

AAAS 520S/ARTHIST 554S

Harlem Renaissance

October 2

-Biographical Report VII: Zora Neale Hurston.

-Seminar Discussion: Zora Neale Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression" & Richard J. Powell's "More Than A One-Liner," & 2 film shorts: 1) Arvid Gillstrom's *The Melancholy Dame* (1929), & 2) Arvid Gillstrom's *Oft in the Silly Night* (1929).

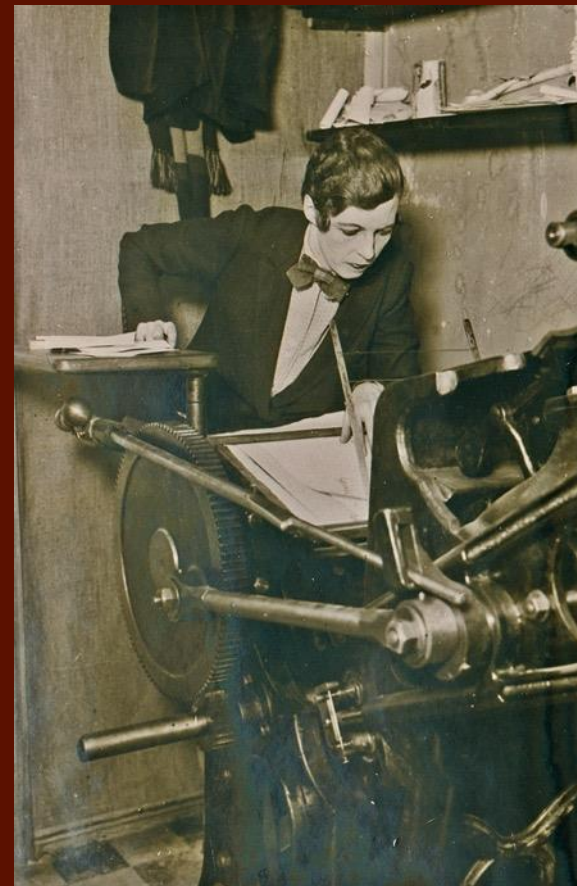


Clockwise from center: Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960); Film still from Arvid Gillstrom, *Oft in the Silly Night* (USA, 1929, dir. Arvid Gillstrom); & Film still *The Melancholy Dame* from Arvid Gillstrom, (USA, 1929, dir. Arvid Gillstrom).

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ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY
NANCY CUNARD



Left: Cover of Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro Anthology* (London: Wishart & Co., 1934).

Above: Photo of Nancy Cunard at the Hours Press, Paris, 1929.



Above: Carl Van Vechten, Zora Neale Hurston, 1938. Gelatin silver print.

Right: Introductory page of Zora Neale Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro Anthology* (1934).

Characteristics of Negro Expression

by ZORA NEALE HURSTON

DRAMA



Zora Neale Hurston

THE Negro's universal mimicry is not so much a thing in itself as an evidence of something that permeates his entire self. And that thing is drama.

His very words are action words. His interpretation of the English language is in terms of pictures. One act described in terms of another. Hence the rich metaphor and simile.

The metaphor is of course very primitive. It is easier to illustrate than it is to explain because action came before speech. Let us make a parallel. Language is like money. In primitive communities actual goods, however bulky, are bartered for what one wants. This finally evolves into coin, the coin being not real wealth but a symbol of wealth. Still later even coin is abandoned for legal tender, and still later for cheques in certain usages.

Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatised. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned.

Now the people with highly developed languages have words for detached ideas. That is legal tender. "That-which-we-squat-on" has become "chair." "Groan-causer" has evolved into "spear," and

so on. Some individuals even conceive of the equivalent of cheque words, like "ideation" and "pleonastic." Perhaps we might say that *Paradise Lost* and *Sartor Resartus* are written in cheque words.

The primitive man exchanges descriptive words. His terms are all close fitting. Frequently the Negro, even with detached words in his vocabulary—not evolved in him but transplanted on his tongue by contact—must add action to it to make it do. So we have "chop-axe," "sitting-chair," "cook-pot" and the like because the speaker has in his mind the picture of the object in use. Action. Everything illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics.

A bit of Negro drama familiar to all is the frequent meeting of two opponents who threaten to do atrocious murder one upon the other.

Who has not observed a robust young Negro chap posing upon a street corner, possessed of nothing but his clothing, his strength and his youth? Does he bear himself like a pauper? No, Louis XIV could be no more insolent in his assurance. His eyes say plainly "Female, halt!" His posture exults "Ah, female, I am the eternal male, the giver of life. Behold in my hot flesh all the delights of this world. Salute me, I am strength." All this with a languid posture, there is no mistaking his meaning.

