

The Politics of Painting: Horace Pippin the Historian

Steve Conn

There are two men in the history of our States whose lives are of such a lasting spell that wherever you see their names in print you must stay and read what is said of them. To the end of imaginable time, mankind will be bound by an irresistible fascination when men write or speak of John Brown and Abraham Lincoln.

William Dean Howells, 1911¹

When Philadelphia-area painter Horace Pippin died in July, 1946, no less an authority than the *New York Times* eulogized him as the “most important Negro painter” to have appeared in America.² This obituary reflected a consensus which had quickly developed about the significance of Pippin’s achievement and about his place in the American art historical tradition. This consensus was articulated most forcefully in January, 1940 by the cantankerous collector Albert Barnes, when he wrote an introductory essay for the catalogue which accompanied Pippin’s first one-man show at Philadelphia’s Carlen Gallery. In the catalogue Barnes audaciously announced that Pippin was “the first important Negro painter to appear on the American scene.”³

When Pippin died, he had been in the artistic spotlight for less than ten years. Born in 1888, Pippin grew up in West Chester, Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia)

and in Goshen, New York. As a young man he supported himself through a series of odd jobs until he enlisted in the Army to fight in World War I. Serving on the front lines in France, Pippin was wounded in the right shoulder in 1918 and returned to West Chester to recuperate. Through the 1920s, he struggled to regain sufficient use of his right arm to paint and by 1931 he had begun work on his first canvas, an impassioned war scene entitled *The End of War—Starting Home*.

Pippin came to public attention in 1937, when Christian Brinton arranged to have Pippin's work displayed at the West Chester Community Center. What followed this modest exhibition was a meteoric artistic career which would include considerable critical acclaim and many paintings sold. By the time of his death, Pippin had shown his work in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

Though one of his images of John Brown has become iconic, Pippin did not gain renown for his seven known history paintings—four scenes from the life of Abraham Lincoln and three depicting the life of John Brown. Instead, he became famous for his biblical scenes, among them three versions of *The Holy Mountain*, where Pippin revisited the “Peaceable Kingdom” theme; his landscapes, especially scenes of his native West Chester; and for his renderings of black life, both the common folk as in *Domino Players* and *Saying Prayers*, and the famous as with his two portraits of Marian Anderson.

Pippin's work can surely be seen as part of a larger Depression-era concern with American history and American regionalism. Just before Abstract Expressionism exploded onto the art scene, New Deal muralists like John Steuart Curry, regionalist painters like Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton, and black painters like Jacob Lawrence turned their attention to historical and genre scenes. These thematic concerns are echoed as well in the writings of Carl Sandburg and Stephen Vincent Benet, and in the music of Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber, whose haunting lyricism seems almost like a soundtrack for many of the paintings of contemporary life in the 1930s.

What attracted the art world to Pippin in the late 1930s and early 1940s was his perceived purity, his “primitivism.” Pippin seemed to operate in a charming artistic vacuum. As Barnes wrote, Pippin's work “showed no evidence of borrowings from any old or modern artist. . . . [Pippin] had neither academic training nor contact with the work of other painters.”⁴ The designation “primitive” was a common one to describe painters like Edward Hicks and Grandma Moses who had no formal training, but it also carried inevitable pejorative baggage. “Primitive” painters might have been appreciated by the art world, but they could not be considered as seriously as sophisticated, trained artists.

In Pippin, the American art world had found its noble savage, uncorrupted by contact with the rest of the art world. He had, after all, been “discovered” in 1937 like some lost tribe stumbled upon by intrepid anthropologists. Dorothy Grafley of the *Philadelphia Record* wrote: “What many an artist spends years learning Pippin knows by instinct. . . . He holds pattern to simple essentials, yet

has a grasp of perspective that baffles academicians.” Even the NAACP’s *Crisis* called Pippin a “Modern Primitive” in a profile of the artist in 1946. Pippin himself believed his work to be a pure expression of his inner emotions, and, as he famously described it, his paintings came from his heart.⁵

To treat Pippin as a “primitive” in this way removed him from any context. Barnes, for example, compared Pippin’s work to prehistoric cave paintings and classed Pippin with “the group of natural, untaught painters to be found at all periods and in all nations. . . .”⁶ Tapping into timeless artistic intuitions and oblivious to the cultural forces around him, Pippin as “primitive” floated free of the particularities of his historical moment. Yet by contextualizing Pippin’s history paintings more thoroughly, as this essay proposes to do, we see how connected and engaged Pippin was to debates over the meaning of history taking place in American popular culture, and to the specificity of African-American politics in the 1930s and 1940s.

More recent evaluations of Pippin’s achievement have, oddly, ended in much the same place as those of the mid-century. This newer work, focusing on what Cornel West has called “Horace Pippin’s Challenge to Art Criticism,” has explored Pippin’s location between standard art historical categories: an untrained painter working in a world of professional artists; a representative painter working at the moment when abstraction came to the fore; a black painter working in and through a white art world.⁷ Having challenged and dismissed the category of “primitive” which had been the framework used to analyze Pippin since the 1930s, students of his work have begun to construct new ways of understanding his singular vision. No one will argue that Pippin is a major talent but “primitive” no longer suffices.

Ultimately, though this newer scholarship has only established Pippin’s place in the pantheon of twentieth-century American art. Making sweeping references to Emerson, for example, West writes splendidly about Pippin as an artist rooted in the American grain. Similarly, Richard Powell concludes an essay on Pippin’s history paintings by telling us that their major significance has been “to raise the art of history painting to a new level.” Pippin resides in Samella Lewis’s 1990 chronological and largely biographical survey of African-American art history as a “self-taught individualist” who didn’t participate in the Harlem Renaissance.⁸

Pippin has been transformed by the writings of recent scholars. He is no longer “primitive” or “naive” and has emerged instead as something of an isolated, transcendent genius. Yet, while this more recent writing about Pippin has given him an art historical legitimacy, it too remains as frustratingly disconnected as the earlier scholarship from the specificities of Pippin’s political and social context. Ironically, Pippin has become in this new consensus almost as ahistorical as he was for critics of Barnes’s generation.

Reading the text of Pippin’s history paintings within their context, however, reveals Pippin to be an artist committed not simply to a broadly conceived

Emersonian project of democratizing art, nor to recreating the conventions of history painting, but rather as a historian very much aware of the contemporary implications of looking backward. Taking part in a conversation going on in the popular culture over the meaning of the past, Pippin, like any skilled historian, manipulated history through his paintings to comment both on the particularities of the contemporary and to deliver universalizing messages about freedom and peace. Put simply, these history paintings stand by themselves as wonderful historical documents, illuminating the ways in which some Americans used history to make sense of the present.

