

Meta Warrick's 1907 "Negro Tableaux" and (Re)Presenting African American Historical Memory

W. Fitzhugh Brundage

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Confronting visitors who meandered through the Negro Building at the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition, held in Norfolk, Virginia, was a tableau entitled *Landing of First Twenty Slaves at Jamestown*. Meta Warrick (Fuller), a sculptor, had created and arranged twenty-four two-foot-high plaster figures that re-imagined the shackled, nearly nude, and traumatized Africans who had landed in Jamestown in 1619. In *Landing* and thirteen other dioramas, she used more than 130 painted plaster figures, model landscapes, and backgrounds to give viewers a chronological survey of the African American experience. Scenes ranged from a tableau of a fugitive slave to a depiction of the home life of "the modern, successfully educated, and progressive Negro."¹ Drawing upon but moving beyond her classical training in Philadelphia and Paris, Warrick applied new capacities for simulation and illusion to the depiction of African American themes. By doing so, she expanded the repertoire of representation of the African American past. Incorporating the lives and concerns of African Americans into the saga of civilization, she turned the historical African American into the

W. Fitzhugh Brundage is the William B. Umstead Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

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Readers may contact Brundage at <brundage@email.unc.edu>.

¹ Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, *The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States* (Richmond, 1908), 205. Meta Warrick did not marry Solomon Carter Fuller Jr., a physician in Framingham, Massachusetts, until February 9, 1909, after the Jamestown exposition. Consequently, I refer to her by her maiden name throughout this article. Because Warrick's dioramas no longer exist, my discussion is based on extant contempo-

centerpiece of the saga, claiming a position the dominant white narrative denied. Her dioramas, which suggested the expansiveness of black abilities, aspirations, and experiences, presented a cogent alternative to white representations of history—by an African American.

With her Jamestown tableaux, Warrick yoked the era's techniques of perceptual modernization to the representation of black history. The dioramas augmented the established tradition of black commemorative celebrations and oratory associated with holidays such as Emancipation Day and the Fourth of July. Not even the most gifted black orators could evoke the full range of historical associations that circumstances demanded and contemporary tastes eagerly sought. Warrick's dioramas complemented the urge, expressed by the African American author Sutton E. Griggs, "to move up out of the age of the voice, the age of the direct personal appeal, and live in an age where an idea can influence to action by whatever route it drifts one's way."²

Warrick's tableaux embodied a long-standing and conscious tactic of African American leaders and activists during the postbellum era to use aural and visual means to reach the black masses. Comparatively high rates of illiteracy and poverty among blacks impeded any campaign to impart a sense of collective history and tradition to blacks. Writing in 1874, Rev. Andrew Chambers, an AME (African Methodist Episcopal) minister from Arkansas, explained that visual displays, which would arouse the unlearned masses and stimulate interest in other forms of commemoration, were the ideal means to educate "our illiterate race." Throughout the late nineteenth century, African American efforts to erect monuments were stymied by poverty, internecine organizational squabbles, and even indifference. But interest in celebratory visual displays persisted among the ranks of black leaders and activists and inspired Warrick and her sponsors at the Jamestown exposition.³

Yet Warrick's dioramas were much more than just a pragmatic means to instruct the black masses. Warrick and her sponsors adopted the dioramic form in a clear

rary accounts of them. Descriptions and photographs of each scene can be found in Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*. For other accounts, see *The Official Blue Book of the Jamestown Ter-centennial Exposition* (Norfolk, 1907), 677; "Historic Tableaux at the Jamestown Exposition," *Southern Workman*, 36 (Oct. 1907), 516–17; Helen A. Tucker, "The Negro Building and Exhibit at the Jamestown Exposition," *Charities and the Commons*, Sept. 21, 1907, p. 726; and William Hayes Ward, "A Race Exhibition," *Independent*, Nov. 14, 1907, pp. 1171–72. For the fullest secondary account, see Judith Nina Kerr, "God-Given Work: The Life and Times of Sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, 1877–1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1986), 165–83; for another account, see Brenda Joyce Chappell, "The Consciousness of African American Women Artists: Rage, Activism, and Spiritualism, 1860–1930" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1993). On the importance of fixed identities to discourses of domination, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 66. On museums and "social conditioning," see Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations*, 4 (Spring 1988), 73–102; and Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, and Politics* (London, 1995), 17–58.

² Sutton E. Griggs, *Life's Demands; or, According to Law* (Memphis, 1916), 51–52. On the perceptual modernization of the era, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

³ Andrew Chambers in *Christian Recorder*, Dec. 3, 1874, quoted in Mitchell A. Kachun, "The Faith That the Dark Past Has Taught Us: African-American Commemorations in the North and the West and the Construction of a Usable Past, 1808–1915" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1997), 349. On the challenges to black historical memory, see Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities* (New York, 1997), 188–91; Kachun, "Faith That the Dark Past Has Taught Us," 234–394; and Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, 1997), 89–161.

effort to adapt, extend, and experiment with the representational innovations of the era. The very form of her creation, as much as its depiction of the progressive and upward evolution of African Americans, was intended to provide evidence of the modernity of African Americans to whites and blacks alike. As a studio-trained artist, she was familiar with the contemporary transformation of visual culture, especially the proliferation of forms of verisimilitude ranging from dioramas to film. She recognized both the challenge and the importance of capturing her audience's attention at a time of dizzying visual experimentation and in a venue rife with competing attractions.

The setting for Warrick's models—an international exposition—placed a premium on representational innovation. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, world expositions became especially important cultural sites for the dissemination of “new” knowledge and representations of the world. Reflecting the era's emphasis on objects as purveyors of objective truth, fairs promoted all manner of nonverbal forms of experiencing objects. When W. E. B. Du Bois referred to “the usual paraphernalia for catching the eye—photographs, models, industrial work, and pictures” at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, he drew attention to the use of visual spectacles to represent reality at world's fairs. Expositions were occasions for reifying objective reality at a time when, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger explains, “the certainty of representation” was in question.⁴

Ever since the 1851 London exposition at the Crystal Palace, a succession of international expositions fused scientific classificatory schemes with spectacular celebrations of technology, progress, and civilization. Fairs served as venues in which authoritative scientific ideas about evolution, race, and culture were disseminated from academic circles to the level of popular consumption. Sponsors of world expositions, by means of contrived contrasts, attempted to organize the world into representable categories that, not coincidentally, advanced the imperial purpose, strengthened national identities, and inscribed ideas about the essential otherness of “primitive” societies and peoples. The ubiquitous “authentic” villages of exotic peoples and cultures at expositions, the historian Timothy Miller has explained, were more than just an expression of imperialist hubris and curiosity; they were the very means through which fair planners accentuated cultural difference and produced “imperial truth.”⁵ The rationalizing taxonomy of expositions' organizational schema assimilated African Americans and other “primitive” peoples as objects of spectacle. By intent, world's fairs simultaneously categorized, marginalized, and erased blacks and other colonial peoples.

⁴ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, “The American Negro at Paris,” *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, 22 (Nov. 1900), 576; Martin Heidegger quoted in Timothy Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (April 1989), 222.

⁵ Mitchell, “World as Exhibition,” 222. Other valuable discussions of the ideological and epistemological underpinnings of world's fairs include Carol A. Breckenridge, “The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World Fairs,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (April 1989), 195–216; Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, 1994); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions, and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988); and Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984).

Yet, as Warrick's dioramas underscore, the participation of colonized and "primitive" peoples in expositions created opportunities for African Americans to destabilize the binary classification of civilization and "the other," of modernity and primitiveness. African Americans well understood the importance of how they were represented at world's fairs. When Du Bois surveyed with satisfaction the 1900 Paris exposition, he stressed with special emphasis that the "honest, straightforward exhibit" in the Negro Section was "above all" made by blacks. As the cultural theorist Walter Benjamin observed about film, new modes of representation "in the age of mechanical reproduction" empowered the masses to comprehend themselves for the first time.⁶ Warrick's dioramas, similarly, enabled blacks to see themselves as the main actors in their own defined world. Whereas "Old South" concessions and anthropological exhibits organized by whites *exhibited* blacks, Warrick's dioramas *represented* them. The distinction between exhibiting and representing blacks was not just authorship but also agency. The Jamestown tableaux highlighted blacks' creative capacity, manifest in the very form of Warrick's creation, as well as black agency depicted in the narrative itself. By assuming responsibility for their own representation at expositions, African Americans grappled with the ideological schema that undergirded fairs. Certainly Warrick contested in both subtle and obvious ways the overarching ambitions and assumptions about race, civilization, and progress that found expression at other parts of the Jamestown exposition. Thus, Warrick's dioramas illustrate how the new technologies and discourses of racial and imperial "truth" could be contested even in the setting where they were most powerfully articulated.

Warrick's dioramas, finally, draw our attention to the challenge that African Americans faced when they experimented with various representational strategies to disseminate a counternarrative of African American historical "truth." For all of Warrick's representational experimentation, her tableaux followed closely, and indeed were constrained by, the conventions of contemporary textual narratives of black progress and history. A preoccupation with displaying black middle-class respectability, diligence, and cultural refinement foreclosed any possibility that the full range of black life-styles, talents, and circumstances could be acknowledged in Warrick's scenes. In this regard, Warrick's envisioning of black life and aspirations was circumscribed not just by her privileged background but also by the rhetorical tactics inherent in her project. When Warrick set out to depict the black historical experience, she compressed and homogenized it, almost certainly for purposes of narrative clarity. Hence, her concern to convey black middle-class respectability through her tableaux was part of a much larger phenomenon of liberal intellectuals and artists, regardless of ethnic and racial backgrounds, in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and America who projected their concerns and ambitions on the peoples they claimed to represent. Warrick's work, in this regard as well, was not a counternarrative per se but instead fit easily with the prevailing grand narrative of social progress

⁶ Du Bois, "American Negro at Paris," 577; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1985), 251.

and upward mobility (for whites). Similar interpretative tensions were evident in other representations of African American history by blacks during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Thus, although Warrick faced distinctive challenges as a sculptor when she set about depicting an ennobling black past, her larger struggle—to use seemingly objective modes of representation to contest the dominant ideology of race and civilization while reinforcing the dominant ideology of middle-class and social progress—challenged her entire generation of black intellectuals and activists.

Race on Display

Before exploring the range of meanings that Warrick's dioramas conveyed, it first is necessary to take into account the specific setting in which she staged her art. The 1907 Jamestown fair was just one expression of Americans' insatiable enthusiasm for exhibitions. Its origins may be traced to the eagerness of Virginia's white elite to promote sectional reconciliation and economic development.⁷ Equally important to organizers was the celebration of the state's colonial heritage, specifically the commemoration of the first permanent English settlement in the United States. Like the historical displays at the world expositions described by Walter Benjamin, the exhibits at the Jamestown fair had the effect of "telescoping the past through the present."⁸ It seems no display was too mundane to impart lessons about history, progress, civilization, and modernity. Especially rife were assumptions about the nature of historical change and social evolution.