On the walls of the homes of the average Negro one always finds a glut of gaudy calendars, wall pockets and advertising lithography . . . I saw in Mobile, Alabama a room in which the walls were gaily papered with Sunday supplements of the *Mobile Register*. There were seven calendars and three wall pockets. One of them was decorated with a lace doily. The mantle-shelf was covered with a scarf of deep, homemade lace, looped up with a huge bow of pink crepe paper. Over the door was a huge lithograph showing the Treaty of Versailles being signed with a Waterman fountain pen.

It was grotesque, yes. But it indicated the desire for beauty. And decorating a decoration, as in the case of the doily on the gaudy wall pocket, did not seem out of place to the hostess. The feeling (in) back of such an act is that there can never be enough beauty, let alone too much.

Zora Neale Hurston, from “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” in Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro Anthology* (1934).



Lower left: Ray Stannard Baker, Interior of a working-man's home, Atlanta, GA, 1908. Photograph.

Upper left: Attributed to Thomas E. Askew, Negro teacher's home, New Orleans, LA, 1899. Photograph.

Center: Front page of the Mobile Register.

Upper right: Advertisement, The Peace Treaty at Versailles was signed with Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen, c. 1920s.



Above: Marion Post Wolcott, Tenant farmers, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, MS, 1939. Photograph.



Right: Gordon Parks, Woman in her home, Washington, D.C., 1942. Photograph.