By painting scenes from the life of Abraham Lincoln, Pippin honored the memory of the man seen as the progenitor of black freedom. Yet he did so at a moment when Lincoln's place in the African-American imagination was contested and shifting. Through Pippin's paintings Lincoln almost loses his historical specificity as he is transformed into a figure of near-Biblical stature, thereby joining the other biblical characters Pippin painted who spoke to both blacks and whites about justice and freedom. In treating John Brown, Pippin chose a figure who was seen increasingly as a demagogue in the white imagination. Depicting Brown sympathetically and giving him an almost divine significance, Pippin more directly challenged his primarily white viewers.

By choosing deliberately to focus on scenes from the lives of two white Americans to convey his lessons, Pippin demanded that his white audience take the lessons of their own history seriously. He reminded them that issues of peace, freedom and racial justice embodied in the lives of these two nineteenth-century white men were never more relevant than during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Looking at Lincoln: Pippin and The Lincoln Myth

At first glance Pippin's Lincoln series seems to confirm what Cornel West sees as his connection with an Emersonian tradition of celebrating the exceptional in the everyday. Three of the four paintings focus on intimate scenes of young Lincoln, not Lincoln as President, the commanding and public figure: Lincoln the boy, (*Abe Lincoln's First Book*), Lincoln helping his family, (*Abraham Lincoln and His Father Building Their Cabin on Pigeon Creek*) and Lincoln as a young man, (*Abe Lincoln, "The Good Samaritan"*). By choosing these scenes we see that "Pippin's link to Abraham Lincoln is . . . to Lincoln as the folk hero who is believed to have said that God must have loved common folk since he made so many of them."⁹ In these paintings, Pippin portrays Abe Lincoln as the most extraordinary of ordinary Americans.

At one level, the scenes themselves have their source in African-American tradition. Not ten years after Lincoln's assassination, members of the black community had raised enough money to commission sculptor Thomas Bell to do the *Emancipation Group*. Known also as the *Freedman's Memorial*, the large bronze work depicts a standing Lincoln, left arm raised over a kneeling, unshack-

led slave. It was unveiled in Washington in 1875 and became a popular stop for Northern tourists. For subsequent generations, Abraham Lincoln remained one of precious few white heroes for black Americans. Even though, by the time of Pippin's paintings, Lincoln had been dead for nearly eighty years, his memory had continued currency. For many African-Americans, Lincoln remained their Moses. Pippin's scenes from Lincoln's life honored that memory.

At the same time, by choosing these scenes, Pippin must be seen as participating in a dialogue with American popular culture more broadly. Publications about Lincoln, from the moment of his assassination, became a small industry; literally hundreds of titles appeared from the end of the Civil War through the First World War. The years between the two world wars, however, saw an intensification of the process that turned Lincoln into a mythic figure. The Lincoln Memorial received its dedication in 1922, for example, and with it the nation had a shrine where it could worship in the religion of Lincoln. That event seems to have triggered a renewed enthusiasm for Lincoln histories: between 1926 and 1933 an "unprecedented abundance of books about Lincoln" appeared.¹⁰ *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* won Robert Sherwood the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1939, and in 1942 Aaron Copland set the Gettysburg Address to music. His *Lincoln Portrait* had its premier in Cincinnati in May of that year. With his fingers always firmly on the pulse of American sentiments, Franklin Delano Roosevelt captured this enthusiasm for the "common man" in his 1933 inaugural address. Throughout this period Lincoln provided the historical backdrop for people, who like Pippin, celebrated America's ordinary folk.

More than any other single title, Carl Sandburg's two-volume biography *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* imagined Lincoln for Depression-era Americans. Published in 1926, the biography had been serialized a year earlier in the magazine *Pictorial Review*. Boosted by that serialization, but helped more by an endless fascination with the president from the prairie, Sandburg's two volumes sold 48,000 sets in its first year. Without question Sandburg's volumes constituted the most significant contribution to Lincoln myth-making in the twentieth century. For anyone interested in learning about Lincoln in the generation before the Second World War, Sandburg's work was the obvious place to begin.¹¹

In *The Prairie Years*, Sandburg did not engage in an antiquarian project intended to create an historically accurate portrait of Lincoln, though Sandburg did indeed immerse himself in archival research. Rather, Sandburg "blurred the line between verifiable and imagined truth" and infused Lincoln with the energy and vitality of his poetic prose.¹² The Lincoln that emerges from the pages of *The Prairie Years* comes from the author's literary imagination.

The historical reality created by Sandburg resonates with Pippin's own view about the realism of his paintings. When the painter Romare Bearden met Pippin once in New York, Bearden came away impressed with "how positive [Pippin] was that his paintings were completely realistic. . . . To him these images were not distortions but perfectly literal translations of the actual world."¹³ Both Sandburg

and Pippin used their art not to distort a sense of reality, but instead to heighten it.

Abraham Lincoln and His Father Building Their Cabin on Pigeon Creek (1934) was the first of the Lincoln studies.¹⁴ The painting shows an adolescent Lincoln working next to his father in front of the family's half-completed log cabin. They chop away at logs in the midst of stumps and fallen trees. The Lincoln family's move to Pigeon Creek was an important episode in Sandburg's book and was included at length in the *Pictorial Review* serialization. Describing the work of building a new homestead, Sandburg writes: "Tom chopped logs for a cabin forty yards away while Abe did the best he could helping Nancy and Sarah trim the branches off the logs. . . ."¹⁵ Pippin has collapsed this scene in his painting (though not much) so that we see father and son working; mother and sister are absent. Pippin's work is not an exact translation of Sandburg, but for his first attempt at history painting, Pippin stayed close to the scene as it appeared in *Pictorial Review*.

With *Abe Lincoln's First Book*, painted ten years later, Pippin makes reference to a stock image of Lincoln. Sandburg did much to reinforce the image of Lincoln as a voracious reader, a self-taught genius. Vignettes of Lincoln reading recur throughout the biography. The first installment of the *Pictorial Review* series included a half-page illustration of Lincoln reading by the dim light of a fire, with the quoted caption: "Abe was always reading, digging into books, stretched out before the fire. He kept on saying, 'The things I want to know are in books; my best friend is the man who'll git me a book I ain't read.'"¹⁶

In this painting, Pippin portrays Lincoln as a source of light in an otherwise dark world. Pippin began with a motif that had become a standard of the Lincoln myth, but he has turned this scene into a play of darkness and light. In this dark painting, we see a young Abe radiating more light in his attic bedroom than the tiny candle next to his bed. Half reclined among storage barrels and sacks, Lincoln reaches for his first book—probably the Bible, according to Sandburg. Certainly learning, as represented by the book, is a source of illumination in the darkness, but Pippin also hints that Lincoln himself is a source of such illumination. Pippin thus transforms Lincoln into a quasi-religious figure, learning from the Bible, already glowing with the incandescence of virtue and truth. In choosing this subject Pippin has also made a personal reference. Lincoln as autodidact surely appealed to Pippin the self-taught artist, and this sense of shared experience may explain why he was drawn to a scene of Lincoln the reader.

