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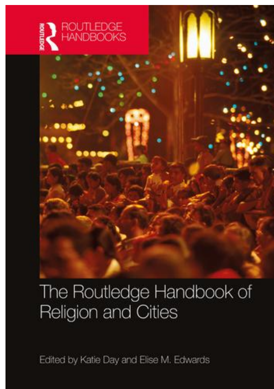

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Katie Day, Elise M. Edwards

Religious space in public art

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RELIGIOUS SPACE IN PUBLIC ART
The New Negro and the New Deal in Harlem

Michael McLaughlin

Introduction

In 1934, in the depths of the Great Depression, Aaron Douglas, a muralist living and working in Harlem, landed a government contract to paint a series of public murals for the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.[1] Titling the resulting series *Aspects of Negro Life*, Douglas told a story of how the forces of modernity transformed black Americans into a new subjectivity, and how black people's movement into new spaces subsequently transformed those spaces. This confluence is most apparent in his final panel where he depicts a black man standing on a giant, industrial cog, with his arms raised and a saxophone clutched in one hand. This central figure stands delicately balanced in the act of crossing from the darkness and death of the rural South into the light and life of the industrial, northern city. The saxophone player looks elatedly forward to where the Statue of Liberty stands, framed by a towering wall of skyscrapers, and the defining symbol of industrial progress: belching smokestacks. The painting is overlaid by Douglas's signature aesthetic: concentric circles, which in this case emanate from and draw the viewer's attention to the juxtaposition of the black man's saxophone and the Statue of Liberty. Douglas invites the viewer to contemplate this juxtaposition: what spaces are created and illuminated by the interactions of black artistic traditions and federal social policies? How is this confluence made possible by the technological, philosophical, and aesthetic innovations of modernity and its embrace of the new as a means to systematically comprehend all times and spaces? How, in turn, are the legacies of state social programs and black religious heritage intertwined?

This chapter takes up these questions raised by Douglas, and considers how federally sponsored public art produced by black artists of Depression-Era New York imbues Harlem with religious significance. It does so by considering the history of one particular public mural series, Vertis Hayes's *Pursuit of Happiness* (1937), painted in conversation with the imagery and ideals of Douglas's *Aspects of Negro Life*. Like Douglas's work, Hayes's *Pursuit of Happiness* also presents an exodus narrative and suggests that African religious traditions live on in the lives of modern black Americans. More importantly, *Pursuit of Happiness* shows how public art shapes the ways in which people narrate their daily experiences. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's work, I argue the mural series transforms the urban space of Harlem into a place suffused with religious narratives by impacting how Harlem residents navigate their local space. Through altering the ways

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in which passersby experience Harlem, the mural becomes a companion to those who see their own life story reflected in its panels, and provides accompaniment along the often "bitter and confusing journey" that is black life in Harlem.[2] As a religious object emphasizing narrative, historical transformation, and migration, *Pursuit of Happiness* suggests a dynamic location for Harlem within the religious cosmos of public art created by black artists.

The spatial transformations wrought by *Pursuit of Happiness* occur at the convergence of two major streams in early twentieth-century American society: the New Deal, which sought to preserve an American heritage threatened by the fallout from the Great Depression, and the New Negro movement (also known as the Harlem Renaissance),[3] which looked to the future as a way to (re)create an authentic black heritage. I examine these two movements before turning to an analysis of how they contributed to the production of public murals by black artists in Harlem. I then briefly consider Aaron Douglas's four-part mural series *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) as an exemplary work produced by this confluence, before turning to Hayes's *Pursuit of Happiness*, which responds directly to Douglas's mural series, and, through its eventual incorporation into the renovated facade of the Harlem Hospital, itself embodies the narrative of Douglas's series. I conclude by examining the religious qualities of *Pursuit of Happiness* and ultimately argue that this work of art demonstrates that religion in Harlem is located in a fluid, unbounded space.