The version of the past extolled by the white planners of the exhibition was an unabashed celebration of Anglo-Saxonism. The members of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), a blue-blood voluntary association committed to the preservation of the Old Dominion's white past, looked to the fair as an opportunity to disseminate their distinctly conservative mixture of politics and filio-pietism. The popular Palace of History at the fair, stuffed with portraits, books, and artifacts, heralded the contributions of white Virginians, as statesmen and warriors, to the nation. Likewise, Anglo-Saxon triumphalism permeated the exhibits staged by the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames, and other self-appointed custodians of the past. White North Carolinians, for instance, celebrated their state's heritage as the birthplace of Virginia Dare, the first "infant child

⁷ On the Jamestown exposition in particular, see Robert T. Taylor, "The Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition of 1907," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 65 (April 1957), 169–208; Roscoe E. Lewis, "The Negro and Jamestown," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, June 29, 1957, p. 11; *ibid.*, July 6, 1957, p. 9; *ibid.*, July 13, 1957, p. 9. On expositions in general, see Bruce G. Harvey, "World's Fairs in a Southern Accent: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, 1895–1902" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1998); Judy Lorraine Larson, "Three Southern World's Fairs: Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895; Tennessee Centennial, Nashville, 1897; and the South Carolina Inter-state and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901–1902" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999); Christopher Robert Reed, "All the World Is Here!" *The Black Presence at the White City* (Bloomington, 2000); Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; and Robert W. Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, 2000), 45–71.

⁸ Walter Benjamin cited in Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, 1993), 82.



NEGRO BUILDING, JAMESTOWN EXPOSITION, 1907.

Designed by W. Sidney Pittman, a black architect who also had designed buildings at his alma mater, the Tuskegee Institute, the Negro Building at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition was a two-story structure 213 feet long and 129 feet wide. Although black workers and contractors constructed the Negro Building, the explicit separation of black exhibits from white exhibits offended many blacks at a time when Jim Crow segregation was still a recent innovation. *Reprint of a Jamestown Amusement & Vending Co. postcard.*

of pure Caucasian blood,” a milestone that “proclaimed the birth of the white race in the Western Hemisphere.”⁹

In light of the overriding themes of the Jamestown exposition, African Americans had ample cause to be suspicious about their place in the proceedings. Certainly the roles accorded to them at earlier expositions offered cause for concern. When whites had acknowledged African Americans’ presence in the past, it typically had been in a viciously pejorative manner. At Philadelphia’s 1876 Centennial Exposition, a concession on the plantation South offered “a band of old-time plantation darkies who will sing their quaint melodies and strum the banjo before visitors of every clime.” At Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, an “Old Time Plantation” display was proposed by Rebecca Latimer Felton, one of the southern representatives on the Board of Lady Managers of the fair. In an effort to glorify “the slave days of the republic” and to illustrate the contemporary “ignorant contented darkey,” the exhibit included two “well behaved” and “real colored folks” chosen by Felton. At Atlanta’s 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition South and at Nashville’s 1897 Ten-

⁹ Mary Hilliard Hinton, “North Carolina’s Historical Exhibit at Jamestown Exposition,” *North Carolina Booklet*, 7 (Oct. 1907), 138; on the role of the APVA, see James M. Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism* (Charlottesville, 1993), 123; on the Palace of History, see Virginia State Library, *Annual Report of the Virginia State Library, 1907* (1907), 66–101.

nessee Centennial Exposition, white businessmen, aided by a minstrel showman, revived the southern plantation concession that had first appeared in Philadelphia.¹⁰

Even the more "refined" representations of blacks that whites planned for expositions often offended African Americans. At Charleston's 1902 South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exhibition, an eight-foot-high sculpture by the New York sculptor Charles A. Lopez proposed to portray African American abilities in marble. At the center of the sculpture was a young black woman who supported a basket of cotton on her head. To her left was a young black man, wearing an artisan's apron and equipped with a mechanic's tools, who relaxed by picking a banjo. Moving farther around the statue, the spectator encountered a muscular man grasping a plow and leaning on an anvil. Decorating the pedestal were cotton, tobacco, and bananas. To outraged blacks in Charleston, who eventually forced the relocation of the sculpture on the exposition grounds, this depiction of blacks as rustic, muscle-bound laborers was intolerable.¹¹

By 1907, blacks understandably were wary of fairs that openly celebrated white supremacy. They resented being insulted by racist depictions while simultaneously being subjected to segregated exposition accommodations. Blacks had first been allowed to participate, but only in a limited fashion, in the 1876 centennial in Philadelphia. They had fared little better at the 1885 New Orleans exposition, the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. They subsequently had been excluded from the planning of the Chicago 1893 world's fair and were barely represented in its displays. The 1895 Atlanta exposition, where Booker T. Washington delivered his career-defining "Atlanta Compromise" speech, was the first fair with a building dedicated to African American exhibits. Once the precedent was established, subsequent southern fairs included segregated "Negro halls." Given those experiences, many blacks agreed with the *Voice of the Negro*, a leading black journal, when it warned in 1907 that any exposition at which the races were segregated and that endorsed the values of white superiority was "a burlesque" that "should be shunned."¹²

Despite the cultural pervasiveness of racism and the injunction to fight the display of such stereotypes, Warrick and other blacks nevertheless succumbed to the temptation to try to use expositions for racial uplift. Because of the cultural influence exerted by world's fairs, they believed that it was essential that blacks represent them-

¹⁰ Description of the plantation South concession at Philadelphia quoted in Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 28; Rebecca Latimer Felton to W. H. Felton, March 15, 1893, Felton Family Papers (Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens); on Atlanta and Nashville, see Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 87. The fullest account of black participation at Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exposition is Kachun, "Faith That the Dark Past Has Taught Us," 244-47, 324-71; the plantation scenes at the Chicago fair are described in Reed, "All the World Is Here!," 117.

¹¹ William D. Crum, "The Negro at the Charleston Exposition," *Voice of the Negro*, 3 (March 1906), 332; Harvey, "World's Fairs in a Southern Accent," 331-32; Larson, "Three Southern World's Fairs," 157-62; William D. Smyth, "Blacks and the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 88 (Oct. 1987), 217.

¹² [J. Max Barber], "The Jamestown Imposition," *Voice of the Negro*, 4 (Oct. 1907), 345. The organizers acknowledged the insult of segregation even while they hailed their freedom from intrusive white oversight. Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 167. On opposition to black participation in previous fairs, see Harvey, "World's Fairs in a Southern Accent," 287-337; Larson, "Three Southern World's Fairs," 165-82; and Ruth M. Winton, "Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1881-1915," *Journal of Negro Education*, 16 (Winter 1947), 36, 38.

selves at them. They especially looked to the expositions as venues in which to affirm their rapid acquisition of civilization, both to themselves and to whites. R. W. Thompson, writing in the *Colored American Magazine*, observed that critics and skeptics demanded "concrete and tangible proof of all that any people may claim for themselves." "Here [at the Jamestown fair] in the Negro exhibit," he went on, "is granted an opportunity for the race to demonstrate beyond cavil precisely what it has accomplished." The displays would serve as "an accurate time keeper of the progress of the race." Thompson was confident that "the massive aggregation of material" in the Negro Building would demonstrate "the Negro as a constructive factor in the civilization of the age."¹³

Precisely those same ambitions had motivated Giles B. Jackson, a former slave who had risen to the ranks of Richmond's black elite, to propose the creation of a Negro Exhibit at the Jamestown tercentennial. Jackson ingratiated himself with Richmond's white elite while working as a servant to several prominent white families in Richmond and as a clerk to a leading white lawyer. He garnered further favor by claiming to have been the Confederate general Fitzhugh Lee's body servant during the Civil War. Establishing himself as Richmond's leading black lawyer, he gravitated toward Booker T. Washington's circle. Jackson envisioned meshing Washington's program of black advancement through economics with the broader aims of the Jamestown exposition to demonstrate "the achievement of the Negro race in America, . . . and specially to show what the race has accumulated for the betterment of its condition since 1865." Through such an exhibit, Jackson predicted, the "unjust and unfair criticisms of the Negroes may be silenced."¹⁴

Even Thomas J. Calloway was persuaded that exhibitions held promise as pageants of self-representation for blacks. A graduate of Fisk University (where he met his lifelong friend W. E. B. Du Bois), Calloway moved easily among militant African American activists. He did not bear the stigma of accommodationism that made Jackson such a controversial figure. Calloway's experience as a special commissioner for the Negro Section at the Paris exposition of 1900 (where he first met Warrick) prepared him to be the chairman of the Executive Committee for the Negro Exhibit at the Jamestown fair. Moreover, his role as an officer of the American branch of the Pan-African Organization, which had been founded in London in 1900, and his membership in the American Negro Academy, the leading organization of black intellectuals, enabled him to convince some prominent African Americans, including Meta Warrick, to support his plans for the Jamestown fair.¹⁵

¹³ R. W. Thompson, "The Negro Exhibit at Jamestown," *Colored American Magazine*, 13 (July 1907), 31–32. For similar attitudes regarding the 1895 Atlanta exposition and the 1897 Nashville fair, see Walter Cooper, "The Cotton States and International Exposition," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 40 (Nov. 1895), 519; and Herman Justi, *Official History of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition* (Nashville, 1898), 193.

¹⁴ Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 138–84. On Jackson, see Patricia Carter Ives, "Giles Beecher Jackson, Director-General of the Negro Development and Exposition Company of the United States for the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition of 1907," *Negro History Bulletin*, 38 (Dec. 1975), 480; and Patricia Carter Ives, "James and Hulda Jackson of Goochland County, Virginia," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 67 (June 1979), 104–6.

¹⁵ Louis R. Harlan, ed., *Booker T. Washington Papers* (14 vols., Urbana, 1972–1989), III, 177n1; Alfred A. Moss Jr., *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 73–74; Thomas Yenser,

It was Calloway's vision, at least as much as Jackson's, that was responsible for the contents of the Negro Exhibit, including Warrick's dioramas. Embracing the era's enthusiasm for spectacular displays of crafts, inventions, machinery, and evidence of educational accomplishments, Calloway and black fair organizers set out to create testimonials to blacks' abilities. Field agents were sent to the states east of the Rocky Mountains to solicit exhibits relating to education, "homes," farms, skilled trades, business enterprises, professions, "military life," church life, books, music, art, and "woman's work." One of the few exhibits that the commissioners financed was the Warrick tableaux. On February 27, 1907, Calloway and the planning committee contracted with Warrick "to construct in a true and artistic manner a series of fifteen model groups to be so arranged as to show by tableaux the progress of the Negro in America from the landing at Jamestown to the present time." Three months later, Warrick's dioramas (there were fourteen) would be installed with some 9,926 other exhibits in the Negro Building.¹⁶

The themes of the Jamestown Negro Exhibit, in sum, reflected the same notions of linear historical progress that would be evident in Warrick's dioramas and were pervasive in African American thought at the dawn of the twentieth century. The displays organized black accomplishments within an incremental, chronological narrative that extended from ancient Africa to contemporary America. As early as the 1895 Atlanta exposition, this emerging narrative convention was literally inscribed in the pediment at the main entrance of the Negro Exhibit there. On one side was a plantation scene of a one-room log cabin, a log church, and the tools of cotton cultivation—synecdoches of black life in the age of slavery. On the other side was depicted African American achievement thirty years after emancipation, including a modern home, an impressive church, and symbols of black artistic and intellectual accomplishment. These tropes appeared again at the Jamestown exposition where a small windowless log cabin, which was intended to evoke the slave cabins of old, stood juxtaposed with a pleasant modern cottage, representing black home life in the twentieth century.¹⁷ Warrick's own dioramas, of course, were the exhibition's fullest and most elaborate representation of this grand narrative of African American self-improvement.