Pippin turned to the Bible more directly to produce *Abe Lincoln, The Good Samaritan* (1943). Here Pippin has painted a winter scene. Abe Lincoln, now a young man of imposing size, has walked through heavy snow from the right of the canvas and seems to be offering some kind of help to a small boy chopping away on a fallen tree with a hatchet.¹⁷ Pippin created in this anecdote a parallel with the Christian Biblical parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-37). In the Bible tale, a stranger stops to help a man beaten and left for dead by highway bandits, and the story serves to illustrate that true Christian love does not depend on



Figure 1: “Things I want to know are in books; my best friend is the man who’ll git me a book I ain’t read.” *Abe Lincoln’s First Book*, 1944. (The image appears here courtesy of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James L. Winokur.)

personal association. The Samaritan did not know the man he rescued, nor did he see him again. Lincoln of course would be remembered for helping not one individual but a whole race of despised people through emancipation. By looking earlier at his life, Pippin has invented a foreshadowing of Lincoln’s great act—a young man willing to sacrifice for others. In Pippin’s paintings the democratic genius from Illinois has been enlarged into a biblical hero from the prairie.

The final Lincoln painting, *Abe Lincoln, the Great Emancipator* (1942) participates even more deeply in popular Lincoln mythology. The action takes place in a Union army tent. Flanked by a somewhat bemused looking General Grant and by two armed guards, Lincoln, now president, lays his left hand on the shoulder of a kneeling sentry. In this painting, which has also been known by the title *Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, Pardons the Sentry*, Pippin is again drawn to the Christian humanity of Lincoln. He portrays the moment when Lincoln has saved the life of a man scheduled to die before a firing squad.

Unlike the other studies of Lincoln’s life, however, Pippin here has fixed on one of the best known and widely debated episodes in the Lincoln myth. During

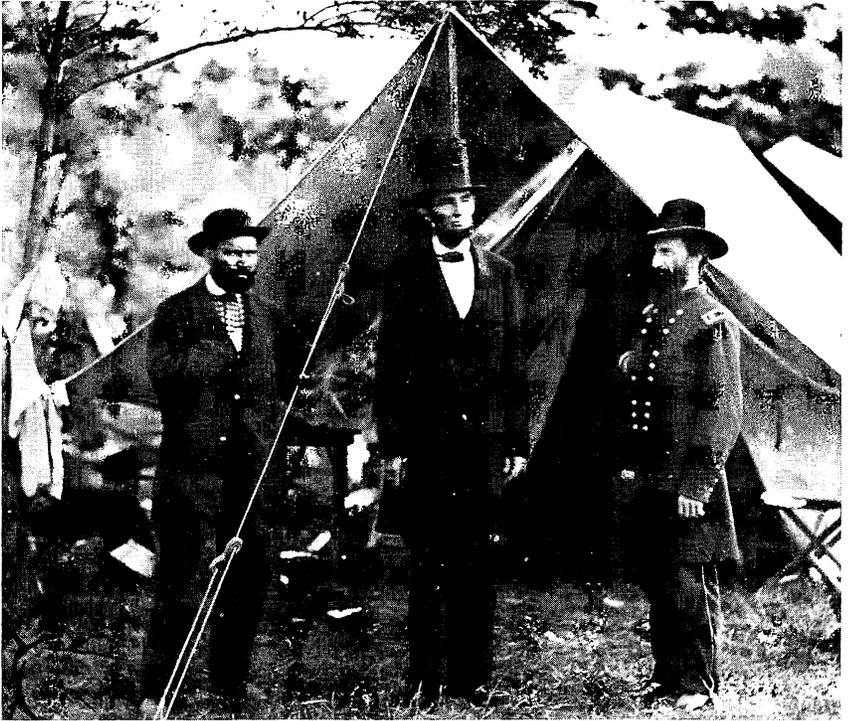


Figure 2: This Alexander Gardener photo was one of several reproduced in Carl Sandburg's *The War Years*, though it was originally mis-labeled as by Matthew Brady. (The photograph appears here courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

the war, Lincoln became a pest to the Union army, subverting its discipline by pardoning dozens of court-martialed soldiers. Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, the four-volume sequel to *The Prairie Years*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, is filled with specific incidents of Lincoln intervening to save soldiers from execution. Lincoln responded to the entreaties of parents and children, wives and sweethearts. Sandburg has Lincoln confide to a Congressman: "No one need ever expect me to sanction the shooting of a man for running away in battle. I won't do it. A man can't help being a coward any more than he could help being a humpback." With as many as 30,000 Union soldiers deserting during each year of the fighting, the issue of martial discipline was not trivial. Sandburg quotes General William Tecumseh Sherman in conversation with Chauncey Depew about the effect of Lincoln's pardons on army discipline. Depew asked Sherman, "How did you carry out the sentences of your court-martials and escape Lincoln's pardons?" Sherman responded, "I shot them first!"¹⁸



Figure 3: Whether Pippin read Sandburg or not, the compositional similarities between this painting and the Gardner photo are striking. *The Great Emancipator*, 1942. (The image appears here courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Helen Hawker Roelofs.)

Pippin may have drawn his inspiration for his painting from the stories told by Sandburg. Pippin has portrayed General Grant as chagrined at the prospect of his Commander-in-Chief pardoning this soldier. More tellingly, though, the first edition of *The War Years* included reproductions of two Alexander Gardner photographs of Lincoln standing in front of an army tent.¹⁹ Though the photographs are set outside, and Pippin's scene is set inside the tent, the composition of Pippin's canvas is remarkably reminiscent of the Gardner photographs.

Beyond drawing generally from Sandburg's *The War Years for Abe Lincoln*, *The Great Emancipator*, Pippin was additionally portraying a specific event which had become the subject of some controversy during the 1930s. The most famous occasion of Lincoln's interference with military justice came with the case of "The Sleeping Sentinel." According to this story, William Scott, a soldier from Vermont, fell asleep on sentry duty at a camp outside of Washington in 1861. He was tried for his infraction, convicted and sentenced to death only to be saved

by the President in the eleventh hour. Scott went on, fittingly, to die a hero's death in battle.