The New Deal: Locating "the people" within the national cosmos

The massive array of state programs which constituted the Roosevelt administration's New Deal utilized modern thought, planning, and technology as tools to strengthen the United States governmentally and economically.[4] Although Roosevelt's initiatives for national recovery were largely about putting the country back to work, threaded throughout his recovery efforts were programs which sought to build a sense of national pride and belonging. The New Deal did not seek to construct a brave new world, but rather to renovate America by building modern infrastructures to connect citizens to the spiritual heart of the country, and help them properly re-imagine their personal place within the larger American cosmos. One of the most significant ways in which the New Deal molded citizens' visions of American spaces was through state sponsorship of art projects. New Deal art programs sought to transform public spaces into displays of art that reminded people of the value of America and the significance of their own role within the national cosmos. For example, several New Deal programs hired professional artists to adorn the interiors of post offices around the country. The resulting murals often depicted scenes from local history: white people "discovering" the local area, farmers harvesting local agricultural products, or a horseback rider bringing the mail. Because of these post office murals, mailing a package no longer meant merely visiting a public building and paying for a government service, but became an act of entering into a scene of local history and participating in a national narrative held together by the federal government.

The largest of the New Deal art programs was the Federal Art Project, a program within the larger Works Progress Administration. Holger Cahill, the director of the Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), imagined the project would "extend the educational reach of art through local galleries and art centers and magnificent murals adorning public spaces."[5] Cahill envisioned the WPA/FAP as a two-way process: bringing the people to art, and art to the people. By increasing the people's familiarity with art, the WPA/FAP saw itself fostering better citizens who were aware of artistic processes, and, more importantly, were influenced by artworks that reflected the program's vision of American citizenship: an industrious work ethic, an egalitarian attitude toward fellow citizens, and a romantic view of the American landscape. The WPA/FAP saw the

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rural regions of the country as the space of truest Americanism, and looked with profound suspicion upon art that seemed disconnected from everyday life (such as abstract art), often viewing such art as a tool of "fascism" and "communist agitators."[6] What the American people needed, argued the WPA/FAP, was a truly American art, one which resisted the trend toward fascist abstraction and instead reflected the realities of the authentic America.[7] Through New Deal art programs, the federal government sought to embellish public spaces with art that would instill in "the people" the values of proper citizenship and a correct understanding of the individual's place within American society.

The New Negro movement: Placing black Americans in a black history

The New Negro movement was a period of social, cultural, and artistic innovation within black America in the decades after World War I. During this time, millions of black Americans moved from the rural South to northern cities such as New York as part of the Great Migration. As they did so, they generated new ways of narrating black identity. New Negro artists embraced modernism as a way to celebrate the history and heritage of people of African descent while remaining optimistically focused upon the future of black people in the United States. Working in the modern, cosmopolitan city, New Negro artists argued the true beginnings of black heritage went back further than the American South, and that the spiritual narrative of black life began in Africa. This was, however, accompanied by a profound sense of cultural and spiritual loss. According to Melville Herskovits, the traits which made Harlem distinct from other cities were simply a "remnant from the peasant days in the South," yet "of the African culture, not a trace" was to be found.[8]

Yet not all was lost. Although Alain Locke, the "father" of the New Negro movement wrote that the "objectives of [the New Negro's] outer life are … none other than the ideals of American institutions and democracy," he also declared that the goals of black America's "inner life are yet in process of formation."[9] Artistically, as well as spiritually, Locke saw the New Negro movement as an opportunity to reclaim African heritage in a way which negated the oppression of white America. He asserted that "Art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid." To move forward, black Americans needed to reconnect with African art. Locke and his collaborators saw African art, not African American art, as the true artistic heritage of black Americans. They did not celebrate the "folk" artistic (or religious) heritage of the rural South, but sought to circumvent this imposed heritage by using modern modes of scientific analysis and artistic creativity to connect directly with the authentic, African sources of black life. By emerging out of the lowly South and standing proudly in the modern city, the New Negroes saw themselves opening new vistas for the black mind and spirit. Now black thinkers and artists could "scientifically" examine black history. Unlike white Americans who artistically depicted an already known history, New Negroes saw themselves as simultaneously discovering and creating a black American artistic heritage.[10]

The New Negro and the New Deal: A tensive synthesis

These two visions of modern life in America; one hearkening to a future reconnection with the African past, the other looking for an immediate celebration of the American past; one seeing modernity as a mode of artistic freedom, the other seeing art as a tool for modern, statecraft, intersected in various artistic projects throughout the 1930s. Two particular works produced in this tensive synthesis, Aaron Douglas's 1934 mural series *Aspects of Negro Life* and Vertis Hayes's 1937 mural series *Pursuit of Happiness*, illuminate the resulting entanglement of religion and

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public art. These two mural series tell similar stories, and the history of *Pursuit of Happiness* as a work of public art itself reflects the aesthetics of *Aspects of Negro Life*.