Meta Warrick

In a very real sense the Jamestown dioramas were expressions of the milieu from which Warrick herself emerged. Both the form and the character of her tableaux reflected the

ed., *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of African Descent in America, 1930–1931–1932* (Brooklyn, 1933), 210.

¹⁶ Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 179–81, 188, 204.

¹⁷ On the Atlanta pediment, see Winton, "Negro Participation in Southern Expositions," 37. For descriptions of Negro buildings at the various expositions, see I. Garland Penn, "The Wakening of a Race," in *The Cotton States and International Exposition South, Illustrated*, ed. Walter G. Cooper (Atlanta, 1896), 69; Tucker, "Negro Building and Exhibit," 723–24; and Winton, "Negro Participation in Southern Expositions," 36–37, 39–43. On African American conceptions of history, see Kachun, "Faith That the Dark Past Has Taught Us"; David Howard-Pitney, *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia, 1990), 3–16, 35–52; Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "Redeeming Southern Memory: The Negro Race History, 1874–1915," in *Where These Memories Grow:*



A portrait of the artist Meta Vaux Warrick (1877–1968) from 1907, the year she created the Jamestown Exposition tableaux. At thirty years old and boasting training in the studios of Paris, she accepted a commission “to construct in a true and artistic manner” tableaux “so arranged as to show . . . the progress of the Negro in America from the landing at Jamestown to the present time.” *Reprinted from Voice of the Negro, March 1907.*

elegantly Victorian and deeply spiritual cultural sensibilities she had acquired while growing up in a comparatively privileged black Philadelphia family. Likewise, her extensive training in fine arts in Philadelphia and Paris and her standing within the African American cultural elite made her ideally suited to create the dioramas.¹⁸

Meta was born into the ranks of the “Negro aristocracy” of Philadelphia on June 9, 1877. She was the daughter of William H. Warrick Jr., a barber, and Emma Jones Warrick, a hairdresser and wigmaker. The founder of the Warrick line in America had been a white Anglican priest who, after emigrating to Virginia, had married a free black woman. His son, William Henry, worked as a merchant seaman in Portsmouth, Virginia, until the oppressive racial atmosphere in the 1850s compelled him to move his wife Louisa and their eight children to Philadelphia. There he became a

History, Memory, and Southern Identity, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill, 2000), 169–90; and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850–1925* (New York, 1978), 15–31.

¹⁸ Velma J. Hoover, “Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, Her Life and Art,” *Negro History Bulletin*, 60 (March–April 1977), 678.

successful steward. Subsequently his son, Meta's grandfather (another William), entered the barbering profession and amassed a small fortune through catering and real estate investments. He prospered enough to buy a comfortable home in a mixed-race neighborhood of the city and to assume a prominent position among the city's "special class of blacks."¹⁹

Unlike the Warrick family, who boasted that none of their ancestors had been enslaved, Meta's mother was descended from slaves. Her grandfather was Henry Jones, a Virginia slave who had escaped to Philadelphia. There he thrived as a caterer and, on the basis of both his wealth and his sense of social responsibility, emerged as an activist among the city's black elite. Through his membership in the leading abolitionist and "improvement" organizations of the city he befriended William Warrick, whose son married Jones's daughter Emma in 1865.²⁰

The Warricks' wealth surrounded Meta and her two siblings with the trappings of Victorian respectability and made possible an education uncommon among Philadelphia's blacks. Meta attended an integrated grammar school and then the experimental Industrial Art School, which mixed traditional academic arts with manual training. Subsequently she progressed to the Girls' High Normal School, where her talent earned a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Museum School of the Industrial Arts in the fall of 1896. She mastered various media but evinced unusual talent for sculpture. Urged by her teachers, she elected to continue her training in France.

Arriving in Paris in 1899, she came under the influence of the painter Henry O. Tanner and the sculptors Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Auguste Rodin. Embracing the aesthetic language of the romantic symbolist school of art, she honed her technique by sculpting traditional themes of Western art, particularly those derived from ancient mythology and the Bible. Like other symbolists, she aspired to give expression through art to emotion, mystical experience, and intangible truths. Despite those seemingly abstract aims, she remained committed to using readily recognizable subjects and familiar themes. Yet, following symbolist aesthetics, she eschewed traditions of classical realism and instead devoted particular attention to capturing, in musculature, expression, and pose, the "life spirit" of her subjects. Warrick's exposure to the artistic currents of *fin-de-siècle* Paris had two especially important consequences: it encouraged her lifelong preference for subjects rich with allegorical potential, and it demonstrated that sculpture need not be limited to the heroic themes and aesthetic conventions that characterized the classical tradition.²¹

¹⁹ Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington, 1990), 98. On Warrick's family and early life in general, see "A Negress Sculptor's Gruesome Art," *Current Literature*, 44 (Jan. 1908), 55–58; Benjamin Brawley, "Meta Warrick Fuller," *Southern Workman*, 47 (Jan. 1918), 25–32; Florence Lewis Bentley, "Meta Warrick a Promising Sculptor," *Voice of the Negro*, 4 (March 1907), 116–18; Kerr, "God-Given Work," 1–66; and Winifred Kirkland and Frances Kirkland, *Girls Who Became Artists* (1934; Freeport, N.Y., 1967), 46–50.

²⁰ On the black community in Philadelphia, see Roger Lane, *William Dorsey's Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America* (New York, 1991); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (New York, 1996), 9–93; and Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787–1848* (Philadelphia, 1988).

²¹ The literature on the symbolist movement is vast; among the valuable studies are Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*, trans. Barbara Bray, Elizabeth Wrightson, and Bernard C. Swift (New York, 1978); Charles C.

Although her experiences in Paris awakened her to the possibilities of sculpture, she shied away from African or African American themes. In 1900 W. E. B. Du Bois, who met Warrick at the Paris exposition, encouraged her to "make a speciality of Negro types." Accepting the suggestion as "well meant," she nevertheless resisted. Her hesitancy to turn to African American themes almost certainly reflected the dilemma African American artists confronted when considering their subject matter. Aesthetic conventions, rooted in both the classical tradition and Western racism, inhibited efforts to fashion representations, especially heroic images, of African Americans. The artistic challenge of depicting African Americans in sculpture was especially daunting. As the art historian Kirk Savage has explained, "Making the African American body a monumental subject would alter its marginality, would make African Americans newly visible and historically significant in the physical and cultural landscape." Moreover, Warrick already had acquired a reputation for her perceived grotesque renderings of mythical and biblical themes. To apply her creative technique to African American topics ran the risk of having both her creations and her subjects dismissed by white patrons and critics as primitive and bizarre, thereby contributing to the artistic marginalization of African Americans.²²

Circumstances eventually led Warrick to reconsider. During the 1900 Paris exposition, she befriended Thomas J. Calloway, then serving as a commissioner of the Negro Section at the exposition. While browsing the exposition grounds in his company, Warrick studied dioramas depicting episodes in Catholic history. Her interest prompted Calloway to disclose that plans were already underway for the Jamestown Tercentennial, and it could include dioramas tracing the history of African Americans from 1619 to the present. During the Paris exposition, Warrick became intimately involved with still another set of tableaux. Thomas W. Hunster and his manual arts students from the Washington, D.C., Colored High School had created dioramas that had been damaged in shipment. Observing Warrick's interest in the form, Calloway suggested that she mend and install Hunster's models. Thus, Warrick found herself working on nine scenes that traced black educational progress since the Civil War. Crafted by African Americans and devoted to African American themes, the dioramic scenes probably were the first to be displayed at a major exposition. Warrick surely understood the innovative quality and importance of Hunster's work and her own contribution in preparing them for display.²³

Warrick's experiences after her return to Philadelphia in 1903 hastened the redirection of her artistic interests. Although she had encountered racism during her stint in Paris, she had escaped most of the galling slights that blacks in America routinely

Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York, 1979); Michael Gibson, *The Symbolists* (New York, 1988); Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *The Symbolist Generation, 1870–1910* (New York, 1990); and Alan Robinson, *Symbol to Vortex: Poetry, Painting, and Ideas, 1885–1914* (New York, 1985).

²² For Warrick's conversation with Du Bois, see Meta Warrick Fuller to Freeman Murray, April 5, 1915, Freeman H. M. Murray Papers (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.); Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 70; "Negress Sculptor's Gruesome Art"; William Francis O'Donnell, "Meta Vaux Warrick, Sculptor of Horrors," *World Today*, 13 (Nov. 1907), 1139–45.

²³ Kerr, "God-Given Work," 148; *Report of the Commissioner-General for the United States to the International Universal Exposition, 1900* (2 vols., Washington, 1901), II, 381, 408–9, 463–67; Du Bois, "American Negro at Paris," 575; Kerr, "God-Given Work," 97–99.

endured. Her time in France and the years preceding the Jamestown exposition coincided with the peak years of lynchings of African Americans, the codification of segregation, and the disfranchisement of southern blacks. She returned to an African American community engaged in strenuous debate about how best to respond to those worsening conditions. For elite blacks such as Warrick, the ascendance of the ideology of white supremacy raised vexing questions about their opportunities in America and their proper role within the African American community.

Warrick had pursued an education and a career as an artist with the assumption that her identity as a black was irrelevant, but the conditions she encountered compelled her to revise her expectations. Her family's tradition of public activism alone might have obliged her to take up the plight of her race. In addition, she surely felt the acute sense of duty shared by privileged blacks. Warrick never spoke of herself as an exemplar of her friend Du Bois's idea of the Talented Tenth, which he developed in an article published in 1903, but in fact she fit his description exactly.²⁴ Her experience as an artist in Philadelphia, moreover, taught her that her art and her racial identity could not be separated. Despite the accolades she had earned in Paris, few white art patrons regarded her as a legitimate artist or were interested in her sculpture.

Consequently, when Calloway offered her an \$1,800 commission to create the dioramas he had proposed seven years earlier, she eagerly accepted. Casting aside her previous refusal to take up African American themes, Warrick grasped an opportunity to reach a potentially vast audience of exposition visitors and to be the first African American sculptor to receive a federal commission.

When Warrick began to create her dioramas in the spring of 1907, she had diverse precedents to draw upon. Her experiences at the Paris exposition and her immersion in the cultural ferment of Paris provided a measure of inspiration. Her familiarity with theater design, especially the dramaturgical effects of screens and staging, gave her a keen appreciation of the capacity of artistry to create illusions. Her training as a sculptor, as well as her symbolist penchant for allegorical representations, obviously facilitated her envisioning the possibilities of the dioramic form. Most important, she had considerable familiarity with the innovations in natural history and ethnographic displays that Philadelphia museums were pioneering; she had studied at the art school affiliated with the Philadelphia Museum and was a habitué of it and the city's other museums.²⁵

²⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Writings*, ed. Nathan I. Huggins (New York, 1986), 842–61.