**Left: Alex M. Rivera,
Zora Neale Hurston at a
football game, Durham,
NC, 1939. Gelatin silver
print.**

**Right: Mother
Catherine Seals, New
Orleans, LA, c. 1929.
Photograph**

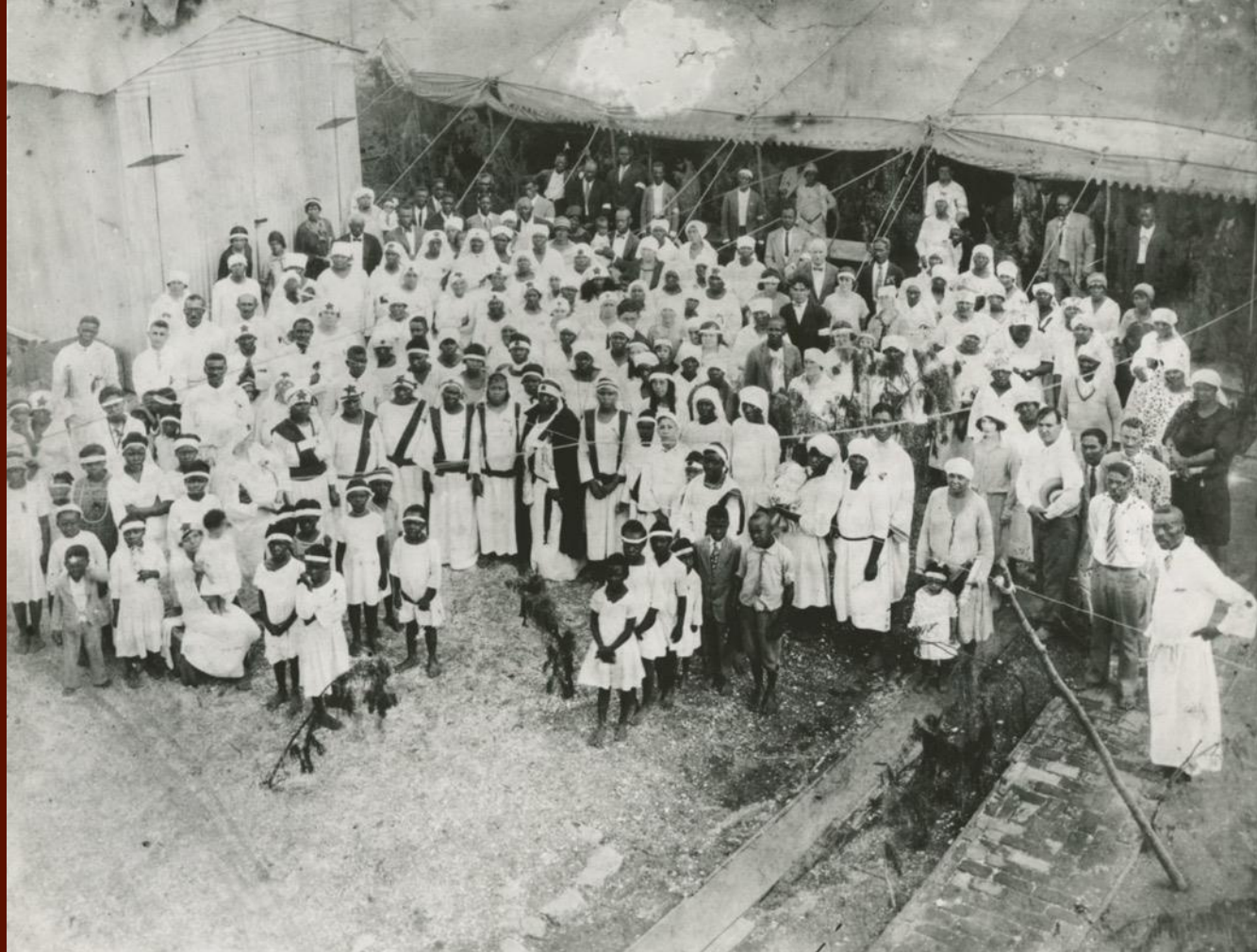


...A place of barbaric splendor, of banners, of embroideries, of images bought and images created by Mother Catherine herself; of an altar glittering with polished brass and kerosene lamps. There are 365 lamps in this building, but not all are upon the main altar.

The walls and ceiling are decorated in red, white, and blue. The ceiling and floor in the room of the Sacred Heart are striped in three colors and the walls are paneled. The panels contain a snake design. This is not due to Hoodoo influence but African background. I note that the African loves to depict the grace of snakes.

On a placard: *Speak so you can speak again.*

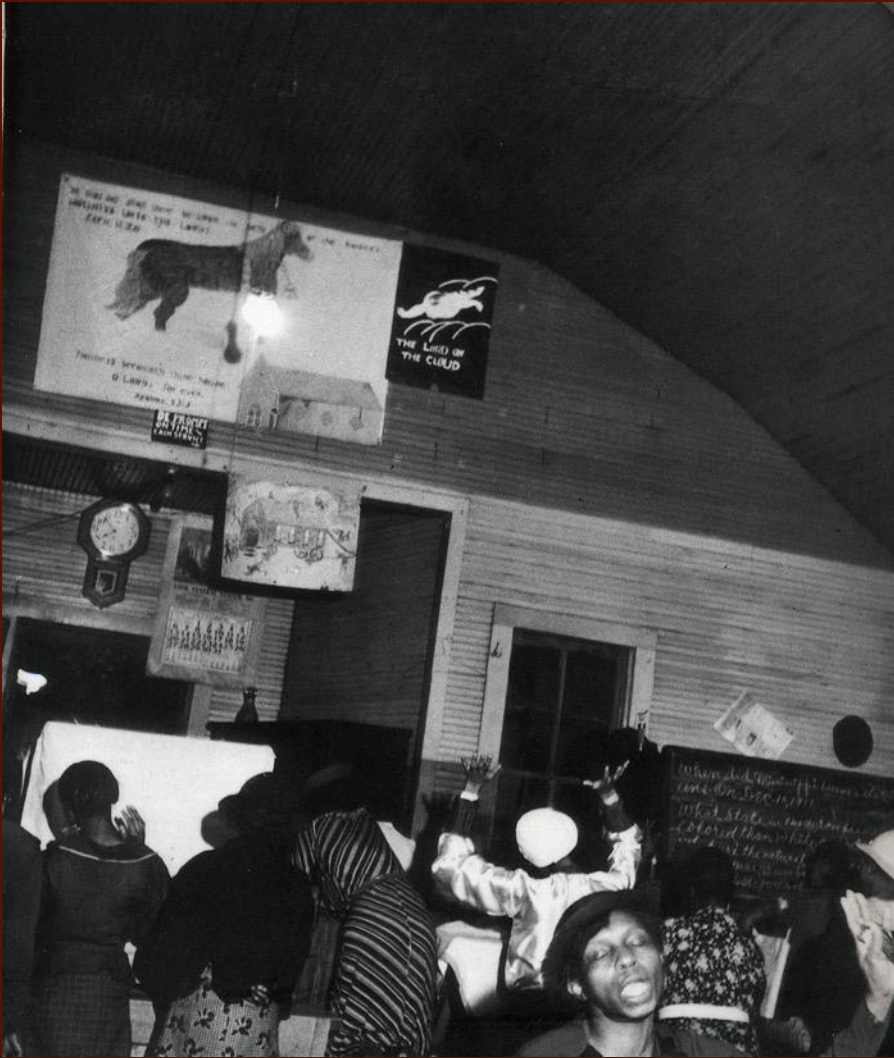
Zora Neale Hurston, "Mother Catherine," in Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro Anthology* (1934).



Left: Anon., Mother Catherine in front of her followers at the Temple of Innocent Blood, New Orleans, c. 1929. Photograph.



Right: Anon., Mother Catherine Seals, c. 1930. Photograph.



Left: Eudora Welty, Speaking in the Unknown Tongue, Holiness Church, Jackson, MS, 1939. Gelatin silver print.