Despite the apparent secularity of these works, both tell profoundly religious stories, especially when considered in light of Josef Sorett's recent scholarship on "racial aesthetics," Sorett's term for the "evolving effort to offer a compelling or persuasive philosophy (or theory) of black culture."[11] Sorett argues conversations regarding racial aesthetics are inextricable from religious discourses, and he illustrates how ostensibly secular black visionaries of the 1930s, such as Locke and Douglas, drew upon religious themes to articulate their visions for the significance of blackness.[12] Furthermore, scholars such as Wallace Best and Judith Weisenfeld have shown how, during the 1930s, the forms and modalities of religion diversified tremendously within black communities in the urban North.[13] Weisenfeld in particular has illustrated how within certain contexts during the era of the Great Migration, the line between religious and racial identity dissolved completely, transforming seemingly secular acts, such as marking one's race on a draft form, into performances of one's religious identity.[14] Douglas's and Hayes's murals demonstrate how public art that addresses the significance of blackness also participates in the construction of religious spaces. In becoming dynamic conversation partners with inhabitants of Harlem, their murals help expand scholarly understandings of religion beyond white Protestant norms of religion as a system of meaning-making.

I begin with Aaron Douglas's four-part mural series *Aspects of Negro Life*, which places the New Negro as the product of an African spiritual lineage.[15] In this series, Douglas celebrates his New Negro embrace of modern artistic techniques such as semi-abstraction, and conveys a sense of African aesthetics by painting the figures in his mural in the style of Egyptian wall paintings, and modeling his figures' faces on African masks. Throughout the murals, Douglas uses concentric circles to draw the viewer's attention to specific elements. These circles give a sonic and unbounded quality to his work, and suggest the source of energy driving the panel series, and, by implication, black American life itself. In the first panel, circles of light emanate from an African traditional religious statue, which pulsates a spiritual rhythm into the dance of the central figures. One diagonal beam of light crosses this panel and directs its spiritual energy into the following panel, where the Emancipation Proclamation and a ballot illuminate the scene. The third mural shows this energy emanating from a group of musicians and dancers, mirroring the image from the first panel. This panel also includes a diagonal beam of light, which in this case emerges from the North Star. This beam strikes the eye of a man kneeling beneath a lynching victim, orienting him along the path of the Great Migration. Following this beam of starlight into the next panel, the viewer sees that the light arises from the present era, and that a saxophone player provides the guiding light for the entire history. While the mural series offers an exodus narrative of the African spirit from the Deep South into to the Promised Land of the urban North, there is no clear Moses figure. Rather, the New Negro figure in the final panel is a Promethean figure, carrying the fire of African civilization into the urban North and illuminating the black past as he does.[16] By drawing on Greek, Christian, African, and Egyptian symbolism in his panel, Douglas demonstrates how black religion for New Negroes was not necessarily bound to Christianity.

In his fourth and final mural from *Aspects of Negro Life*, Douglas offers a cautious celebration of the flourishing of black life in urban America. This mural, *Song of the Towers*, reflects on the changes within black American life brought about by the Great Migration. A figure in the lower right of the mural is fleeing the deathly hands of the Jim Crow South and striving to reach the glowing city of skyscrapers and smokestacks that dynamically dominate the background of the mural. This figure is scrambling up a giant, industrial cog, on top of which stands another figure, the saxophone player who triumphantly raises his arms as he catches sight of the Statue

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of Liberty, framed in the distance between towering skyscrapers. The man's saxophone seems to almost brush against Lady Liberty's torch, and Douglas emphasized this conjunction of black artistic tradition and federal social policy by encircling it in concentric bands of yellow light. The modern black American figure sheds light on the past, allowing it to be seen and studied while also giving that heritage an orientation toward the future. By tracing this light to an African traditional religious statue, Douglas argues that black history is the story of black people bringing forth their African spiritual heritage to illuminate their lives. As such, the figures of black history take on a mythic and religious significance, since modern black Americans can see their work in the building of a black metropolis as a participation in this larger narrative. This theme of African religious heritage, illuminating and guiding modern black Americans, is central to the story of Vertis Hayes's *Pursuit of Happiness*.