²⁵ For brief descriptions of the panoramas, dioramas, tableaux vivants, and other attractions of the Paris exposition, see James P. Boyd, *The Paris Exposition of 1900: A Vivid Descriptive View and Elaborate Scenic Presentation of the Site, Plan and Exhibits* (Philadelphia, 1900), 319, 451–52; Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 84–86; Richard D. Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto, 1960), 64; and Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1982), 64–66, 73–78. On visual experimentation in Paris, see Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 129; and Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, 1998), 118–30, 157–76. On Warrick's interest in theater, see Kathy A. Perkins, "The Genius of Meta Warrick Fuller," *Black American Literature Forum*, 24 (Spring 1990), 65–72. On innovations in Philadelphia museums, see Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926* (Chicago, 1998), 32–114.

As early as the turn of the nineteenth century, popular "museums" had proven the immense appeal of their wax models and painted illusions. Natural historians and museum curators turned to similar devices, mounting animals in appropriate landscapes to create an illusion of the natural habitat. By the late nineteenth century, such practices extended to ethnography, a branch of natural history. "Primitive" peoples appeared *in situ*, surrounded by proper ethnographic objects from the overstuffed display cabinets of museums. At the 1895 Atlanta and 1897 Nashville international expositions, for instance, twelve life-sized figures, in "authentic" attire and poses, depicted various types and stages of human development. Such presentations offered patrons a glimpse of "primitive" cultures and vanishing peoples, thereby articulating the dominant ideology: the natural hierarchy of humanity and human cultures.²⁶

Warrick undoubtedly knew about such exhibits. Still, the field was ripe for innovation, and Warrick did not create her dioramas merely to mimic previous exhibits. Conventions of display had not yet been established, and thus the form was mutable. Distinctions separating animal and habitat exhibits from cultural and hierarchical tableaux remained ambiguous. In such a context, Warrick's ambition to represent the fullness of three centuries of black history by means of dioramas moved well beyond the scope of contemporary exhibits, even of ethnographic "life groups."

In fulfilling her commission, Warrick faced daunting prejudice that was built into the forms she wished to use. Extant precedents, ranging from habitat groups to ethnographic models, were not self-evidently suited to tracing and celebrating African American accomplishments. Even seemingly "objective" habitat dioramas were in fact instruments of imperialist, white, male domination. Likewise, so implicated in theories of racial superiority were life group displays that they formed a crucial component of "the epistemology of imperialism." Assembled to plot the location of each human group on the universal scale of social development, ethnographic displays were intended to demonstrate unambiguously that Western civilization marked the highest achievement of social evolution, classifying and naturalizing such categories as primitive and civilized, backward and modern, and so on. An especially glaring example of the arrangement of a display to illustrate such hierarchies was Charles W. Dabney's planned exhibit for the 1895 Atlanta exposition. As originally conceived, "a series of figures" would portray "the evolution of the Negro from the earliest animals

²⁶ On the Atlanta and Nashville displays, see Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 100. On habitat displays, see Frank Chapman, "The Bird-Life and the Scenery of a Continent in One Corridor: The Groups in the American Museum of Natural History—A New Method of Museum Exhibition," *World's Work*, 17 (March 1909), 11365–74; Irene F. Cypher, "The Development of the Diorama in the Museums of the United States" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1942), 18–47; Frederic A. Lucas, "The Story of Museum Groups," *American Museum Journal*, 14 (Jan. 1914), 1–15; *ibid.* (Feb. 1914), 50–65; and Karen Wonders, *Habitat Dioramas: Illusions of Wilderness in Museums of Natural History* (Uppsala, 1993), 106–47. On "life groups," see Cypher, "Development of the Diorama," 48–80; Curtis M. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, 1981), 83–124; Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method in Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George W. Stocking Jr. (Madison, 1985), 75–111; David Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36 (April 1994), 242–70; and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, 1991), 386–443.

through the ape, chimpanzee and South African Bushman, down to the Negro as he is in this country." In this instance, black protest led to the withdrawal of the proposed exhibit, but elsewhere similar displays took their place in museum and exposition halls.²⁷

Warrick not only had to re-imagine dioramas free of such racist emplotment, but she also had to historicize them so that they presented an evolutionary narrative. Not until almost a decade after her dioramas were displayed at the Jamestown exposition would American museum curators begin to experiment with using dioramas to recreate celebrated events in American history.²⁸ Until then, ethnographic displays typically treated history and culture as virtually synonymous, drawing few distinctions between the past and present. Most displays presented cultures in a temporal limbo that existed outside of any traditional historical understanding. Warrick, in contrast, highlighted historical change through scenes of the progressive advancement of blacks. The tableaux presented a grand narrative of evolutionary progress from primitive to civilized, from enslaved to free. Five of the fourteen dioramas dealt with the slave era; the remaining nine depicted black life since the Civil War. By beginning her dioramas with slavery rather than emancipation, Warrick established the defining influence that slavery exerted on the history of African Americans and America. The subsequent tableaux, whether of a black family homesteading or of a crude schoolhouse, countered racists' claims that freed blacks had retrogressed into criminality, indolence, and barbarism. When viewers reached the last model in Warrick's extended allegory of collective transformation—*Commencement Day*—the descendants of the prostrate Africans in the first scene had become well dressed, erect, proud, able, dutiful, and self-disciplined African Americans.

The narrative logic of her dioramas, progressing from the "primitive" and shackled Africans of 1619 to the "modern" contemporary black family, presumed that human societies evolved through stages that could be measured against a single criterion of development, or "civilization." In this regard, her dioramas reflected prevailing conceptions of material progress, education, and civilization. Yet Warrick and her sponsors rejected the conclusion that civilization was a racialized accomplishment peculiar to whites. Rather, the achievement of modern civilization was a race-neutral status that African Americans and peoples everywhere were capable of achieving. Whereas most whites presumed that centuries would be required to elevate blacks above abject barbarism, Warrick's tableaux would demonstrate that African Americans already were agents of modern progress.²⁹

²⁷ Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 117; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 100. On dioramas as instruments of domination, see Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 95; Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Science* (New York, 1989), 26–58; Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists*, 89–91, 97–99, 104–9, 112; Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits," 77–83; Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays," 250, 256, 263–66; Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 135–37; and Ruth Irwin Weidner, "Gifts of Wild Game: Masculine and Feminine in Nineteenth Century Hunting Imagery," in *The Material Culture of Gender: The Gender of Material Culture*, ed. Katherine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (Winterthur, 1997), 337–64.

²⁸ Ned J. Burns, "The History of Dioramas," *Museum News*, March 1, 1940, pp. 11–12; Cypher, "Development of the Diorama," 68–77, 87–94; Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940* (Chicago, 1999), 164–70.

²⁹ On race, civilization, and progress, see Tunde Adeleke, *Unafrikan Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black*

The Warrick Dioramas

By offering visible evidence—"a theater of proof," as it were—of blacks' progress, Warrick and her sponsors intended her tableaux and the other exhibits at the Jamestown exposition to demonstrate that African Americans had an understandable and noteworthy history.³⁰ During a cultural moment when contemporaries were fascinated with replications of reality (evident in everything from literary realism and films to phonographs and boardwalk concessions), those avowedly didactic aims seemed to require the verisimilitude and verity of dioramas, photographs, tableaux vivants, and other visual confirmation. More than just literal representations of reality, Warrick's dioramas (and models of all kinds) achieved the descriptive, image-making quality of literature and the concreteness of the material world. This synthesis of artifice and mimesis, of literal representations of imagined moments in African American history illustrates how Warrick's dioramas brought into focus both what the legitimate subject of history ought to be and how that history should be represented.

Perhaps because of Warrick's rush to complete the dioramas on a short schedule, she left no detailed description of either her planning or her interpretation of the dioramas. We have only cursory descriptions of how the tableaux appeared at the Jamestown exposition. They come to us as a series of photographs scattered throughout a later history of the Negro Exhibit. Yet, although much about the organization of the dioramas and the experience of viewing it remains unknown, the overarching organizational principles are readily apparent. Warrick established a consistent tone and theme throughout the tableaux, maintaining a representational logic from one scene to the next. Her broadest aims—to chart the progress of her race—are easily discerned. Her specific representational decisions, however, are obscure and open to multiple readings. The apparent ambiguity of and contradictions in Warrick's dioramas present an obstacle to any simple and definitive conclusion about their meaning. But the presence of contradictions in them are the key, not a barrier, to their usefulness for understanding the past.

Almost certainly Warrick intended her tableaux to convey protean, even contradictory, meanings to the various constituencies who attended the Jamestown fair. Warrick and other black exhibitors knew that their audience at the Jamestown exposition would include northern whites, southern whites, and blacks from both the North and the South. In the racially charged setting of the turn-of-the-century United States and of the South in particular, exhibitors faced a daunting challenge of fashioning displays that would not alienate any portion of a public that was divided

Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission (Lexington, 1998), 13–30; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995), 1–44; Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 19–46; Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton, 1999), 15–65; Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York, 1999), 22–55; and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afropia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York, 1998), 96–135, 169–93.

³⁰ The phrase is borrowed from Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* (no. 6, 1986), 19.

along fault lines of race, class, and region. The imagery Warrick might have tapped was boundless. Even so, she had to be selective in order to refer to and evoke familiar ideas, myths, and themes that would be legible to her viewers. Through the visual grammar of her everyday scenes, Warrick created a representation of the ascendant ideology of racial uplift and progressive civilization.

Warrick's scenes of slavery are suggestive of the multiple layers of meaning conveyed by her tableaux. At first glance, the scenes hint that she contrived to repress or, at the very least, to channel narrowly the memories of the ordeal of bondage. The image of slavery called up by Warrick's models was far more reserved than the depictions of servitude that had characterized, for instance, the speeches and writings of antebellum abolitionists. There was no dioramic equivalent to the vivid, melodramatic descriptions of floggings, murders, rapes, and slave auctions of abolitionist lore. And some of the models conjured scenes that were strikingly similar to contemporary white accounts of slavery. Yet, however restrained her portrayal of slavery's horrors, Warrick's dioramas were no moonlight-and-magnolias rendition of slavery. Themes of explicit violence and coercion were present in the displays of the arrival of the first slaves in Jamestown, of a fugitive slave hiding from white slave trackers, and of blacks picking cotton while being supervised by a white overseer.