By January 1863, the episode had been immortalized in a poem by Francis De Haas Janvier, public readings of which enjoyed much popularity. The story was subsequently re-told in different publications throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sandburg devoted almost a page to the event in volume III of *The War Years*. In Sandburg's telling, Lincoln forgot Scott's case after having been told of it, and consequently, he raced down to Camp Lyon to pardon Scott in person. "The President arrived at the tent," says Sandburg, "where Scott was under guard, went inside. 'My boy,' he said to Scott, 'stand up here and look me in the face. . . . My boy, you are not going to be shot tomorrow.'"²⁰ This narrative, along with Gardner's photographs reproduced in *The War Years*, seems to provide the raw material for Pippin's painting.

"The Sleeping Sentinel" story had re-emerged in the popular imagination as Pippin embarked on his career as a painter. Having been the subject of some historical dispute, the Scott case received monographic attention in 1927 from Allen Clark, who published *Abraham Lincoln: The Merciful President* in that year. Two years later, that book found a radio audience when it served as the basis of a radio drama which premiered on Lincoln's birthday. The culmination of Scott's revival came in 1936 with the publication of yet another historical examination of the story, this time by Waldo Glover in his *Abraham Lincoln and the Sleeping Sentinel*.²¹ Pippin may have drawn specifically from Sandburg, but the story itself enjoyed a wide circulation at the moment Pippin began to paint.

In painting "The Great Emancipator," Pippin took up the theme which made Lincoln central in African-American memory, but he has treated it in a complex way. Rather than show us the Great Emancipator reading the Proclamation, or in some other symbolic and public act of liberation, Pippin depicts the President freeing a white man in the small space of an army tent. In a final referential gesture, Pippin has arranged Lincoln and the soldier in virtually the same pose as the *Freedman's Memorial*. By starting with Lincoln in the role for which he was loved by black Americans, but by changing the race of the freed man, Pippin reminds us that emancipation was just as necessary for the future of white America as it was for African Americans. Pippin thus began with Sandburg and other versions of "The Sleeping Sentinel" in order to illustrate the lesson of Frederick Douglass. In his autobiographical *Narrative*, written nearly a century earlier, Douglass told his readers that freedom knows no race; freedom for black Americans means freedom for white Americans as well.²² This is the reminder Pippin gives his viewers with this painting.

Pippin, The New Deal, and a New Lincoln

In 1932, Robert Vann, editor of Pittsburgh's black newspaper the *Courier*, encouraged his readers to vote Democratic by imploring them: "My friends, go turn Lincoln's picture to the wall. That debt has been paid in full."²³

Vann's instruction to black voters was symptomatic of a shift taking place in the political meaning of Lincoln's memory. Politically, love of Lincoln among African Americans had contributed for nearly seventy years to Republican majorities in black wards. Through the election of 1932 black voters were among the most stalwart supporter of the GOP. According to historian Nancy Weiss, in Chicago Herbert Hoover won 71.4 percent of the black vote in 1928; in Cleveland Hoover won 71.7 percent. In Philadelphia, Pippin's own backyard, Hoover won over 82 percent of the black vote. Even as the Great Depression assured Hoover's defeat in the election of 1932, he continued to garner roughly three-quarters of the black vote in these cities. By the landslide election of 1936, those figures had almost exactly reversed. Franklin Delano Roosevelt won 61 percent of the vote nationally, but he won 81 percent of the vote in Harlem.

During the 1936 campaign, Republican candidate Alf Landon, like his Republican predecessors, appealed to black voters by drawing on their sense of historical obligation. He reminded black voters: "The history of the Republican party and that of our colored citizens are so interwoven that it is impossible to think of freedom and the remarkable progress of colored Americans without recalling the origin of our party." By 1936, however, appeals to history—reminders that the Republican Party had given black Americans the 13th and 14th amendments—no longer persuaded as economic calamity hurt blacks even more than whites. The New Deal may not have provided much relief for suffering African Americans, but it did provide more than Hoover and the Republican party had.²⁴

Certainly Lincoln occupied a special place in the political memory of African Americans. Romare Bearden, writing about Pippin's work, explained that "Lincoln and John Brown were as much a part of the actuality of the Afro-American experience, as were the domino games and the hoe cakes for Sunday morning breakfast."²⁵ Richard Powell also links Pippin's history paintings with "a collective, loosely consolidated historicizing movement within the black community," in the 1930s and 1940s. Powell notes that this period witnessed a "flurry of historical enterprises,"²⁶ among which Pippin's paintings are surely to be included. While narrative painting of the kind Pippin did had not yet been overwhelmed by the tides of abstraction and expressionism, history painting had and continues to have a special importance for black artists. Jacob Lawrence recalled that the inspiration for his own history paintings came from afterschool history clubs and classes on black history at the YMCA.²⁷ Painted in the 1930s and 1940s, Pippin's seven history paintings should be seen as part of a tradition which would be carried on most importantly by Lawrence.

Yet Pippin's Lincoln series coincided not only with a renewed interest in the history and memory of the sixteenth president, but also with a very real political realignment among black voters, which served as well to shift Lincoln's position in the African-American imagination. With his Lincoln paintings Pippin chose precisely not to turn Lincoln's portrait to the wall, but instead to create new images which preserved Lincoln's memory in a new political context.

Black political leaders who hoped to change the allegiance of black voters understood that Lincoln's memory continued to exert a powerful partisan pull. Consequently, many black leaders engaged in a concerted effort to separate the memory of Lincoln from the contemporary political situation. The National Colored Committee, an officially independent and nonpartisan black political group, announced that its goal in 1936 was to convince black voters to "stop voting for Lincoln and vote for Roosevelt instead." A newspaper column declared that FDR was "the best friend the Negro American has had in the White House since Abraham Lincoln." The *Afro-American* put it more succinctly by sarcastically pointing out to its readers: "Abraham Lincoln is not a candidate in the presidential campaign."