In 1936 Hayes won a commission from the WPA/FAP to paint a series of murals at the Harlem Hospital.[17] The resulting work, *Pursuit of Happiness*, is an eight-panel series which originally lined both sides of a hallway in the newly built nurses' residence of the Harlem Hospital.[18] The head of the Harlem Hospital initially rejected Hayes's proposed design because it contained "too much Negro subject matter," and he believed Harlem would not be majority-black in the near future.[19] After the hospital coordinator sent Hayes his reasons for opposing the design, such as his belief that black people would not like seeing paintings of other black people, Hayes asked to meet with the coordinator and got his permission to record the meeting. Following the meeting, Hayes informed the coordinator that, unless he allowed the mural to be painted as Hayes wanted, Hayes would release the notes from the meeting to the New York Times. This threat, along with a letter-writing campaign and at least one newspaper article covering the issue resulted in the administrator relenting and Hayes painting *Pursuit of Happiness* with black figures. Still, Hayes felt the hallway where the mural was painted was "inadequate" and "cloistered," as it was located within the nurses' residence, away from the public eye.[20]

Like Douglas's series, Hayes's panels depict the history of black life from Africa, through the American South, to the industrial North. The series contains two African scenes, a scene of black life in the rural South, and a variety of scenes depicting contemporary 1930s urban black life. Like *Aspects of Negro Life*, this series is framed on one end by an African religious statue and on the other by a depiction of jazz. Here, Hayes makes this framing a bit more explicitly religious by including in the final panel a church scene next to the jazz musicians. The two panels featuring a church service and an African religious statue mark the hallway as a religious space and present black history as a conversation between Christianity and African traditional religions. As these two panels face each other across the hallway, they fill its space with a dialogue between two dimensions of black religious life. The minister in the church scene faces across the hallway toward the African religious statue, yet also peers down over his pulpit toward the people walking down the hallway, inviting them into a dialogue between the African religious statue on one side of the hallway and the church scene on the other. The minister does not so much preach a religious message to those in the hallway, but, rather, with an outstretched arm framed by a stained-glass window of Jesus the Good Shepherd, he serves more as a watchful companion to those in the hallway, blessing their daily work as a participation in a shared narrative of the black American pursuit of happiness.

The central and most significant panel of *Pursuit of Happiness* stood at the head of the hallway. This panel, upon which both the hallway and the narrative of the series turned, depicts sharecroppers looking toward an industrial city. Four figures stand on the brink of a hill overlooking a skyline suggestive of Manhattan. Their backs are turned to a plow whose wheel has come off and lies useless on the ground. Their faces look to a futuristic skyline dominated by an enormous cog, a clear reference to Aaron Douglas's *Song of the Towers*, painted three years earlier in

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the library across the street from the hospital. In this panel, the figures stand ready to join the Great Migration and leave their now-useless rural plow wheel for the industrial cog that awaits them. By placing this scene at the head of the hallway, Hayes centered black agency within black history. The important turning point in black American history for Hayes was not emancipation but the movement to urban centers, the moment when black Americans chose to set out to recreate themselves in new, modern manners.

Nurses, many of whom were black, when walking this hallway would have had their eyes directed toward a depiction of a moment when ordinary black people like themselves took action to engage in the American pursuit of happiness. The fact that a panel depicting the Great Migration stood at the head of the hallway transformed the act of walking down its length into an entering of the stream of black history. One either traversed through black American history back to Africa, or moved along with the narrative and walked into the contemporary urban, black world. This movement into the modern world was made quite literal, since the figures in the Great Migration panel looked toward a panel depicting black people engaged in various modes of work: shining shoes, carrying packages, baking bread; and this panel was itself painted around an archway leading to the rest of the hospital. Walking through this archway meant walking into history. To walk this painted hallway was to participate in an exodus narrative framed by religious images that connected with the nurses walking by and entangled religion in the daily actions of the hospital staff. The hallway was not simply a conduit connecting one place to another, but became a place itself: a place where black people recalled their heritage on a daily basis, and a place where history became a series of maneuvers between religious images.