As previously noted, the first tableau concerned the beginnings of slavery in Jamestown in 1619. Figures represented twenty African men and women, bound, nearly stripped of clothes, in positions of abject powerlessness and abasement, on the dock where a Dutch sea captain had sold them to English settlers. In the background were a stockade, a storehouse, and the captain's ship receding into the horizon. Both the dress and the untrained hair of the Africans underscored their primitiveness. Warrick compressed into the scene symbols of commerce, empire, and the traffic in humans, thereby reminding whites and blacks alike that "thirteen years after the landing of the white people at Jamestown came the Negro, while not of his own choice or liking." The diorama would seem to have posed the same question that Anna Julia Cooper, an African American writer and feminist, asked in *A Voice from the South* (1892): "Who are the Americans? . . . Who are the absolute and original tenants in fee-simple?" Or, as Du Bois quizzed whites in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): "Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here."³¹

The second model continued the focus on the role of blacks in the South's and the nation's economic development. It depicted slaves at work in a cotton field on a southern plantation, presumably in the decades before the Civil War. The scene could be interpreted as confirmation of the claim, made by proslavery polemicists as well as Booker T. Washington, that slavery had taught Africans valuable skills and a work ethic. At least one visitor interpreted the model as depicting "the slaves learning to work." The history of the Negro Exhibit similarly noted that the slaves in the diorama "are properly clothed and show other evidences of increasing civilization."³²

³¹ Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 158; Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (1892; New York, 1988), 163; Du Bois, *Writings*, ed. Huggins, 545.

³² Tucker, "Negro Building and Exhibit," 726; Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 204.



LANDING OF FIRST TWENTY SLAVES AT JAMESTOWN

In the first of her tableau scenes, *Landing of First Twenty Slaves at Jamestown*, Meta Warrick establishes the historical importance of Jamestown for African Americans by highlighting the arrival of Africans thirteen years after the establishment of the colony. Warrick compresses into the scene symbols of commerce, empire, and the traffic in humans. Reprinted from *Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States, 1908*.

Yet the model also suggested the life-sapping toil that defined the slave experience, in marked contrast to images of plantation life in the minstrel shows and popular fiction as uninterrupted frivolity.

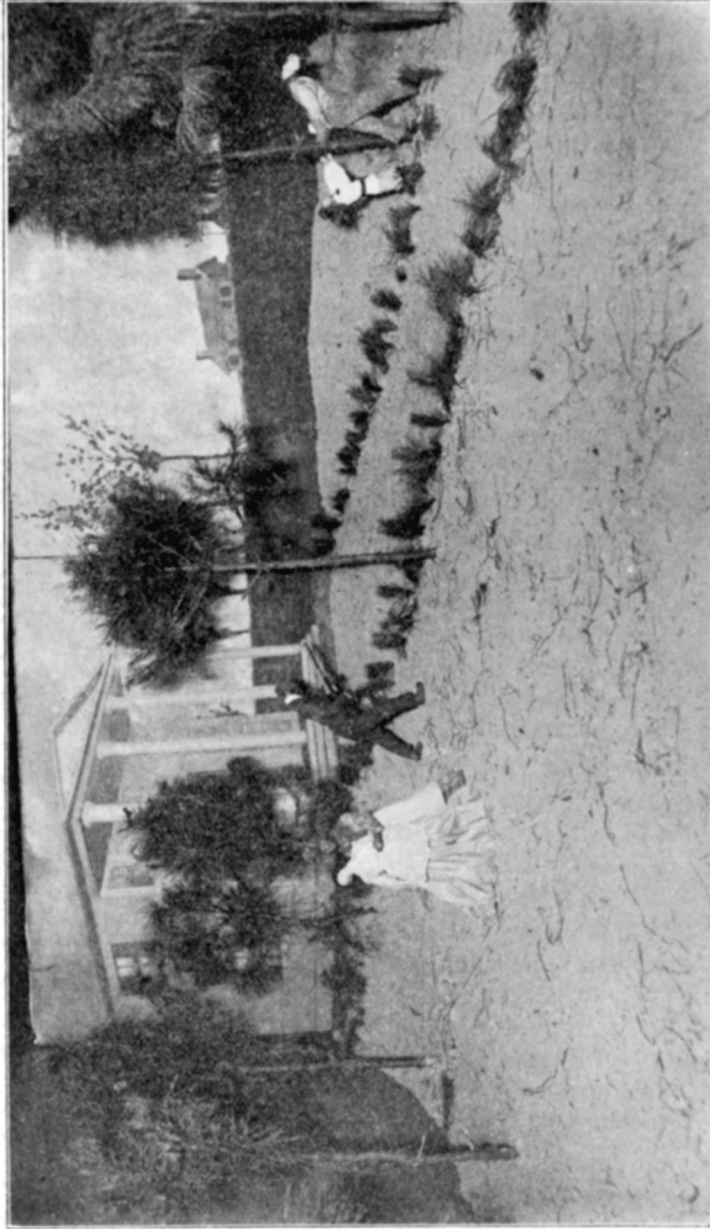
In the same diorama, Warrick raised the issue of miscegenation through her deliberate use of skin color on the figurines. Whereas the models of the Africans in the first tableau had been painted a dark brown, the laboring slave figurines were “no longer uniform in skin color,” thus displaying unmistakable signs of miscegenation. Here again, viewers could read different meanings into this evidence of racial mingling. Was Warrick drawing attention to the sexual exploitation of slaves? Or was she suggesting that the “increasing civilization” of the slaves was partially the result of the salutary influence of interracial mating? When Warrick drew attention to miscegenation, she waded into the turn-of-the-century struggle over the definition of American national character. The newly organized Daughters of the American Revolution and other white patriotic and hereditary societies were then defining the national character in explicitly racialized terms. Anna Julia Cooper, Frederick Douglass, Du Bois, and other blacks vigorously dissented. Rather than privilege “white” blood as the source of American character, they emphasized the nation’s history of interracial mixing that eugencists lamented and many whites vigorously sought to deny. Warrick, in her scenes, joined in emphasizing the nation’s long-standing history of biracial intimacy.³³

From miscegenation and work, Warrick moved on to freedom with *A Fugitive Slave*. Portraying the slaves’ hunger for freedom, the model featured a two-man patrol searching for a slave, who was hidden in underbrush. Even though tracked by a bloodhound and armed slave catchers, the fugitive remained confident that his trail had been destroyed when he crossed the stream that bisected the model’s landscape. By summoning the memory of countless runaways (including Warrick’s own grandfather) and invoking scenes from countless slave narratives, the tableau countered popular depictions of blacks as ideally suited to and content in bondage.

The ambiguity that characterized many of the dioramas was especially evident in Warrick’s depiction of the slave-master relationship in the tableau *Defending Master’s Home in Civil War*. Set during the Civil War and in front of a grand Greek Revival mansion, with a humble slave cabin on the horizon of a vast plantation, the diorama, one observer explained, offered a romantic image of “the negro’s loyalty to his master in the Civil War.”³⁴ According to the scenario of this model, while the plantation owner was away fighting for the Confederacy, a “poor white” seized the chance to kidnap the master’s son. (Apparently no explanation for this curious crime was either provided or needed.) The child’s mother, overwhelmed by fear and distress, had fainted into the arms of a faithful black mammy. A gray-haired and proud house slave, armed with a rifle, rescued his master’s son and chased off the offender.

³³ Jackson and Davis, *Industrial History of the Negro Race*, 204; Cecelia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, 1999), 70–90, 110–49; Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, 1999), 136–56.

³⁴ Ward, “Race Exhibition,” 1172.



DEFENDING MASTER'S HOME IN CIVIL WAR.

In *Defending Master's Home in Civil War*, Meta Warrick provides a complex rendering of the "faithful slave" myth. The tableau depicts a well-dressed house slave foiling the kidnapping of the master's son by a poor white. The plantation mistress collapses into the arms of a slave woman, perhaps meant to recall the intimate bonds that had existed between elite whites and some of their slaves. Yet the scene also turns slaves into historical agents who defended white civilization's most sacred foundations—the home and family. Reprinted from *Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States, 1908*.

The inspiration for this tableau is obscure. Warrick flirted with the well-established clichés—of dutiful antebellum slaves uncorrupted by freedom—that suffused Thomas Nelson Page's dialect stories and the gathering movement to commemorate "faithful slaves." Whites had long congratulated themselves that the loyalty of slaves demonstrated both the affection that existed between "servants" and masters and the civilizing influence of bondage upon Africans. Countless white planter families recounted tales of heirlooms that had been protected from marauding Yankees by loyal slaves. Warrick was hardly alone in invoking the image of the faithful slave; Booker T. Washington and Du Bois both did so despite their differing visions for their race. In the climate of early-twentieth-century America, the figure of the loyal slave offered a more favorable, humane, and complicated representation than the grotesque depictions of freed slaves as subhuman, compulsive rapists in Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) and other popular works.³⁵

Defending Master's Home also may have been intended to recall the intimate bonds that had existed between elite whites and some of their slaves. Giles B. Jackson, one of Warrick's sponsors, knew firsthand of the advantages that flowed from the ongoing support he received from his former master. Other black leaders, including Du Bois and Washington, agreed that the "better class" of southern whites, descendants of the old planter elite, was an ally blacks should cultivate. Warrick's model appeared to raise the possibility that white and black elites, who had once shared a sense of obligation and duty to each other, could again be reconciled.

But this tableau deviated in curious ways from the conventions of both the white mythology of slavery and black invocations of the loyal slave. Intentionally or not, Warrick created a vignette that was open to readings that hinted at the extraordinarily complex predicament and motivations of slaves. Like contemporary black orators who recalled that slaves had displayed exceptional loyalty to their masters, Warrick left ambiguous whether the fealty of slaves had been earned.³⁶ In the tableau, slave heroism affirmed black magnanimity, not white virtue. Warrick's diorama also rendered in miniature a central tenet of the black defense against charges of black criminality; why would blacks rape and murder now when they could have done so easily but had not during the Civil War? The black man in the tableau was the defender of, rather than a threat to, whites. At the very least, Warrick turned slaves into historical agents who defended white civilization's most sacred foundations—the home and family—from the threat posed by menacing whites. Thus, while white viewers may

³⁵ Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia; or, Marse Chan, and other Stories* (New York, 1887). Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York, 1901), 12–15, 220–21; Du Bois, *Writings*, ed. Huggins, 383, 485–86, 489. Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells both invoked the behavior of slaves during the Civil War as evidence of the race's forbearance and magnanimity. See Frederick Douglass, "Why Is the Negro Lynched?," in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 4: *Reconstruction and After* (New York, 1955), 492–506; and Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston, 1997), 79. Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1905).

³⁶ For black speeches that described the loyalty of black slaves, see *Savannah Tribune*, Jan. 5, 1889, Feb. 13, 1909, Jan. 10, 1914; *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 3, 1888, Feb. 24, 1917; *Ocala Evening Star*, Jan. 9, 1900, Jan. 2, 1901; and *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, Jan. 3, 1901.

have viewed the tableau as a comforting image of black loyalty, blacks may have seen it as a confirmation of black heroism.

Such black agency was conspicuous in the final diorama of the history of African Americans in the era of slavery. Undoubtedly drawing on her Pennsylvania background, Warrick devoted a diorama to the founding of the Free African Society. With this reference she valorized America's first independent black church, established by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, in Philadelphia in 1787. Allen and Jones, while lay preachers for St. George Methodist Episcopal Church, recruited so many blacks to the congregation that alarmed church officials segregated them into the church's balcony. When the black members refused to accept separate seating, church leaders forcibly ejected them from the church. Undaunted, Jones and Allen began conducting independent church services. Warrick's diorama re-imagined one of those early gatherings at which the two exiled religious leaders held services in a humble, unadorned blacksmith's shop.³⁷

For Warrick, like so many African Americans, the establishment of the Free African Society, which evolved into the AME Church, was a signal event because it marked a critical juncture in the emergence of an overt sense of shared African American identity. By recalling that event, Warrick affirmed the role blacks had played in propagating "Christian civilization." Moreover, the rise of the AME Church from humble origins to international influence meshed with Warrick's visual catalog of black advancement. The event had additional meaning for her since she herself was a member of the congregation depicted in the diorama.