Center: James VanDerZee, Daddy Grace, Harlem, NY, 1938. Photograph.

Right: Wayne Miller, Michael's Religious Candle House, Chicago, IL, 1947. Gelatin silver print.



Archibald J. Motley, Jr., *Lawd, Mah Man's Leavin'*, 1940. Oil on canvas.



Above: Ancient Egypt, Thebes, *Cat and Mouse*, circa 1295-1075 B.C.E., XIX to XX Dynasty, New Kingdom Period. Pigment on limestone.

Right: Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools*, 1488-1510. Oil on wood.





Todos Caerán.

Left: Francisco Goya, *All Will Fall*, from *Los Caprichos*, 1799, plate 9. Aquatint & etching.

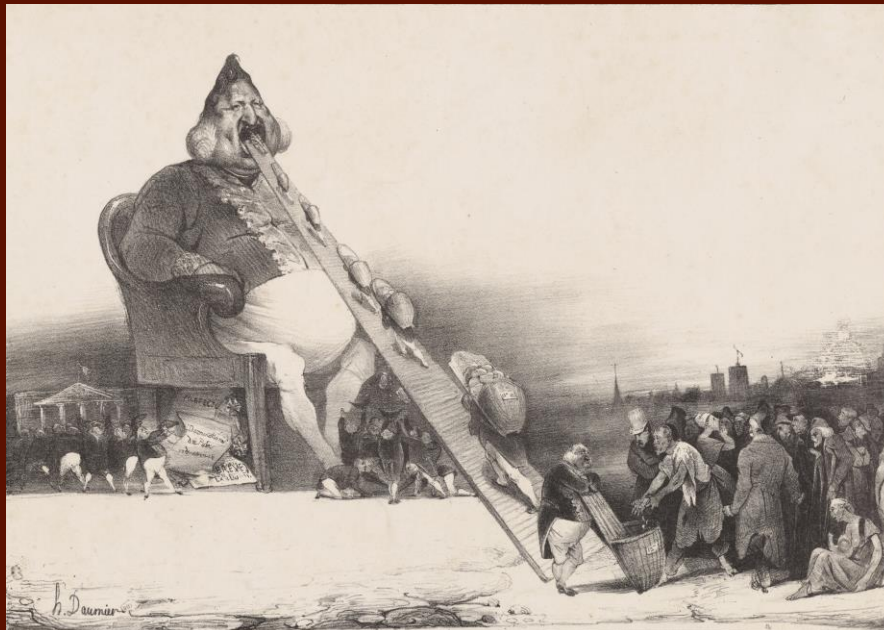
Below center: Honore Daumier, *Gargantua*, 1831. Lithograph.

Right: William Hogarth, *Boys Peeping at Nature*, 1737. Engraving.



Indiciis monstrare recentibus abdita rerum,
dabiturque Licentia sumpta pudenter.

Rec^d 1737. Half a Guinea being the First Payment for five Large Prints.
One representing a Sleeping Company of Actresses Dressing themselves for the Play, in a Barn; and the other four Morning, Noon, Evening and Night.
Which I promise to deliver on Lady day next on Receiving half a Guinea more. N.B. they will be 25 Shilling after y^r Subscription is over.





Above: George Grosz, *Pillars of Society*, 1926. Oil on canvas.