The effort to change the voting patterns of the black electorate produced a rally heavy with symbolism in Madison Square Garden. Sponsored by the National Colored Committee, the event took place on September 21 and drew an estimated 16,000 participants. Those at the Garden heard from prominent Democrats, including New York Senator Robert Wagner, who used the rally to draw an analogy between Lincoln and Roosevelt. Speakers promised that the New Deal would bring a second emancipation, and they urged the audience to "carry forward the real spirit of Abraham Lincoln by supporting the social and economic programs of our great president Franklin Delano Roosevelt." The rally concluded with the unveiling of a colossal painting of the "second emancipation." Franklin Roosevelt stood before the audience, twenty feet tall, with his hands outstretched in benediction over a group of kneeling blacks. Above FDR's shoulder hovered the spirit of Abraham Lincoln.²⁸ At this rally, and throughout the campaign of 1936, black writers and political leaders stripped Lincoln of any Republican connections and transferred the mantle of his memory to the Democratic Roosevelt.

Lincoln became an even more politically potent symbol for African Americans in 1939 when the Lincoln Memorial provided the backdrop for an Easter concert by Marian Anderson. Denied use of Constitution Hall, Anderson performed from the steps of the Memorial; Eleanor Roosevelt helped arrange the new site. It was an event which, perhaps more than any other, inaugurated the modern civil rights movement. As Scott Sandage has written: "In one bold stroke, the Easter concert swept away the shrine's official dedication to the 'savior of the union' and made it a stronghold of racial justice."²⁹ Pippin was certainly aware of the significance of Anderson's achievement, and he painted her portrait twice in the years after the Lincoln Memorial performance.

At one level then, Pippin participated in a national process of Lincoln myth-making going on throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Drawing from Sandburg and others, Pippin used his paintings to celebrate the virtuous life of Lincoln and the genius of the ordinary. At another level, however, these paintings should be seen in the more specific context of black politics in the 1930s and 1940s. These paintings provide insight into what Sandage has called the "dynamic and complex

relationship between African-Americans and Lincoln's memory. . .," a relationship, Sandage points out, that historians have largely ignored.³⁰ Pippin's Lincoln still belongs to African-American memory, but not any longer as the representative of the Republican party. The scenes Pippin painted avoided any partisan reference, and through them Pippin has emancipated Lincoln's memory from any attachment to the floundering Republican Party. These history paintings finally serve to remove Lincoln from the specificity of large historical events. Focusing on the small and the private, Pippin has connected Lincoln to the Bible and to the ideals of freedom and created a more universal figure, accessible to ordinary Americans.

John Brown and American Memory

Pippin's other three history paintings depict scenes from the life of John Brown. Compositionally, they are even stronger, more striking works than the Lincoln series. Pippin, by painting three scenes from John Brown, paid homage to a more specifically African-American heritage than he did with his paintings from the life of Lincoln. Indeed, by choosing John Brown as his subject in 1942, Pippin issued a challenge to his primarily white viewers to confront the meaning of John Brown. Mid-century white Americans now remembered John Brown with ambivalence, but Pippin devoted some of his most powerful painting to pay tribute to him.

At least as much as Abraham Lincoln, John Brown occupied a special place in African-American memory. Romare Bearden "vividly" recalled "the yearly commemorations for John Brown" and he remembered "my grandfather reading Brown's last speech to the court which was a regular part of the ceremony at Pittsburgh's Shiloh Baptist Church."³¹ A generation after Pippin painted his three John Brown canvases, H. Rap Brown, head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), explained: "John Brown was the only white man I could respect and he is dead."³² Rap Brown's assessment of John Brown in 1967 underscores that Brown left a more complicated legacy than Lincoln. If Lincoln's image, when Pippin turned to it, was at the peak of its popularity, then John Brown's place in the popular imagination was more problematic.

In 1910, the battle field at Osawatimie, Kansas, the place where Brown made a heroic stand against pro-slavery forces, was dedicated as an historic site. Former president Theodore Roosevelt addressed the gathered crowd, and later that year he expanded his speech into an article for *Outlook* magazine. In the article, Roosevelt wrote that "John Brown stands to us now as representing the men and the generation who rendered the greatest service ever rendered this country." But having bestowed this honor on John Brown, Roosevelt went on to concede that "if the friends of freedom and union had surrendered themselves to his leadership, the cause of freedom and union would have been lost." Abraham Lincoln and John Brown represented two sides of the moral debate over how to resolve the

issue of slavery, and Roosevelt declared Lincoln the winner: “in meeting the problems of to-day, let us profit by, and welcome and co-operate with the John Browns; but let us also remember that the problems can really be solved only if we approach them in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln.”³³

In the same year that Roosevelt mused over the lessons of Brown and Lincoln, Oswald Garrison Villard published a reexamination of John Brown. Written by the grandson of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, *John Brown, 1800-1859: A Biography Fifty Years After* facilitated the re-evaluation of John Brown’s legacy and his place in white American mythology. The book received a lengthy review from the senior American literary critic William Dean Howells in the sober *North American Review*. Howells, of course, could remember the events of Harper’s Ferry, and John Brown had been a hero for Howells in his youth. Now, late in his life, Howells used the review as an excuse for a personal meditation on John Brown’s legacy.

Villard’s book, Howells confesses, forces readers “to question our unqualified reverence and affection [for Brown], and allow that if he was greatly sinned against he also greatly sinned.” By the end of his review, Brown remains a hero for Howells, not primarily because of his convictions but rather because he was willing to die for them. It is Brown’s martyrdom, rather than his bold actions, that remain exemplary for Howells. “John Brown was ready all his life to die for freedom,” Howells concludes, “the great pity and the great sin was that he was ready to make others die for it.” Villard’s biography, Howells tells his readers, “makes us realize his error while we realize the sublimity of his death and own him, if no saint, always a hero and martyr.”³⁴

If Howells became equivocal about John Brown, then Henry Watterson, who also reviewed the Villard biography in the same issue of *North American Review*, was not. Calling Brown “An Abortive Hero,” Watterson scarcely contains his rage that the book should deal at all kindly with Brown. “I confess,” Watterson writes, “that I am unable to divine what ethical teaching and enduring lessons are to be deduced from rapine and murder. . . .” Watterson also used his review to attack Roosevelt for his remarks at Osawatomie. Watterson accuses both the biographer and the president of “taking much for granted and seeing through a glass darkly.” Villard and Roosevelt, in Watterson’s opinion, had made a hero of a “robber and a murderer, for whose deeds of blood and terror insanity is the only defense that can be reasonably set up.” Watterson even insinuated that, beyond his unconscionable deeds, John Brown’s cause might not have been a just one. “The institution of African Slavery,” he suggests to his readers, “however illogical and indefensible, was woven into the national fabric . . . and held and protected there by the Constitution and the laws of the land. As to the blacks, slavery was not an unmitigated evil.”³⁵

Americans curious about John Brown’s life could read several biographies in circulation in the first half of the twentieth century. Villard was followed in 1918 by Hill Peebles Wilson’s work and by Robert Penn Warren’s *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* in 1929. It was also in that year the Stephen Vincent