Warrick's images of the slave experience were the prologue to nine scenes that depicted African American strivings since emancipation. Warrick exploited tropes common in American popular culture, especially popular illustrations and mythic images of frontiersmen from Daniel Boone to Abraham Lincoln, that charted the transformation of the continent's wilderness into tidy pastures, plowed fields, and picturesque village skylines. Juxtapositions of "before" and "after" scenes—of the rustic conditions endured during slavery and the refinement achieved in freedom—were a staple of representations of black progress at expositions. In this regard, Warrick's models echoed Frances Benjamin Johnston's celebrated photographs of similar scenes, displayed in the Negro Section at the Paris exposition in 1900.³⁸

Warrick in particular wanted to display the newfound strength of the black family in freedom. Accordingly, in *Freedman's First Cabin*, she portrayed a family—a mother

³⁷ On Richard Allen and the founding of the AME Church, see James Campbell, *Sons of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 3–31; Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches, 1760–1840* (New York, 1973); and Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 135–43.

³⁸ Thomas Crawford's representation of progressive civilization in the United States in the pediment of the Senate Chamber of the U.S. Capitol (1853–1860) shares striking thematic similarities with Warrick's dioramas. See William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820–1920* (Washington, 1991), 72. Another antecedent was James Pressley Ball's 1855 panorama, the "Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States Comprising Views of the African Slave Trade"; Ball's panoramas began with views of African villages and progressed to slave ships and the slave markets and plantations of America. Joseph D. Ketner, *The Emergence of the African-American Artist: Robert S. Duncanson, 1821–1872* (Columbia, Mo., 1993), 104. On Frances Benjamin Johnston's photographs, see Smith, *American Archives*, 177–86; and Laura Wexler, "Black and White and Color: American Photographs at the Turn of the Century," *Prospects*, 13 (1988), 341–90.

holding an infant, a father, a son, and a daughter—as they prepared supper after having cleared a small woodland path and having laid the foundation of their new home. Her figures had escaped the thralldom of slavery, represented by the gloomy and primal forest, for the promise of freedom and a future of civilization, symbolized by the house foundations and the other signs of human refinement in the clearing.

Similarly, she linked freedom, education, and civilization in *The Beginnings of Negro Education*, which showed two black teachers, a man and a woman, in a log cabin schoolhouse, calling their black pupils back to class after recess. The diorama recalled the unbounded enthusiasm that freed people had displayed for education after emancipation and celebrated the service of black teachers. The scene underscored the unshakable belief in the power of knowledge and the celebration of learning that were ubiquitous in turn-of-the-century black public culture, oratory, and writings.

Intent on demonstrating blacks' fitness for and record of citizenship, Warrick turned to black military service in *Response to the Call to Arms*. Set in an undefined moment in the recent past, the diorama avoided any explicit reference to the Civil War. Dates and contemporary interest indicate that it was probably a scene from the recent Spanish-American War. Warrick placed eight black soldiers in the tableau, standing at parade rest, their attention riveted by their black commanding officer. It was a reminder that African Americans had a history of military service that stretched from the nation's founding through the most recent war. (Indeed, the published history of the Negro Building at the exposition made sure that readers understood this point by devoting five chapters to the topic.) Yet even this seemingly simple representation of black Americans' military service was charged with political meaning. Only years prior to the exposition, white southern legislators, in the name of white supremacy, had abolished black militia units, thereby effectively depriving most black men of any opportunity for military service. Even the major Union veterans' organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, had systematically segregated its ranks during the 1890s, and the recurring joint reunions of Confederate and Union veterans pointedly excluded black veterans. And only months before the Jamestown exposition, the dishonorable discharge of more than one hundred black soldiers for alleged riotous behavior in Brownsville, Texas, had sparked a fire storm of controversy between whites, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who disparaged the abilities of black soldiers, and a virtually united black community, which bitterly resented the unwarranted dismissal of the black soldiers and attacks on black valor. In an age of ascendant imperialism and revived martial spirit in the United States (which the exposition enthusiastically celebrated), black soldiers were virtually invisible in the celebration of war and soldiering; they won no place on the pedestal of civic recognition. Blacks vigorously, if unsuccessfully, contested the systematic denial of their military valor. With this diorama, Warrick echoed black orators on the Fourth of July and Emancipation Day and black historians such as George Washington Williams in celebrating black men's record of civic duty, patriotism, and manhood.³⁹

³⁹ On discrimination against black veterans and soldiers, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Black Veterans and the Historical Memory of the Civil War," in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians and the American Civil War*, ed. Joan Cashin (Princeton, 2003); Wallace E. Davies, "The Problem of Race Segregation in the Grand Army of the

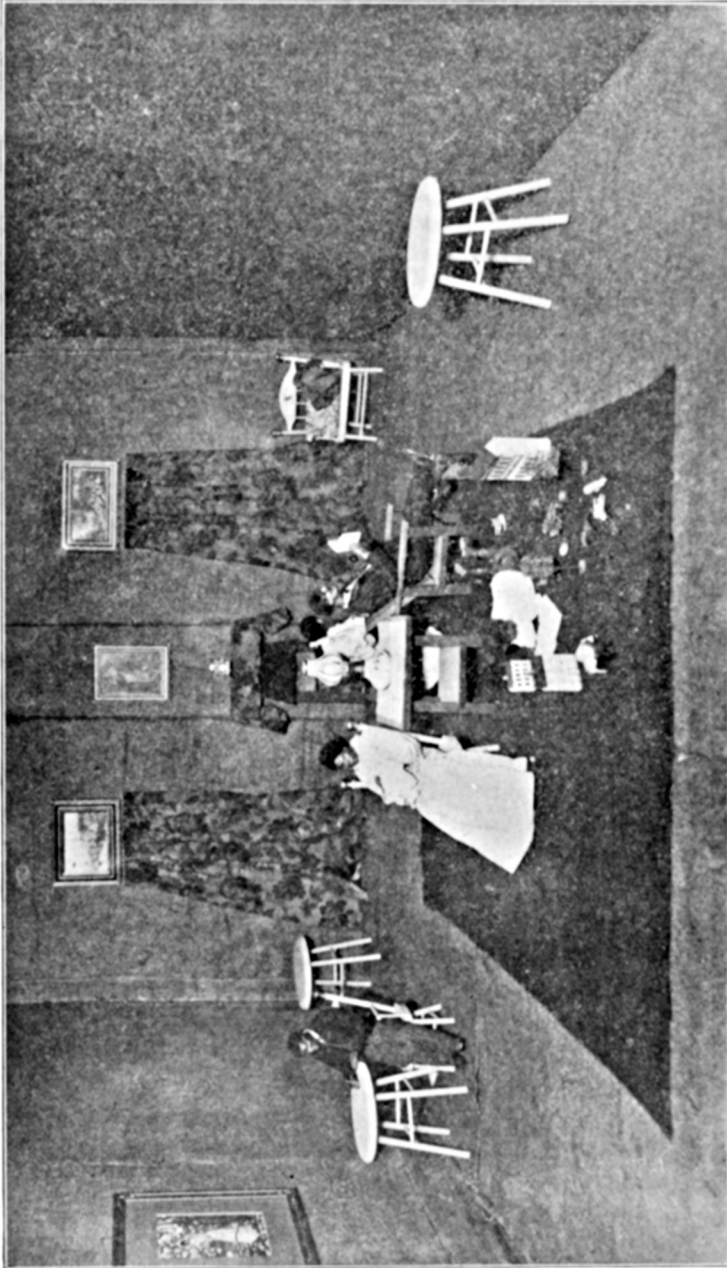
Warrick's last six tableaux, set in the present, depicted civilization achieved. In a real sense, these models re-created in miniature the social context out of which emerged the plethora of manufactured goods, handicrafts, and arts that stuffed the exhibits in the Negro Building. Those scenes were exceptional at a time when sculptural representations of workers of any kind, let alone black workers, were rare. Warrick avoided the exoticized and caricatured images that marred Charles Lopez's controversial sculpture of black workers displayed at the 1902 Charleston exposition. Instead she domesticated the image of black labor in a manner that was understandable and acceptable to middle-class and elite audiences, whether white or black. The first three—*On His Own Farm*, *Contractors and Builders*, and *The Savings Bank*—defied stereotypes of blacks as indolent and instead portrayed them as capable contributors in essential areas of the economy. Yet Warrick's own background bounded her ideas of work and workers. She had no firsthand knowledge of the jobs most blacks performed or the conditions they endured. Given her larger aims and her privileged background, she presented a romanticized and allegorical image of black labor. Her sanguine depiction of black occupational mobility, represented by black landowners, tradesmen, and bank clerks, was actually an exercise in nostalgia. She saluted the dignity of labor but did so while ignoring the powerful forces beginning to drive urban blacks from their trades and rural blacks from the countryside, which condemned most black men and women to arduous, unskilled occupations.⁴⁰

Finally, in three models that clearly were capstones to the whole exhibit, Warrick represented accomplishment in "The Arts of Civilization." First came *Improved Home Life*, set in a neatly furnished parlor in the home of a prosperous black family. While the husband read, his wife was busy with her needlework, and their child played on the floor. A houseguest, Paul Laurence Dunbar, was seated at a side table writing. By placing this celebrated black poet and several works of art in the diorama, Warrick demonstrated that the pursuit of beauty and the expression of imagination took their place alongside the accumulation of wealth as an ideal of black family life. In contrast to white presumptions that the acquisition of culture by blacks was dangerous and often destructive, Warrick offered a comforting scene of domestic tranquility.

The virtues of private life and domesticity were not Warrick's only message. We may wonder why Warrick chose to add Dunbar to her depiction of idyllic home life. Perhaps she included the poet simply as a gesture of respect to a lionized and recently deceased fellow artist. Yet Dunbar also was the most iconoclastic and pessimistic black writer of the age. His poetry and fiction called into question many of the

Republic," *Journal of Southern History*, 13 (Aug. 1947), 354–72; Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 162–208; and Donald R. Shaffer, "Marching On: African-American Civil War Veterans in Postbellum America, 1865–1951" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1996), 158–86. On the Brownsville "affair," see Ann J. Lane, *The Brownsville Affair: National Crisis and Black Reaction* (Port Washington, 1971); and John D. Weaver, *The Brownsville Raid* (New York, 1970).

⁴⁰ On images of work and laborers in American sculpture, see Melissa Dabakis, *Visualizing Labor in American Sculpture: Monuments, Manliness, and the Work Ethic, 1880–1935* (New York, 1999), 10–34, 62–82, 127–73. Unfortunately, Dabakis has little to say about representations of African Americans. Warrick's conception of black workers matched closely the occupational elite that Du Bois had identified in Philadelphia. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899; New York, 1967), 101–3.