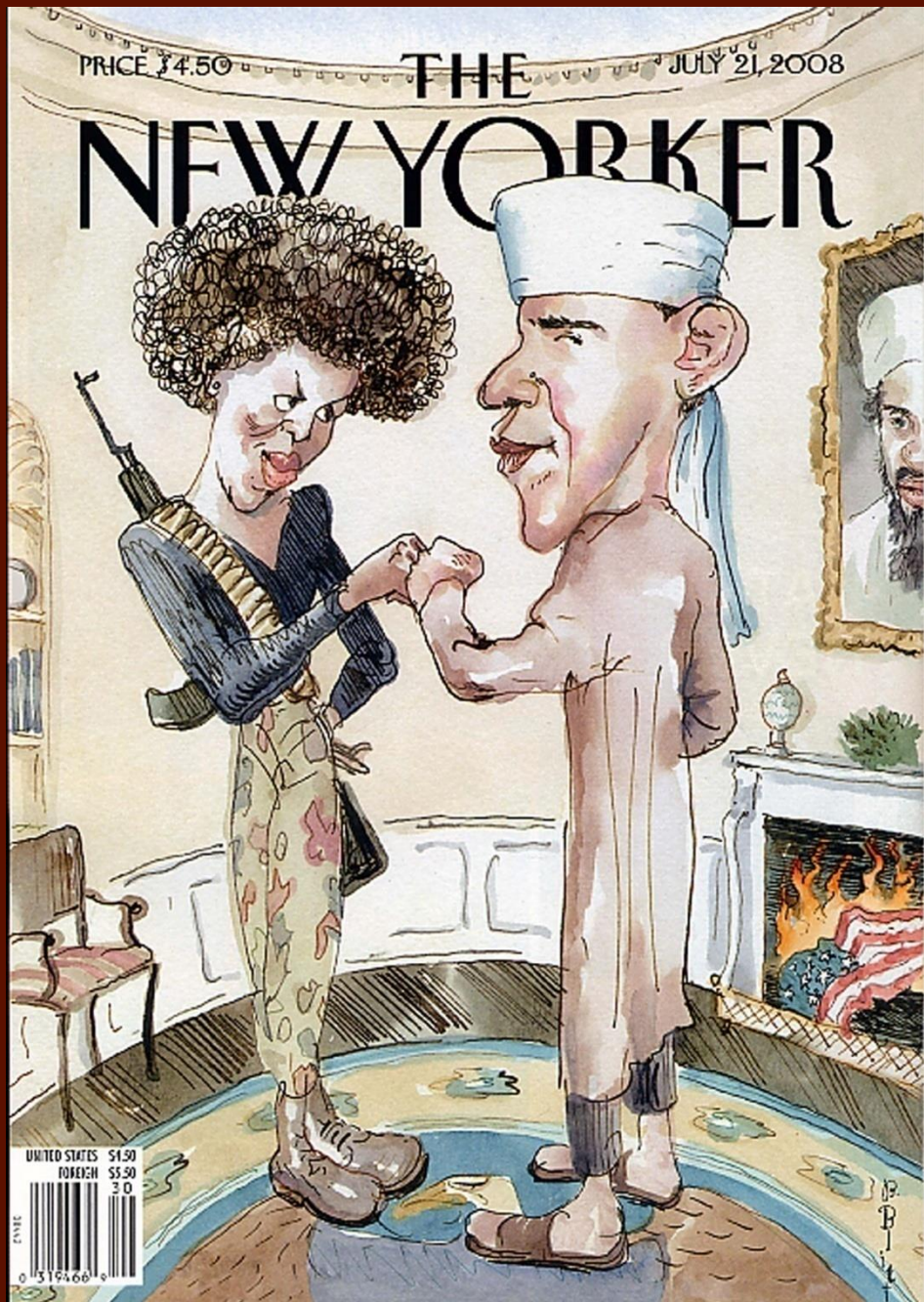
Right: Robert Arneson, *General Nuke*, 1984. Glazed ceramic and bronze.





But one's
ironic . . .

Robert Colescott, *Pygmalion*, 1987. Acrylic on canvas.



Left: Barry Blitt, Cover of *The New Yorker*, 21 July 2008.

Above: Tom Toles, Editorial cartoon for *The Washington Post*, July 2008.

HARPER'S WEEKLY.

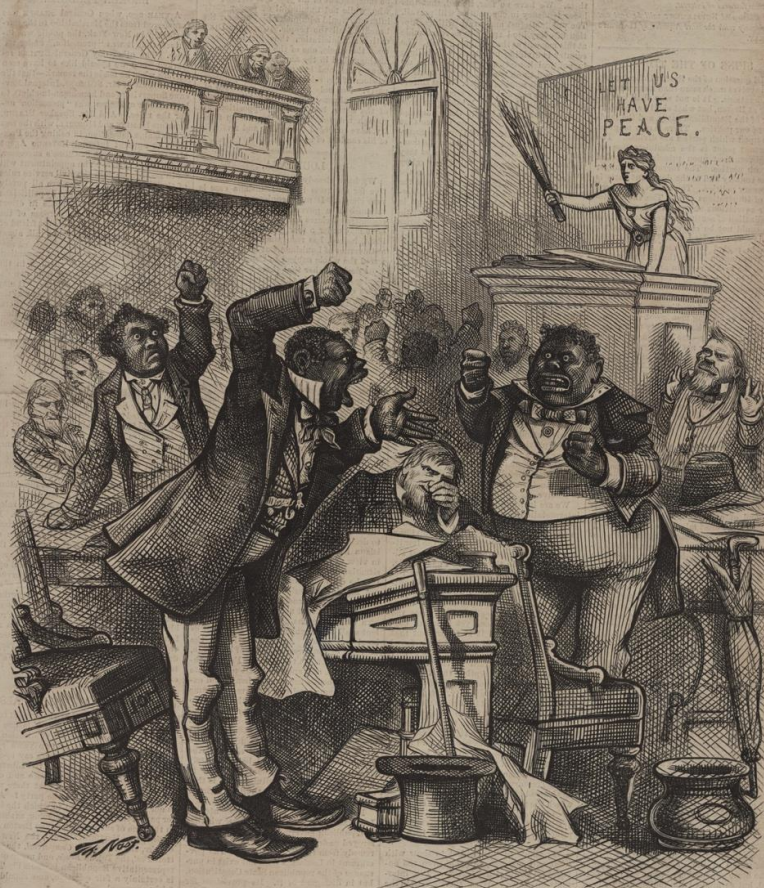
A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

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NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1874.