Public art, religious space

After decades of unprotected exposure to the environment of the hospital, the Harlem Hospital murals entered the new millennium in a state of disrepair. In 2005, the Harlem Hospital began a multi-year process of expansion and renovation.[21] Due to community insistence and a hospital director with a better eye for art, the murals were restored to their original condition and subsequently re-installed in a newly constructed patient pavilion. No longer visible only to staff hurrying about hospital duties, the murals are now enjoyed by staff, patients, and visitors. The mural pavilion has become a destination in itself, and a venue to house cultural events ranging from art exhibits to charity masquerade balls.[22]

Furthermore, thanks to an innovative design team and "so much private funding you can't even imagine,"[23] Vertis Hayes's art continues to be enjoyed by the public today in ways inconceivable in the 1930s. During the restoration process, an architectural design team captured high-resolution photographs of Hayes's murals and incorporated enlarged scenes from *Pursuit of Happiness* into the new glass facade of the building, a facade lit at night by interior lights that transformed the mural into a glowing beacon of black art.[24] By creating "black people six stories high" the team quite literally enlarged the public impact of, and interaction with, Hayes's original work.[25] Furthermore, the act of transforming Hayes's mural from part of the hospital's interior decor to the illuminated face of the building is reflective of the New Negro theme of the African past shining light into the modern future. Like the light sources in Douglas's *Aspects of Negro Life*, in which the energy of African traditional religion gets carried through the oppressions of the American South to re-emerge in modern jazz, Hayes's *Pursuit of Happiness* journeyed through decades of continued neglect and racism to resurface as the public face of the hospital. Today, as the sun sets on Manhattan, the interior lights of the Harlem Hospital light up the facade-bearing scenes from Hayes's murals, and illuminate the street outside with light shining from and through black American history. Just as New Negro artists like Douglas and

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Hayes drew on the light of the African past to guide their art, contemporary Harlemites walking Malcolm X Boulevard have their way lit by black luminaries of past generations.

Like the murals of the original hallway design, where the religious significance was built by walking in conversation with figures of the black past, the significance of the Harlem Hospital murals extends beyond the walls of the hospital and reaches into the pathways which passersby take throughout their days. By transforming walls into images, these murals transmute the action of walking down the street into an act of participation within a larger history. Pedestrians' movements from one place to another become intertwined with a historical narrative of exodus and urban black flourishing. As such, the murals generate a dialectic between the passersby on Malcolm X Boulevard and the narrative proposed by the murals. Regardless of the extent to which passersby consciously adopt (or reject) the narrative of the murals, the imposing murals are nevertheless hegemonic, and create a perturbation within the otherwise silent, stone-faced streets of Harlem in which people are invited to reflect on their heritage.

As the facade of a public building, the potential meanings of the artwork are expanded as more people interact with it in a larger array of manners. People slow down to take selfies, they make it a stop on tours they give of Harlem, and even find it an inspiring place to create their own paintings.[26] When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City, one Instagram user found the lit-up facade, "an oasis amidst all this destruction."[27] For others, the murals become significant because of their dynamicity. On April 16, 2017, Robert Garland shared an Instagram post of the mural noting that it "looks especially beautiful this morning... 🌼🌷🌻🌹💐🌸."[28] By ending his post with six flower emojis, Garland suggests that, like spring flowers, the Harlem Hospital murals can sometimes look "especially beautiful," and are a natural and living feature of the Harlem landscape. Yet the fact that Garland posted this on Easter Sunday suggests, if he is Christian, that perhaps he saw something more deeply spiritual in the mural. Perhaps he saw the mural as a symbol of overcoming darkness, sin, and racism, and as a rising to new life.