IMPROVED HOME LIFE

Improved Home Life epitomizes Meta Warrick's focus on black middle-class respectability. While the husband reads, his wife is busy with her needlework, and their child plays on the floor. Paul Laurence Dunbar, the black poet, is seated at a side table writing. In contrast to white pre-conditions that blacks' acquisition of culture was dangerous and often destructive, Warrick offers a comforting scene of domestic tranquility and propriety. Reprinted from *Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States, 1908.*

assumptions of black progress that Warrick presented in the tableaux. He highlighted the injustices that blacks confronted, exposed the myth of southern paternalism, and reflected on the shortcomings of a program of racial uplift dependent upon material progress and the trappings of gentility. Warrick, intentionally or not, provided an opening for ambivalence and skepticism in a scene otherwise suffused with optimism by including the figure of Dunbar in her tableau.⁴¹

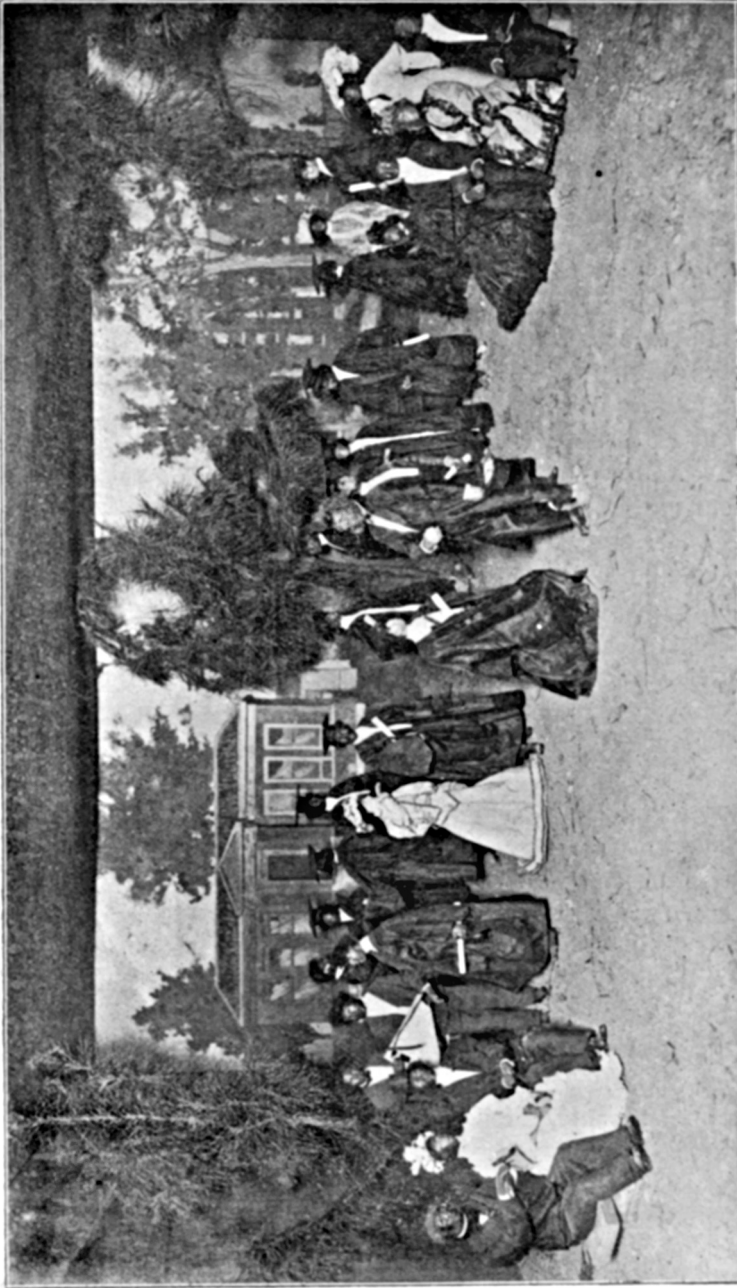
Religion and higher education, the essential measures of advanced civilization, were the subject of Warrick's final two scenes. Significantly, in *An After Church Scene*, she returned to less ambiguous themes. She used the sculpture to depict the growth of the AME Church, and she thus recalled the earlier diorama of its origins. The congregation was no longer a small gathering of worshipers in a smithy's barn; services now took place in an impressive church with stained-glass windows, and they attracted smartly dressed worshipers whose "general appearance" conveyed, in the words of one viewer, "manliness, self-reliance, modest intelligence, and ease of manner."⁴² In her ultimate and most elaborate tableau, *Commencement Day*, Warrick paid tribute to black achievement in higher education. At once historical and contemporary, this diorama staged a graduation ceremony at Howard University. Frederick Douglass, the commencement speaker, stood on the common, surrounded by dignified professors, self-confident graduates, and proud parents. Warrick's choice to portray Howard University and Douglass was an unmistakable endorsement of the broadest conception of education and rights for African Americans at a time when industrial education and Booker T. Washington's influence were ascendant. Her aesthetic sensibilities could not be satisfied by the parochial and utilitarian vision for black people offered by Washington. If most of the tableaux could be read as visual affirmations of Washington's creed, the concluding diorama suggests that Warrick nevertheless shared Du Bois's conviction of the crucial importance of cultural and intellectual endeavor.

Much about Warrick's retelling of the black past was thoroughly consonant with the racial uplift ideology of her age. The outlines of Warrick's dioramic narrative of black progress were familiar to anyone who had listened to black commemorative orations or who had read any of the burgeoning catalog of "race histories" or paeans to racial uplift. To a great degree, her allegorical scenes borrowed and restaged familiar oratorical and literary tropes of black struggle and accomplishment. In place of soothing recitations of arcane data about black educational accomplishments, business investments, and property holding that accompanied most public orations and "race histories," Warrick offered reassuring scenes as a simulacrum of the race's steady advance.⁴³

⁴¹ On Paul Laurence Dunbar and his ambivalent stance, see Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877–1915* (Baton Rouge, 1989), 56–98; and Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 181–93.

⁴² "Historic Tableaux at the Jamestown Exposition," 517.

⁴³ For examples of commemorative orations, see *Savannah Morning News*, Jan. 2, 1892; *Indianapolis Freeman*, July 18, 1896; *Columbia State*, Jan. 2, 1898; *Raleigh News and Observer*, Jan. 2, 1900; *Raleigh Baptist Sentinel*, Jan. 9, 1908; *Charlotte Star of Zion*, Jan. 29, 1914; and *Richmond Planet*, Jan. 9, 1915.



COMMENCEMENT DAY

Commencement Day represents the literal and metaphorical culmination of Meta Warrick's tableaux of black progress. The scene shows a Howard University graduation ceremony. Frederick Douglass, the commencement speaker, stands surrounded by professors, graduates, and parents. Warrick's choice of subject was an unmistakable endorsement of the broadest conception of education and rights for African Americans at a time when industrial education and Booker T. Washington's influence were ascendant. *Reprinted from Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States, 1908.*

She joined with other black writers and orators in depicting blacks' rapid progress as the consequence of their own will and struggle rather than of white beneficence.⁴⁴ Her postemancipation scenes were bereft of white figures or symbols of white intervention in black affairs. In this regard, Warrick's dioramas differ in important ways from Frances Benjamin Johnston's celebrated photographs of Hampton Institute and African Americans that had been displayed in 1900 at Paris and other world expositions. Whereas Johnston apparently tried to erase the racial identity of her subjects in favor of a common national character, Warrick presented a saga of racial autonomy and self-determination. Her scenes were closer to the archive of photographs, "Types of American Negroes," that Du Bois exhibited at the 1900 Paris exposition. The diversity of the African Americans depicted and the variety of poses in Du Bois's photographs resisted any simple conception of African American character or identity. Warrick, however, did not represent nearly as broad a panorama of "Negro types" as had Du Bois and instead presented a relentlessly bourgeois image of black life.⁴⁵

Her belief in the central importance of the rise of the black middle class almost certainly helps explain Warrick's emphasis on the historical significance of otherwise seemingly mundane aspects of African American life. Largely avoiding the exceptional events or heroic deeds of the black historical experience that black orators and historians favored, the dioramas highlighted the representative and the prosaic. Instead of scenes depicting, for instance, the death of the black hero Crispus Attucks during the Boston Massacre in revolutionary-era Boston, the Fisk Jubilee Singers performing before the crowned heads of Europe, or black soldiers charging up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War, Warrick illustrated milestones in the lives of anonymous African Americans. Even so, the title to Warrick's domestic models—"The Arts of Civilization"—alerted viewers that those deceptively humdrum activities were nevertheless profoundly important. Warrick's transformation of the mundane into spectacle was consonant with the voyeurism of everyday life that characterized late-nineteenth-century culture. The dioramas reflected the erosion of private space evident in contemporary fiction, urban design, and architecture.⁴⁶

Her tableaux encouraged the viewing audience to penetrate the imagined living space of black families, burrowing deep into intimate places normally shielded by Victorian conventions and decorum. Warrick placed nuclear black families at the center of her postemancipation dioramas. She affirmed that black home life, no less than black public conduct in church, at school, or on the street, conformed to the conventions of propriety. Her emphasis on black civility was more than just a manifestation of her own Victorian upbringing and fastidiousness; because questions of

⁴⁴ A *New York Times* correspondent alleged that the Negro Exhibit at the Jamestown exhibition was filled with the work of "mulattoes" rather than "full blooded negroes"; quoted in "Mulatto Negroes and the Jamestown Exhibit," *Colored American Magazine*, 13 (Aug. 1907), 87–88.

⁴⁵ Warrick may have had other reasons for excluding white figures from her models. By doing so, she avoided the problems of positioning whites and blacks relative to each other in the scenes. Too often other artists, when confronted with the challenge of conveying the power and agency of black figures alongside white figures, had rendered the black body as debased and powerless, as "a foil for whiteness." See Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 203.

⁴⁶ On spectacle and late-nineteenth-century culture, see Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*; on the erosion of private space, see Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, 61–64.

individual and collective integrity had implications for the fitness of blacks to participate in public life, black respectability had unmistakable political import. That she dwelled on domestic scenes as a means to portray black "civilization" demonstrated her recognition that in turn-of-the-century America a crucial measure of one's refinement and respectability was how closely one's life hewed to patriarchal notions of manhood, motherhood, and domesticity.