[WITH A SUPPLEMENT.
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COLORED RULE IN A RECONSTRUCTED (?) STATE.—(See Page 242.)

(THE MEMBERS CALL EACH OTHER THIEVES, LIARS, RASCALS, AND COWARDS.)

COLUMBIA. "You are Aping the lowest Whites. If you disgrace your Race in this way you had better take Back Seats."

Left: Thomas Nast, "COLORED RULE IN A RECONSTRUCTED (?) STATE (THE MEMBERS CALL EACH OTHER THIEVES, LIARS, RASCALS, AND COWARDS)." COLUMBIA - "You are Aping the lowest Whites. If you disgrace your Race in this way you had better take Back Seats," *Harper's Weekly*, March 1874.

Right: Thomas Worth, "Artistic Colored Gentleman - "I WONDER HOW HARPER'S ARTIST LIKES TO BE OFFENSIVELY CARICATURED HIMSELF?" Second Colored Gentleman - "GOLLY, IF HARPER'S PICTURE IS NASTY, YOURS IS NASTIER." "TU QUOQUE!" *The Daily Graphic*, March 1874.

THE DAILY GRAPHIC

AN ILLUSTRATED EVENING NEWSPAPER

300 & 41 PARK PLACE

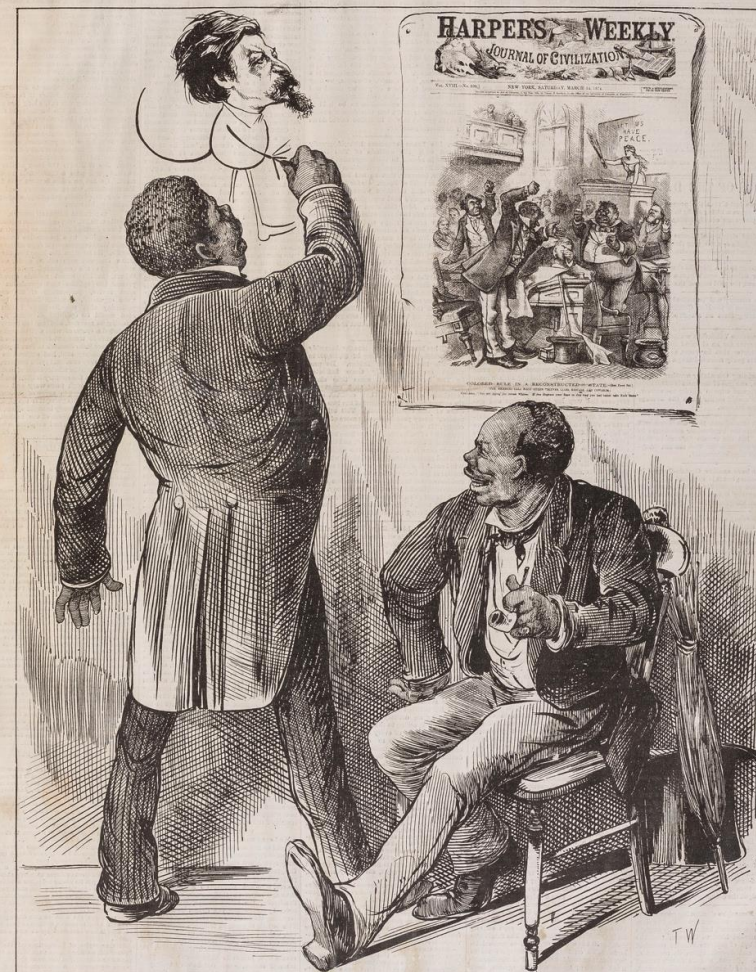
VOL. IV.

All the News,
Four Killings Daily.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 1874.

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Artistic Colored Gentleman—"I WONDER HOW HARPER'S ARTIST LIKES TO BE OFFENSIVELY CARICATURED HIMSELF?"
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"TU QUOQUE!"