These social media posts demonstrate how the significance of the mural and its religious significance are not limited to the plane of the art itself but become enmeshed within the altered pedestrian and digital rhetorics of those walking by.[29] The meaning gets carried and embodied by the thousands who walk by, and the story Hayes's work tells gets enacted by those who see it. The artwork cannot simply be located at the Harlem Hospital Center, but rather exists in taxicabs asked to drive by the murals, in social media posts of the murals, and people who simply recognize the hospital facade as a distinctly different building. While the renovation project transformed the Harlem Hospital into a significant public work of art, it did so in a way such that its significance is not rigidly fixed within the hospital, but fluidly flows into the surrounding community as people on the street adjust their patterns and rhythms of walking in response to the towering presence of Hayes's murals. Rather than serving as a canvas onto which visitors paint their expectations and experiences of the neighborhood, the Harlem Hospital murals project their narrative onto the passersby along the street, where the people walking by then continue the work of place-making. As they make deliveries, run errands, and visit friends, people passing the hospital encounter a facade which generates a distinct space and draws them into the narrative it projects. While allowing for greater interpretive space than the original hallway did, the hospital facade still invites people to see their lives reflected in its story of black flourishing.

The fact that Hayes's murals have been transformed from a hallway celebrating the arrival of black people into the urban metropolis and into the glowing facade of a central institution within that metropolis shows the lasting impact of WPA/FAP sponsored artworks. The WPA/FAP sought to give American citizens a more secure understanding of their place within the American cosmos, a sense of place that tied local history and culture into the broader national identity. The inclusion within the facade of Hayes's depiction of jazz music and a scene showing

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black people within various medical and scientific professions helped mark the Harlem Hospital as a black institution within a black metropolis, one which could offer distinctively black cultural and social products to the larger American nation. However, the designers of the renovated facade also included the Great Migration scene on one end of the facade, thereby historicizing Harlem as the product of black migration. The migrants stand on one side of the facade and the Harlemites on the other, with the cog between them. The cog draws the viewers' eye from the migrants to the urban dwellers. In doing so it centers black agency, and simultaneously recognizes its constrained and conflicted existence. The mural may celebrate the movement toward a new home, but it also reminds the viewer that this is a movement between two incompletely free systems. Black people became the face of federal public art without a resultant transformation of the government's racial politics.

Unlike New Deal art that depicted various chapters in local history, the hospital exterior depicts black Americans as people whose history continuously moves between various locales. *Pursuit of Happiness* tells a story of people made homeless and placeless through the machinery of colonialism and democracy. By incorporating the theme of black migration, the murals suggest Harlem is somehow transitory too. The murals tell a story of motion, change, and adaptation. They reflect the history of forced and unchosen black migration. While they celebrate black people's contribution to science and medicine, this is not shown as a teleological necessity, but simply one stage before another journey. On one hand this resonates with the ways in which the murals are now experienced by people outside. To see the murals in their fullness, one must stand along a sidewalk, a no-place between where one came and where one is headed. *Pursuit of Happiness* can only be fully experienced mid-journey. As a memorable marker along a daily walking commute, or a sight to behold while "strolling the avenue," the new Harlem Hospital exterior can become a synecdoche for the whole of Harlem, a symbol which marks Harlem as a space of arrivals and departures, and a place of motion toward a better future.[30]

On the other hand, the note of transitoriness in *Pursuit of Happiness* reflects the precariousness of Harlem as a thriving center of black life. In 1948 Ralph Ellison penned an essay in which he declared "Harlem is nowhere." According to Ellison, Harlem was a state of emotional discomfort, a sort of experiential displacement, an existential homelessness brought about by the reality that, as a black person, one has "no stable, recognized place in society … one wanders dazed in a ghetto maze, a 'displaced person' of American democracy."[31] Douglas captured this idea in his mural *Song of the Towers* in which he painted a saxophone player celebrating urban life, yet doing so from a distance. Douglas's musician stands alone in the foreground, separated from the city despite the fact that he is incorporated into the scene through a giant industrial cog. Here, as is in the New Deal, the industrialization of America works to simultaneously incorporate and segregate black bodies. The renovated facade of the Harlem Hospital also reflects this idea since people experience it as they pass by on the street outside. While the art celebrates the success of black doctors, the sheer size of the facade means that one must stand outside the hospital in order to appreciate that celebration.