African American domestic life had come under close scrutiny and criticism because of the ways in which Victorian ideologies, especially social Darwinism and evangelical Christianity, linked the private with the public. Hostile whites concluded that black family life contradicted the dictates of civilization and therefore blacks, despite living among the civilized, were doomed to remain a primitive people. Black activists countered that the race's embrace of the patriarchal family demonstrated the triumph of blacks over the legacy of slavery. Summarizing the prevailing wisdom, Du Bois wrote in 1900 that "we look most anxiously to the establishment and strengthening of the home among the members of the race because it is the surest combination of real progress." Warrick's images of stable, decorous, bourgeois family life confirmed black success at cultivating precisely the sort of Christian home championed by Du Bois and others. But her preoccupation with displaying black middle-class respectability foreclosed any possibility that she could represent life-styles deviating from conventional domesticity.⁴⁷

Warrick's voyeuristic scenes of black domestic life may have presented models of respectable manhood and true womanhood, but she avoided a male-centered historical narrative. Her dioramas presented the black past as a saga of male and female survival and accomplishment. Only the scenes of the runaway slave and of the military muster excluded female figures. In the twelve other scenes, black women engaged in the same range of activities as the male figures. Most contemporary black commemorative celebrations and published "race histories," in contrast, presented manhood itself as synonymous with the progress of the race. Motivated by anxieties about black masculinity, many black men during the late nineteenth century began to reinterpret the whole history of the race in an effort to compile a cavalcade of heroic black manhood. Black men, for example, monopolized the most conspicuous roles in black civic occasions, processions, and histories and left only limited roles to black women. While black men sought to embody black masculinity by donning the gaudy finery of the military or by displaying pride in craft, black women were expected to offer tacit support for the same ideals that black men professed—concerns principally associated with the male public sphere. Whether by intent or not, Warrick's voyeuris-

⁴⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The College-Bred Negro* (Atlanta, 1900), 57. On respectability and domesticity, see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 67–99, 128–51; also see Campbell, *Sons of Zion*, 32–63; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 1–60; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, 1993), 185–230; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manner in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York, 1990), 112–46, 215–56; and Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black Feminism," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana, 1993), 247–69.

tic narrative of domesticity challenged not only white depictions of black degeneracy but also black histories that focused exclusively on black men as historical agents.⁴⁸

Taken as a whole, Warrick's dioramic cycle was her effort to interpret the black experience in a manner that contradicted the grotesque and mocking renditions that whites propagated in drama, literature, and popular culture in general. If hurried in execution and ambitious in scope, Warrick's narrative of black freedom was propelled by an internal logic. Much of the narrativity and history invoked by the dioramas lay beyond the immediate visual experience. Neither the scenes themselves nor their titles conveyed the complex meanings and associations of the dioramas. Presuming that visitors had prior knowledge of the narrative presented in the tableaux, she relied on that knowledge, along with the ordering of the objects, to unfold dramatic action in the minds of spectators. In this manner Warrick's scenes became stages on which viewers projected, by means of association, a deliberately framed series of actions. The synoptic capacity of dioramas allowed Warrick to present three centuries of African American history as contemporaneous, as coexisting simultaneously in the present. And this underlying narrative logic suggested a distinctive orientation toward the future. Warrick created a purposeful past that linked the struggles of contemporary African Americans with those of their ancestors. The future offered the promise of the fulfillment of enduring aspirations that had been anticipated, inspired, and urged on by the past sacrifices represented in the dioramas.

The contrast between the barely clad and abject slaves in the first diorama and Frederick Douglass in the concluding scene was unmistakable. Nowhere in her dioramas did she acknowledge the nation's retreat from the promise of Reconstruction or from its commitment to racial equality. Instead, Warrick celebrated the living struggle of emancipation and projected a present in which the possibilities of her race were bright, or at least open-ended. The cumulative effect of the tableaux contradicted any reinscription of subservience and primitivism on the image of the black body.

Assessing the Warrick Tableaux

The immediate impact that Warrick's tableaux had on the several thousand whites and blacks who visited the Negro Building each day during the Jamestown exposition is difficult to discern. The absence of virtually any record of spectators' responses precludes firm conclusions about any enduring impressions left by the tableaux. Yet they occupied more than fifteen hundred square feet of prime exhibit space in the Negro Building; they were difficult to ignore. Further proof of immediate impact appeared in the published accounts of the exposition, including the official fair history, which lauded the dioramas. Recognizing Warrick's creativity, the fair's white organizers awarded her a gold prize in the fine art category. Negating such praise and

⁴⁸ For discussions of the struggle over gender roles among African Americans, see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 45–76; Kathleen Ann Clark, "History in No Fossil Remains: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Memory in the American South, 1863–1913" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999), 70–120; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 1–60; and Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

notice, however, was the sparse attendance at the fair, which made the exposition one of the least successful international fairs of the era. When the fair closed in November 1907 the dioramas were disassembled and discarded, as ephemeral as the exposition itself.

Warrick's participation in the exposition, nonetheless, had far-reaching consequences for her subsequent career. It was a point of creative departure for her, marking her shift away from classical and biblical themes to overtly African American topics. Throughout the remainder of her prolific career, which extended until her death in 1968, she created widely displayed sculptures that dealt with many of the historical themes that she had first explored in her Jamestown dioramas. In 1913, Du Bois requested that Warrick contribute to New York State's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. She designed an eight-foot-high sculpture entitled *The Spirit of Emancipation*. In it, she depicted an African American couple standing under a tree who were nonetheless not safe. Branches, "the fingers of Fate," clawed at them, threatening their tenuous freedom with "the fateful clutches of hatred."⁴⁹ Her 1913 statue followed her tableau allegories of 1907. She sculpted no crouching slaves, no beneficent white liberators, no broken shackles. Indeed, she became more explicit in her juxtaposition of pride and danger. In *The Awakening of Ethiopia* (disputed date) she accentuated her subject's nonwhite appearance and incorporated African motifs, and in *A Silent Protest against Mob Violence* (1919) she depicted lynching and other cruelties endured by blacks. Through narrative sequence and sculptural form she probed themes that would figure prominently in twentieth-century African American art, especially Jacob Lawrence's celebrated cycles "The Life of Frederick Douglass" and "The Life of Harriet Tubman."⁵⁰

Warrick's 1907 creation exemplifies the innovative aural and visual representations of African American history in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although historians, perhaps reflecting the influence of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, have joined literary scholars in emphasizing the importance of print and literacy to the creation of nineteenth-century American and African American identity, excessive concentration on texts and literacy precludes a full understanding of visual and aural expression. Warrick's sculptures were sites of contestation and properly occupy a place alongside the era's notable nonprint representations of African American history, such as Bert Williams and George Walker's musical *In Dahomey* (1902), Scott Joplin's operatic celebration of emancipation, *Treemonisha* (1911), Du Bois's elaborate pageant of black heritage, *Star of Ethiopia* (1913), and Oscar Micheaux's incendiary protest film *Within Our Gates* (1917).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Freeman Henry Morris Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study of Interpretation* (1916; Freeport, N.Y., 1972), 55–66.

⁵⁰ On Warrick's later career, see Kerr, "God-Given Work," 184–362; and James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York, 1943), 77–78, 86–87, 92, 94.

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 1991), 163–206. On Bert Williams and George Walker, see David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895–1910* (New York, 1997); on Scott Joplin, see Susan Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man's Tune: A Life of Scott Joplin* (Columbia, Mo., 1994), 182–88; on Du Bois's pageant, see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 374–80; on Oscar Micheaux, see Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, eds., *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* (Bloomington, 2001).

As technological and artistic innovations offered new modes of narrative expression, Warrick and her peers engaged in a far-reaching cultural project: the visualization of African American memory. Against a backdrop of "a frenzy of the visible" and an "immense accumulation of spectacles," African American artists experimented with new methods to bring the past into the present, changing the way people experienced their personal past and the collective past. These diverse forms reflected their creators' use of spatial and temporal illusion to excite the visual curiosity of viewers in order to convey historical "truths" that otherwise were ignored in the dominant narrative. Focusing on Warrick's Jamestown tableaux underscores how much conventional binaries of civilization and primitivism and of subjectivity and agency were entangled in a field of power and representation that both enabled and constrained the expression of African American historical memory. Alain Locke, writing during the Harlem Renaissance, concluded that Warrick had been stymied in her attempts to represent the fullness and complexity of the African American experience. He criticized her art for wavering "between abstract expression which was imitative and not highly original, and racial expression which was only experimental."⁵² Locke's critique remains compelling and relevant to Warrick's Jamestown scenes.

True, she previously had eschewed African American themes. She participated in a segregated exposition that many blacks denounced because it was overseen by the "lick-spittle" Giles B. Jackson. She had adopted the civilizationist ideology, and she likewise presumed that the black masses were an uncouth child-race who had to overcome the legacy of their primitive ancestors and slavery while ascending the ladder of civilization. When she revised the dominant historical narrative by incorporating blacks into the ranks of the civilized, she displayed surprising optimism in its underlying progressive teleology. Her confident representation of idealized "Negro types" and of black economic accomplishments rested on assumptions about class hierarchy and progress that sharply circumscribed her ability to imagine other paths of black cultural development and resistance.⁵³

Only around the time of World War I, and especially during the Pan-Africanist revival of the 1910s and 1920s, did black intellectuals and leaders evince much interest or pride in black common folk. As the grip of social Darwinism and its corollary of evolutionary racism loosened, African American intellectuals began to glorify the primitive and to undermine the idea that African Americans should slavishly submit to the conventions of modern civilization. Earlier assumptions about Africa, black capacities, and civilization—assumptions that Warrick held in 1907—all became subject to revision. While engaging in bolder and more far-reaching critiques of the grand narrative of American civilization than Warrick had envisioned at Jamestown, African American artists and intellectuals would pioneer modernist aesthetics.⁵⁴

⁵² Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Laurentis and Stephen Heath (New York, 1980), 122–23; Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle* (Detroit, 1973), aphorism one; Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York, 1925), 266.

⁵³ For thoughtful discussions of the ideological challenges that black intellectuals and activists confronted, see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*; and Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*.

⁵⁴ Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830–1925* (New York, 2000), 187–218; Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 220–50; Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and*

From Locke's vantage point, Warrick's Jamestown dioramas and early work were at most an obscure and timid antecedent to the cultural ferment of the twenties. But the qualities in Warrick's work that troubled Locke are suggestive of both the possibilities for and the limits of African American historical narration and imagination during a critical period of perceptual modernization.

At a highly contingent moment, when African Americans were experimenting with new representational strategies, Warrick's tableaux were an early, if tentative, example of African American self-imaging within the dominant domain of racist representation. If she failed to move significantly beyond the extant textual narratives of black progress and history, she did challenge the exclusive authority of white Americans to represent and signify, to embody, either the nation or civilization. Her dioramas challenged what one scholar calls the "visual structures of white supremacy" by simultaneously adopting and subverting conventional turn-of-the-century images.⁵⁵ Dismantling the stereotyped and caricatured images of African Americans reproduced in American popular culture, the dioramas recalled the long history of blacks in North America, resisted claims of racial purity by acknowledging the historical reality of interracial reproduction, and offered a teleological narrative culminating in black civilization, not in retrogression or criminality. Warrick's contribution was to yoke visual technologies of representation to familiar nineteenth-century literary narratives of African American progress, thereby encouraging viewers to experience firsthand the black ascent of civilization, in effect transforming them into virtual witnesses of black progress. Her tableaux provided a vivid forum in which to challenge exhibitions of black subjectivity with unmistakable representations of black agency. Her version of black progress and civilization, as previously noted, corresponded to a set of ideals that would not long endure unchallenged. Yet her scenes evoked a sense of racial autonomy and self-determination that would persist as a central theme of African American culture throughout the twentieth century.

the Harlem Renaissance (Chicago, 1987); J. Martin Favor, *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance* (Durham, 1999).

⁵⁵ Smith, *American Archives*, 183.