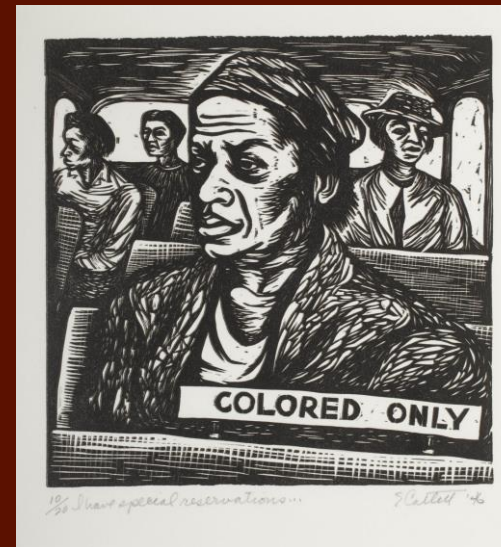
Robert Colescott, *George Washington Carver crossing the Delaware*: Page from an American History Textbook, 1975. Acrylic on canvas.



Above: Film still for *Body & Soul* (USA, 1925, Oscar Micheaux, dir.).

Upper right: Film still from *Putney Swope* (USA, 1969, Robert Downey, Sr., dir.).

Lower right: Elizabeth Catlett, *Negro Woman Series: I Have Special Reservations*, 1946.





Film still from *Ozara and Katessa* (USA, 2017, Kalup Linzy, dir.).



Film still from *Chi-Raq* (USA, 2015, Spike Lee, dir.).



David Hammons, Installation view of *Victory Over Sin* in the PS1 exhibition *Afro-American Abstraction* (February 17 – April 6, 1980), PS1, Long Island City, New York. Wallpaper, human hair, light fixture, and wire.

John Wilson, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 1943. Etching.





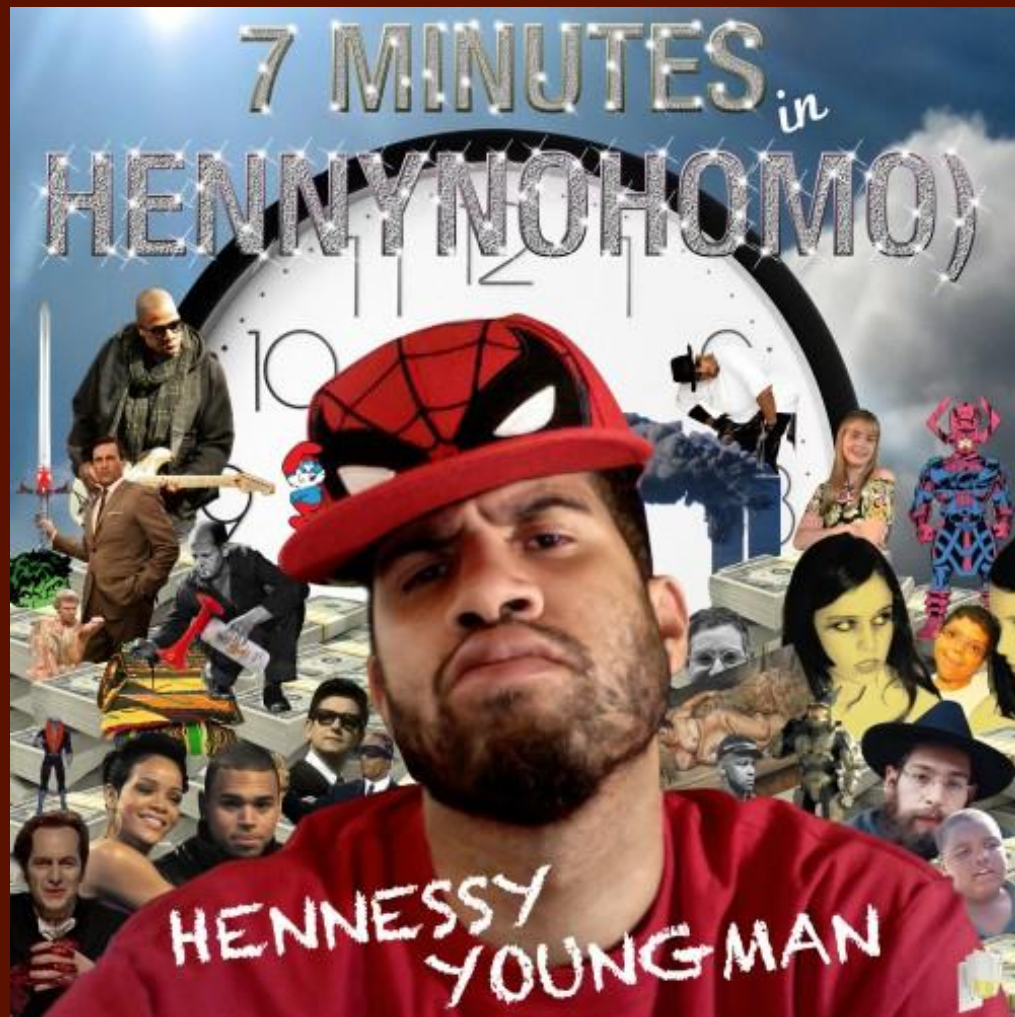
Film still from *Get Out* (USA, 2017, dir. Jordan Peele).