Benet won a Pulitzer Prize for his lengthy and phenomenally successful poem "John Brown's Body."³⁶ The eight-book poem, however, recounts Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry only in the first book, and for this Benet relied almost exclusively on Villard's biography. In the remaining seven books, Benet presents a scrupulously balanced Civil War tale which succeeded with the public in large part because it offended neither Northerners nor Southerners. Even so partisan a critic as Allen Tate could approve of Benet's poem.³⁷

In 1934 David Karsner published another biography, though *John Brown: Terrible 'Saint'* largely re-hashed what had already been printed.³⁸ While these three books might not have contributed anything factually new to the discussion of John Brown, they did further the process of historical re-evaluation. In each book, John Brown emerges more villainous and less and less heroic. Writing about this white liberator of black slaves in the politically repressive and toxically racist 1920s, Leland Jenks concludes that Brown was not really a hero at all. Jenks bitterly told his readers: "Like many other Americans of mediocre talent Brown has come to enjoy a posthumous fame that is grossly disproportionate to his actual acts, and often at variance with them." Sourly, Jenks notes that thousands sang "And his soul goes marching on," but he insists, "it was not the soul of any John Brown that really lived."³⁹ The culmination of this historical revision came with James Malin's *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six*.⁴⁰ A broad attack on all Northern abolitionists, including Emerson, Thoreau, and Parker, Malin saves particular venom for John Brown. The book appeared in 1942, the very year Pippin painted his three John Brown scenes. John Brown committed treason, and while many Americans might acknowledge that had been in a good cause, they could no longer countenance Brown's act of rebellion.⁴¹

The John Brown story had several times received artistic treatment before Pippin took it on. Most notably, perhaps, Thomas Hovenden, an academic painter who would achieve national celebrity with his *Breaking Home Ties* exhibited at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, painted John Brown kissing a black baby as he was led away to his execution. Completed in 1884, *Last Moments of John Brown* treats sentimentally an episode which took place during the lifetime of many of its viewers. In a later generation, John Steuart Curry depicted a wild and heroic John Brown in a mural done on the wall of the Kansas State House between 1937-42. In *The Tragic Prelude*, Brown looks like Moses with a rifle, about to lead his people to freedom. But the title of mural hints again at the ambiguity with which many white Americans viewed John Brown's legacy by the 1930s.

John Brown's path through the memory of white America roughly parallels that of the Civil War itself. He stood defiantly and uncompromisingly for black freedom, and memories of him became more and more out of place in a society content to reduce black Americans to second-class citizenship and to let the grandsons of the slaveholders Brown so despised dictate race relations. Brown's shirt had been, quite literally, the first bloody one of the Civil War, but most white Americans no longer wanted to wave it.

It comes as no surprise that John Brown fared differently in black memory. While Villard's biography became the standard work on Brown, it was preceded a year earlier by W. E. B. Du Bois's *John Brown*. Fittingly, it was published in 1909, the same year Du Bois helped to found the NAACP, and the fiftieth anniversary of Brown's execution. Written as "a record of and a tribute to the man who of all Americans has perhaps come nearest to touching the real souls of black folk," Du Bois's celebration of John Brown, like so much else he wrote, was largely ignored by white readers.⁴²

While Brown's stock fell for white Americans in the first half of the twentieth century, for black Americans, John Brown remained a hero. Indeed, the distinguished black historian Benjamin Quarles has argued that Brown's image in the mind of black Americans changed almost not at all between 1859 and the present. In editing a volume of black writing about John Brown, Quarles found that "blacks were as one in their general appraisal of Brown;" he justified his anthology by stating that "history is continuity no less than change."⁴³

White and black opinion of John Brown passed each other symbolically in 1932. In May of that year, a delegation from the NAACP convention being held in Washington traveled to Harper's Ferry to present Storer College with a bust of the town's most famous sojourner. Fifty years earlier Storer had invited Frederick Douglass to give a speech about Brown. In 1932, however, and apparently at the urging of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the college refused the gift as being too controversial.⁴⁴ When Rap Brown invoked John Brown within the context of a radical black power movement, he did not so much resurrect the abolitionist as remind white Americans of the place John Brown continued to hold in many black imaginations.

It was into this contest over the meaning of John Brown that Pippin submitted his paintings. Without the same kind of popular consensus that surrounded Abraham Lincoln in the 1920s and 1930s, the sources for Pippin's John Brown images remain more obscure. Brown continues to be known as the pre-eminent man of action. In the face of what he regarded as cowardly capitulation to the "Slave Power," Brown took the business of stopping slavery into his own gnarled hands. Yet, in Pippin's paintings we are presented with a passive John Brown. In *John Brown Reading His Bible*, Brown occupies the center of the composition, seated at a simple table. Similarly, in *The Trial of John Brown*, the wounded crusader is literally lying on the floor of the courtroom; in *John Brown Going to His Hanging*, we see John Brown tied up, unable to move. In these three paintings, Pippin has deliberately avoided depicting either his actions in Kansas or his raid on Harper's Ferry, choosing instead to show us a more intimate and vulnerable John Brown.

Depicting these quiet scenes from John Brown's life Pippin is less interested in chronicling the historical events that made Brown heroic or infamous. As he did with the Lincoln paintings Pippin has magnified the lessons of John Brown by separating them from his actions. Like the other black Americans Quarles discusses, Pippin has "divorced his actions from his motives, preferring to dwell



Figure 4: By the time Pippin painted this, John Brown had different meanings for white and black Americans. Pippin forces us to confront the woman in the lower right, who asks, “which side are you on?” *John Brown Going To His Hanging, 1942.* (The image appears here courtesy of the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. John Lambert Fund.)

upon the latter.” Speaking at Storer College in 1881, Frederick Douglass told his audience: “To the outward eye of men, John Brown was a criminal, but to their inward eye he was a just man and true.”⁴⁵ This is the John Brown presented to us in Pippin’s paintings, a man of motives, rather than actions; a just man to the “inward eye,” rather than the criminal.

We see this “inward” conception of John Brown most forcefully in *John Brown Reading His Bible*. In this composition John Brown sits behind a rough wooden table, alone in a sparse and rugged log cabin. Brown’s enthusiasm for scripture was a central part of his legend, and Pippin has put the Bible, the source of Christian morality, literally front and center in this painting. The visual focus of this painting, however, is the grimly determined face of a young John Brown (he has not yet grown his signature beard). His face and his white shirt seem to give off considerably more light than the timid candle placed near Brown’s right hand on the table. The scene takes place at night. Looking through the window

in the left background we see it is pitch black outside. The half-drawn checked curtain, however, is quite bright. In Pippin's treatment Brown, like Lincoln reading in the attic, generates his own light, an interior moral light. Resolutely studying the lessons of the Bible, which would later guide his actions in Kansas and at Harper's Ferry, Brown virtually burns with the flame of his own righteousness.