In 1925 James Weldon Johnson noted,

> The question naturally comes, 'Are the Negroes going to be able to hold Harlem?' If they have been steadily driven northward for the past hundred years … can they hold this choice bit of Manhattan Island? … When colored people do leave Harlem … it will be because the land has become so valuable they can no longer afford to live on it.[32]

Recent and ongoing gentrification of Harlem suggests Johnson was not incorrect in his concerns nearly a century ago. In 2011, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts picked up the note sounded by Ellison

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and declared once again "Harlem is Nowhere." While Rhodes-Pitts was concerned with economic pressures on Harlem, she ultimately located Harlem in the "nowhere" of letters written, pamphlets distributed, conversations overheard, petitions signed, and friends greeted. Rhodes-Pitts argued that the real Harlem—Harlem as the heart of black America—is neither bound by institutions nor found in landmarks, but is malleable, dynamic, and exists at a grassroots level on the streets.[33]

So too is the religious space created at the confluence of the New Deal and the New Negro. The religion here is not bound by, but instead extends from and beyond, institutional walls. It is not encompassed by one set of doctrines, texts, or beliefs, but rather embraces a range of traditions. It provides an orienting, yet open-ended narrative involving persons with which passersby might share a sense of companionship. Although stripped of explicitly religious images when it became the public face of the hospital, *Pursuit of Happiness* nevertheless furthers the process of racial aesthetics. The hospital facade is not religious by itself, but rather offers a narrative in which black Harlem residents may find companionship with figures of the mythic African past. Despite the racial and economic marginalization of Harlem, the hospital facade stands as a reminder that Harlem was, and is, a black space. In the midst of this wounding the murals accompany passersby as they make their way as black people in a white, racist America.

Notes

1 Today this building is part of the Schomburg Center. "About the Countee Cullen Library," New York Public Library, accessed May 28, 2020, www.nypl.org/about/locations/countee-cullen.
2 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Worlds Religious People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 145.
3 I use the term New Negro to emphasize the ways in which this movement was about the development of new significations for black racial identity. While the period did see black artists gain greater acceptance in white-dominated art markets, the term *Harlem Renaissance* positions this movement as a period within a longer white-dominated art history, while the term *New Negro* emphasizes the ways in which the artists understood themselves at that time, and places this movement within a larger black American history.
4 Kenneth J. Bindas, *Modernity and the Great Depression: The Transformation of American Society, 1930–1941* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), pp. 6–10.
5 Nick Taylor, *American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), pp. 248–9.
6 Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 61.
7 For the Roosevelt administration, with its refusal to support an anti-lynching bill and its submission to Jim Crow norms, the authentic America was white.
8 Melville Herskovits, "The Negro's Americanism," in *The New Negro*, ed., Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 359. This quote demonstrates the difference in Herskovits's early thinking compared to the ideas he presents in his 1941 *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Other scholars have noted this change in Herskovits's scholarship. For example, see Richard A. Long, "Some Backgrounds for African Continuity Studies," in *Journal of African Studies* 2 No. 4 (Winter 1975): pp. 561–8, p. 563.
9 Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in *The New Negro*, ed., Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 10.
10 Arthur Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," in *The New Negro*, ed., Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 237.
11 Josef Sorett, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p. 4.
12 Sorett, pp. 25–34, pp. 45–48.
13 Wallace Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915–1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

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14 Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

15 Digital images of the four panels can be found through the New York Public Library Digital Collections. For direct links, see *Negro in an African Setting* https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/634c59a4-6f99-3618-e040-e00a180633b0, *From Slavery To Reconstruction* https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/634ad849-7832-309e-e040-e00a180639bb, *Idyll of the Deep South* https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/634c04bc-fed3-b0e8-e040-e00a18063c1a, and *Song of the Towers* https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6ca557ed-9597-5dcd-e040-e00a18065af4.

16 Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), pp. 121–4.

17 Hayes won the WPA/FAP contract in 1936. The murals were painted in 1937, and, as such, that is the year given as the work's date.