Joyce J. Scott, *Man Eating Watermelon*, 1986. Beads, thread.

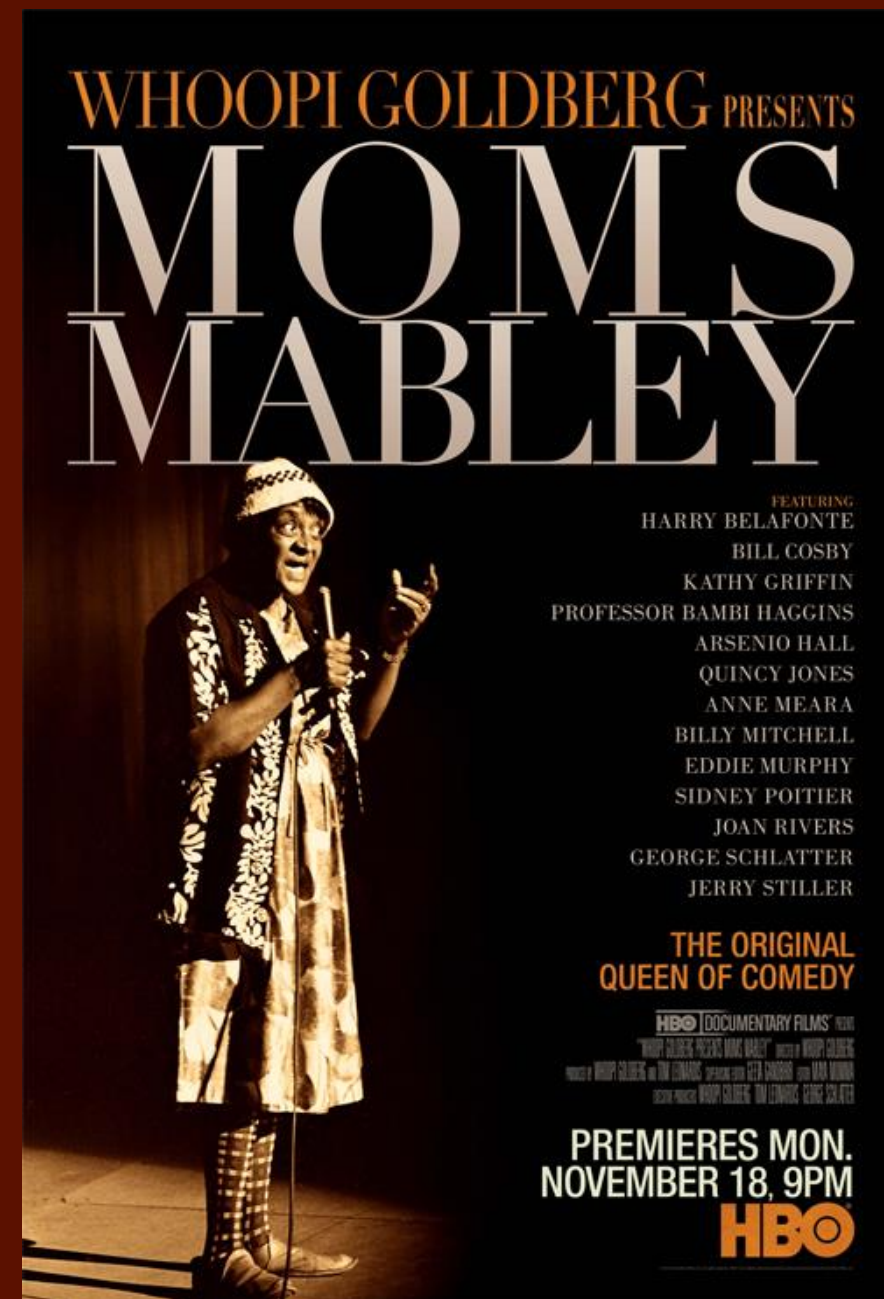


David McGee, *Portrait of Picasso/Side A*, 1998. Acrylic on canvas.



Above: Jayson Musson, Advertisement for Hennessey Youngman's Art Thoughtz video series, 2010.

Right: Poster for *Moms Mabley: I Got Somethin' To Tell You* (USA, 2013, Whoopi Goldberg, dir.).



Carrie Mae Weems, *Missing Link: Despair*, 2003. Iris print.





Wayne F. Miller, *Parade Watchers, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 1946*. Gelatin silver print.



Film stills from *Oft In The Silly Night* (USA, 1929, dir. Arvid Gillstrom).



Film stills from *The Melancholy Dame* (USA, 1929, dir. Arvid Gillstrom).