The Trial of John Brown, sequentially the next canvas in the series, is a curious painting. Brown lies wounded on the floor of a Virginia courtroom. He will make his famous speech condemning the sins of this guilty nation in this room, but Pippin shows us Brown on trial. Darkened now by a blanket thrown over him, his light thus put out, he lies at the feet of twelve jurors who listen to a prosecutor plead the Commonwealth's case. Were it not for his wound, the tiny Bible opened next to him, and his carpet bag, we would scarcely be able to tell which figure was meant to be John Brown. Pippin has painted all fourteen men in this composition with virtually identical faces, creating a visual pun on the phrase "jury of one's peers." Perhaps Pippin intended this visual similarity as a reminder that John Brown was indeed convicted by his peers, and that through this condemnation, white America executed a genuine moral force. Or again, perhaps Pippin suggests that John Brown was not that different from other Americans, except that for whatever reason Brown acted upon what was best in the biblical and in the American traditions.

John Brown Going to His Hanging shows us the prisoner at the end of his life being led to the gallows on a cart drawn by two white horses. The action is set outdoors and the two bare oak trees which frame Brown remind us that this is a winter scene, a time of death. The most extraordinary part of this composition, however, is the foreground. There a crowd has gathered to watch Brown's execution. Yet, in order to watch Brown, they have turned their backs on us. Pippin has forced the viewer to become one of the crowd that cheered Brown's death. He has thus forced the viewer to choose sides. Are we simply observers of this event like the rest of the assembled crowd? Or would we have objected? Pippin heightens the immediacy of this choosing by including the small black figure in the lower right hand corner. According to family legend, Pippin's grandmother had been present in Harper's Ferry for Brown's execution. She is the sole black figure in any of the history paintings and by including her, Pippin has drawn a personal connection between himself and the event. Unlike the other figures, however, she faces the viewer squarely, and with a scowl on her face she rebukes us for the action in the painting.

Conclusion: Pippin the Historian, Pippin the Teacher

The recently concluded retrospective of Pippin's work entitled "I Tell My Heart," made it possible for viewers to see six of the seven history paintings together. This pairing of the John Brown series and the Lincoln series underscored that these paintings should be viewed in both the context of contemporary

American politics and the debates over historical myth-making. There is, finally, an international context into which we should place Horace Pippin's history paintings as well.

World War I loomed as the pivotal event in Pippin's life. A wound left his right arm semi-mobile, but the Great War ultimately "brought out all the art" in him.⁴⁶ Pippin recorded his recollections of the First World War in several striking paintings. World War I also helped make Lincoln a symbol of international importance. According to Merrill Peterson, "The identification of American ideals with the Allied cause in the First World War gave a new dimension to Lincoln's fame."⁴⁷ This symbolic connection continued through the 1930s. American volunteers who fought the fascists in Spain did so as part of the "Lincoln Battalion."

Significantly, Pippin chose not to paint war scenes from the Civil War. According to Pippin's first biographer Seldon Rodman, "There was no need to paint the war itself. He had done that. All wars are alike."⁴⁸ Nor did Pippin focus on the violent events in the John Brown story. Instead his paintings identify both Lincoln and Brown with the struggle for freedom. In the case of Lincoln, this meant highlighting and amplifying themes already current in the popular culture. Portraying John Brown this way meant drawing from the well of African-American memory, and challenging white viewers more directly. Both these historical figures then, became a way for Pippin to tie together his experiences as a veteran of the Great War with his heritage as an African American.

If World War I functioned as the backdrop for Pippin's artistic exploration, then it would be no coincidence that Pippin painted six of his seven historical scenes while the United States was again engaged in war. Returning to Lincoln and Brown as his country participated in a titanic struggle against world fascism, Pippin insisted that these two figures did not belong simply to a popular American mythology, or even exclusively to the memory of African Americans, but rather, that they stood with those around the world who fought against tyranny. Painting during the war, Pippin infused these paintings with the spirit of gentle West Chester Quakerism, whose meeting houses Pippin also lovingly portrayed.

Viewed in this way, Pippin the historian is also Pippin the teacher. He was certainly not the only African-American painter during these years to paint scenes from history. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that the American tradition of history painting was best kept alive in the mid-twentieth century by black painters. But Pippin turned to history for different reasons and with different purposes than did painters like William Johnson or Jacob Lawrence. Both Johnson and Lawrence brought Modernism to the task of history painting and both were more self-consciously connected to the vanguard of the art world. Johnson, in fact, spent much of his life in Europe and counted among his major influences Soutine and Munch. Both also used history painting as a way to create and assert an African-American identity within the world of contemporary art. As Lawrence described his own fascination with history: "I guess it was part of my search for an image."⁴⁹

Lawrence's great series paintings use a Modernist vocabulary to make a record of black history. His work demands that subject material drawn from the African-American experience be taken seriously within the context of Western art history. Lawrence's Modernist canvases of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass both legitimate Lawrence's position in the world of contemporary art and announce that these subjects are worthy of artistic treatment.

Pippin's purposes were more didactic. Less interested in Modernist experiments with form, Pippin did not paint these historical scenes to be almost defiant records of the African-American experience. Rather, he painted them so that his viewers could draw lessons from them—lessons about justice, freedom, and humanity. For Pippin to honor historical memory was to learn from it.

Notes

The author must thank Sylvia Yount of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Tom Sugrue at the University of Pennsylvania, the History Department Colloquium at The Ohio State University, Angela Brintlinger and especially Lisa Florman of The Ohio State University for help above and beyond, and, finally, Abby Letcher, who loved these paintings first.