18 Information and images concerning the *Pursuit of Happiness* mural can be found on Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies' website devoted to the Harlem Hospital Murals, See "The Murals | Pursuit of Happiness" http://iraas.columbia.edu/wpa/pursuit.html. Accessed May 27, 2019. Although Columbia's IRAAS's website only hosts images of the individual slides, NYC Design has posted black and white images of the original hallway in its entirety. See "Harlem Hospital WPA Murals," album uploaded by NYC Design, www.flickr.com/photos/nycdesign/albums/72157650208943559. Accessed May 27, 2019.

19 "Discrimination Charges Hurled At Supt. Of Harlem Hospital For Rejecting Negro Artists' Murals," *The New York Age*, Saturday, February 29, 1936, No. 3. Accessed via Newspapers.com April 28, 2018.

20 Cooper Hewitt, "Inspired: Africa, WPA Art and a Unique Hospital Design," posted by Cooper Hewitt, uploaded Jun 3, 2013, 7:20, www.youtube.com/watch?v=orbRNNebPE4. The relevant story is narrated by the pre-recorded voice of Vertis Hayes Jr. (the artist's son); See also Ernestine Jenkins, "Muralist Vertis Hayes and the LeMoyne Federal Art Center: A Legacy of African American Fine Arts in Memphis, Tennessee 1930s–1950s," in *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 73, No. 2 (SUMMER 2014): p. 140.

21 Columbia University Institute for Research in African American Studies, "The Murals | Conserving the Murals" http://iraas.columbia.edu/wpa/conservation.html. Completion of the curtain wall containing the images from Hayes's murals occurred in 2010. The Mural Pavilion interior was opened September 27, 2012, see NYC.gov, "Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Gibbs And HHC President Alan D. Aviles Open New Harlem Hospital Patient Pavilion," September 27, 2017, www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/339-12/mayor-bloomberg-deputy-mayor-gibbs-hhc-president-alan-d-aviles-open-new-harlem-hospital.

22 Nadine Matthews, "Make room for rumba! The Cuban dance form is coming for Harlem week!" *New York Amsterdam News*, August 15, 2019 http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2019/aug/15/make-room-rumba-cuban-dance-form-coming-harlem-wee/; "Harlem Haberdashery hosts Harlem Hospital benefit." *New York Amsterdam News*, March 5, 2015 http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2015/mar/05/harlem-haberdashery-hosts-harlem-hospital-benefit/.

23 Cooper Hewitt, 1:04:05. Roughly six million dollars were privately donated to the mural restoration project.

24 For images of the renovated hospital exterior see "Harlem Hospital Center—Mural Pavilion," International Design Awards USA, accessed May 28, 2020 https://idesignawards.com/winners/zoom.php?eid=9-6955-14.

25 Cooper Hewitt, 1:24:24.

26 I Bike Harlem (@ibikeharlem). 2018. "The facade of Harlem Hospital." Instagram. April 8, 2018. www.instagram.com/p/BhTzxZSgIzp/; DonnieDelano (@DonnieDelano). 2016. "When youre there for inspiration." Twitter. May 25, 2016, 9:27 p.m. https://twitter.com/DonnieDelano/status/735643444136271872.

27 Jennifer T. (@chebitts). 2012. "Everything's intact here in Harlem." Instagram. October 31, 2012. www.instagram.com/p/RdxuPyh006/.

28 Garland, Robert (@robertgarland). 2016. "The mural looks especially beautiful this morning." Instagram. April 16, 2017. www.instagram.com/p/BS8VAcPBj6j/.

29 Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Practices: Walking in the City (1984)," in *The People, Space, and Place Reader*, eds, Jack Gieseking and William Mangold, with Cindi Katz, Setha Low, and Susan Saegert (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 232–6.

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30 Kiki (@komrade_kiki). 2018. "Vertis Hayes." Instagram. June 4, 2018. www.instagram.com/p/BjmJAVAlHZG/; Mike Shepherd (@angeloshep). 2015. "Sights of Harlem." Instagram. May 7, 2015. www.instagram.com/p/2ZuPIIQWqf/.

31 Ralph Ellison, "Harlem Is Nowhere," *Harper's Magazine*, August 1, 1964, 229. Although written in 1948, Ellison's essay was not published until 1964.

32 James Weldon Johnson, "Harlem: The Culture Capital," in *The New Negro*, ed., Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 310.

33 Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, *Harlem is Nowhere: A Journey to the Mecca of Black America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011).

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