1. William Dean Howells, "John Brown After Fifty Years," *North American Review* 193 (January, 1911), 26.
2. *New York Times*, July 7, 1946; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 7, 1946.
3. *Horace Pippin Exhibition*, Carlen Galleries, Philadelphia, 1940. This bold assessment was repeated in a small article reviewing the show in *Time* (the *Time* writer, as if to underscore the legitimacy of Barnes's opinion, noted: "Dr. Barnes is brusque, but no booby"). *Time*, January 29, 1940, 56.
4. Barnes quoted in *New York Times*, July 7, 1946.
5. Dorothy Grafley, quoted in *Current Biography* 1945, 471; Joseph Woods, "Modern Primitive: Horace Pippin," *The Crisis* June, 1946; Pippin quoted in Judith Stein, "An American Original," in *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, ed. Judith Stein, Philadelphia, 1993, 2.
6. Barnes quoted in *New York Times*, July 7, 1946.
7. The recently concluded retrospective of Pippin's work, "I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin," borrowed Pippin's famous self-description and was the most exhaustively researched and most extensive presentation of the artist's work. It was thus the first chance to reassess his career since his last retrospective in 1977. West's essay appears in the exhibition catalogue *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, ed. by Judith Stein, Philadelphia, 1993.
8. Richard Powell, "Re-Creating American History," *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, 79. (See Samella Lewis, *African American Art and Artists* (Berkeley, 1990).)
9. Cornel West, "Horace Pippin's Challenge to Art Criticism," *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*.
10. Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (Oxford, 1994), 285.
11. Richard Powell has suggested that Pippin might have relied on the 1939 film *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Sandburg's biography provided much of the fodder for the film starring Raymond Massey. Powell has also suggested that when looking at Pippin's paintings "one is reminded" of this film. Most of the film's action, however, takes place during a later period in Lincoln's life than Pippin has portrayed, and black reaction to the film seems to have been different from white. When the film opened in Washington D. C. it was picketed by some of the city's black residents. My own feeling is that Pippin may have drawn from the movie in a generic sense, but that Sandburg is a more important source. See Powell,

"Re-Creating American History," 76, and Scott Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963," *Journal of American History*, 80 (June, 1993).

12. *Ibid.*, 276.
13. Romare Bearden, "Introductory Essay" in *Horace Pippin* catalogue, (Washington, 1976).
14. This painting was not included in the "I Tell My Heart" exhibition; it resides at the Barnes Foundation.
15. Carl Sandburg, "The Unfathomed Lincoln," *Pictorial Review* (October, 1925), 89.
16. *Ibid.*, 7.
17. According to Sandburg, the winter of 1830-31, when Lincoln would be about 20, was particularly hard on the prairie. "For forty-eight hours," Sandburg describes, "the battalions of a blizzard filled the sky, and piled a cover two and a half feet deep on the ground." The harsh weather created a crisis for settlers: "Connections between houses, settlements, grain mills, broke down; for days families were cut off, living on parched corn; some died of cold, lacking wood to burn; some died of hunger lacking corn." In the midst of this, Sandburg writes, "young Lincoln made a try at wading through to the Warnick house four miles off, nearly froze his feet, and was laid up at home." See Sandburg, "The Unfathomed Lincoln," *Pictorial Review* (November, 1925), 74. Also *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* I, 107.
18. Quoted in Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (New York, 1939), III, 521.
19. *Ibid.*, I, opposite 292, 293.
20. *Ibid.*, III, 529.
21. For this discussion I have relied on Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 243-44.
22. At several points in the *Narrative* Douglass portrays slavery as a poison toxic to both slaves and masters. In Chapter VII, for example, in describing Master Hugh's wife, Douglass writes: "My mistress was. . . a kind and tender-hearted woman;. . . Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me." See *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* ed. by Henry Louis Gates in *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York, 1987), 277.
23. Quoted in William Leuchtenburg, *FDR and the New Deal* (New York, 1963), 187.
24. Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, 1983), 30-31, 196.
25. Bearden, *Horace Pippin* catalogue.
26. Powell, "Re-Creating American History," 71.
27. Quoted in Lewis, *African American Art and Artists*, 129.
28. For this discussion of black politics in the 1930s, I have relied on Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR*, especially 193-95.
29. Scott Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, The Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963," 146-47.
30. *Ibid.*, 138.
31. Bearden, Introductory Essay to *Horace Pippin* catalogue.
32. Quoted in James T. Patterson, *America in the Twentieth Century* (3rd ed., New York, 1989), 410.
33. Quoted in *A John Brown Reader*, ed. by Louis Ruchames, (London, 1959), 353.
34. William Dean Howells, "John Brown After Fifty Years," *North American Review*, 193 (January, 1911), 34.
35. Henry Watterson, "An Abortive Hero," *North American Review*, 193 (January, 1911), 35-46.
36. Hill Peebles Wilson, *John Brown, Soldier of Fortune, A Critique* (Boston, 1918), and Robert Penn Warren, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr* (New York, 1929); Stephen Vincent Benet, *John Brown's Body* (Garden City, NY, 1928).
37. Charles Fenton, *Stephen Vincent Benet: The Life and Times of an American Man of Letters* (New Haven, 1958), 180-230.
38. David Kersner, *John Brown: Terrible 'Saint'* (New York, 1934).
39. Leland Jenks, "The John Brown Myth," *American Mercury*, I (March, 1924), 267-73.
40. James Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia, 1942).
41. After the First World War, a few eccentric whites might still defend John Brown, as Clarence Darrow did when he announced in a speech: "John Brown was right; he was an instrument in the hands of a higher power," but more and more attitudes like Watterson set the tone for discussions of John Brown. Carl Sandburg's volumes on Lincoln treat Brown ambivalently. Sandburg quotes him liberally in the few pages devoted to Harper's Ferry, and in so doing he gives some sense of the evangelical passion Brown brought to his personal

mission of ending slavery. But Sandburg has a harder time portraying Brown as a character: "The solving of John Brown as a personality was not easy. . . . 'Crazy' was the word for Brown said many." Like Roosevelt some years earlier, Sandburg gives the last word on Harper's Ferry to Lincoln. At the end of the chapter describing the raid, Sandburg quotes Lincoln. Brown was a traitor, Lincoln tells a crowd of southern sympathizers in Troy, Kansas. "He has just been hanged for treason against the state of Virginia," Lincoln announces, and then adds as a warning: "Now if you undertake to destroy the Union contrary to law, if you commit treason against the United States, our duty will be to deal with you as John Brown has been dealt with. We shall try to do our duty." Darrow cited in *A John Brown Reader* ed. Ruchames, 392-93. See also Carl Sandburg, *The Prairie Years*, II, 188-194.

42. W. E. B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia, 1909).

43. Benjamin Quarles, *Blacks on John Brown* (Urbana, 1972), xiv-xv.

44. *Ibid.*, 106.

45. *Ibid.*, xiv.

46. Quoted in Judith Stein, "An American Original," in *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, 3.

47. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 195.

48. Seldon Rodman, *Horace Pippin: A Negro Painter in America* (New York, 1947), 18.

49. Quoted in Lewis, *African American Art and Artists*, 88-95, 129.