

## LESSON 5: THE HALL OF NEGRO LIFE

**TOPIC:** Celebrations: The Hall of Negro Life

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will:

Extend their study of Celebrations through examining an overview of the Hall of Negro Life.

Analyze the names of the people listed at the bottom of the Douglas painting to determine their achievements.

Focus on Jesse O Thomas, A. Maceo Smith, and W.E.B. DuBois and their roles in the management of the Hall of Negro Life.

Discuss citizenship rights of African Americans

**SYNOPSIS:** The Hall of Negro Life was built for the Texas Centennial in 1936. There was difficulty in the construction due to the delayed funding; however, the building was created in less than 3 months. Some have said it was built from plywood and plaster. The Hall had individual rooms dedicated to showing the accomplishments of African Americans in the areas of Business and Industry, Fine Arts, Mechanical Arts, Agriculture, Health, and Education. It featured murals of the Harlem Renaissance artist, Aaron Douglas. The Hall was visited by many people. There were mixed reviews often based on the race of the visitor. For a short period of time, the Hall's display of the great achievements by Negroes seemed to remove the lines of segregation and both whites and blacks united in the knowledge and celebration of the contributions of African Americans to the United States.

## **INFORMATION:**

### **The Hall of Negro Life: Overview and Attendance**

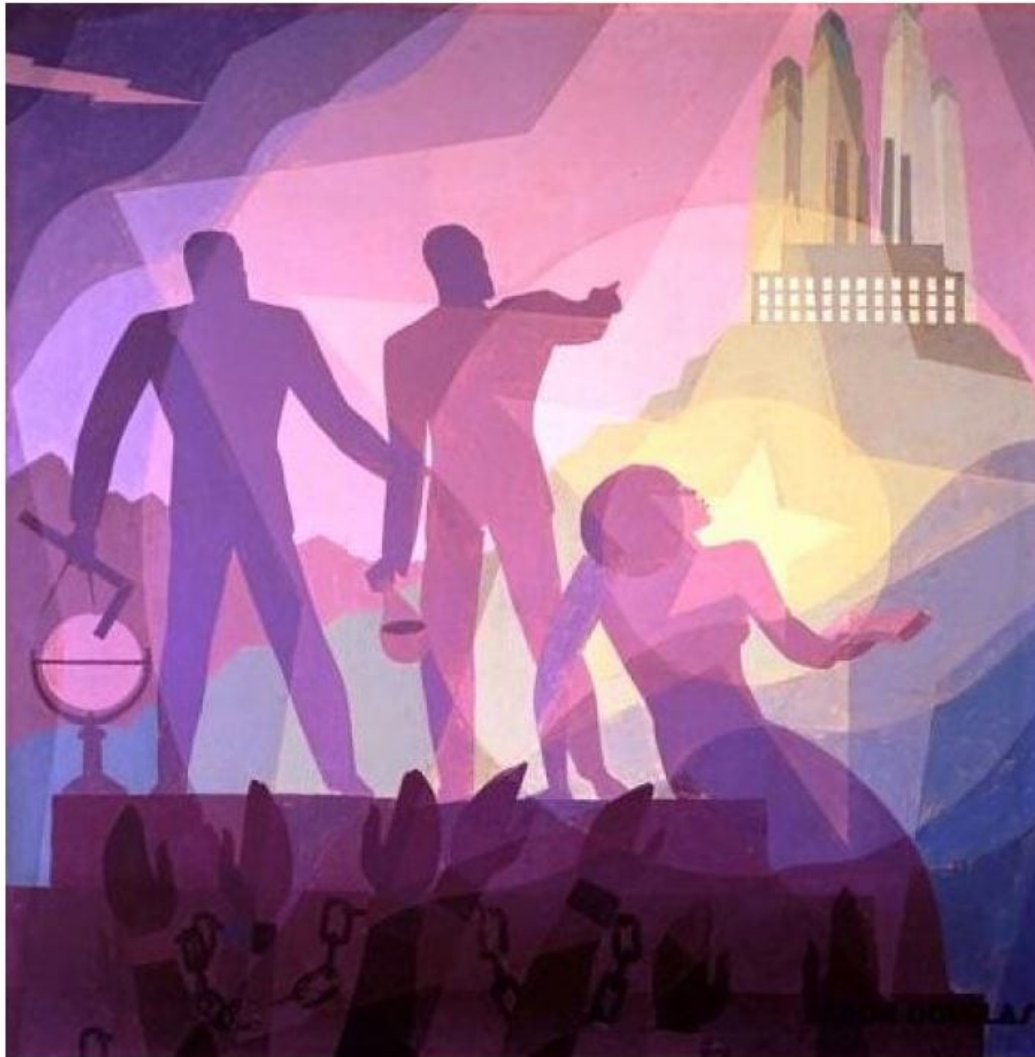
The Hall of Negro Life was one of the buildings constructed as part of the Texas Centennial at Fair Park in Dallas Texas in 1936. It was a completely federally funded building, unlike the other buildings at Fair Park. It had a modern architectural design and bright colors. The only exterior decoration on the building was above the entrance. It was a huge circular seal showing a figure with broken chains.

Inside was an octagonal lobby with a rising sun, representing a new day dawning for the Negro. The lobby had chairs and tables. On the tables were free copies of W. E. B. DuBois' What the Negro Has Done for the United States and Texas. It included census statistics, economic status, education levels, home ownership, occupations, Negro owned farms and businesses, and information about the progress that Negroes had made since Emancipation. In the lobby was also a one-easel painting titled, "African Nude" by James A. Porter.

Aaron Douglas, an artist who became one of the most important artists from the Harlem Renaissance painted a set of four murals which were on the upper walls of the Hall of Negro Life. He was a master of mural painting. The first is a history of the first Negro on Texas soil and the other three murals tell the story of transport from Africa to the present period of his progress. These two murals were destroyed or lost during the razing of the Hall of Negro Life. The remaining murals are *Into Bondage* and *Aspiration*.



*"Into Bondage" by Aaron Douglas, 1936 (Corcoran Gallery of Art)*



*"Aspiration" by Aaron Douglas, 1936 (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco)*

### **Names below the murals**

There were names of important Negroes listed below the murals; Paul Laurence Dunbar, Benjamin Banneker, Col Charles Young, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Wright Cuney, Richard Allen, Dr Daniel H. Williams, Crispus Attucks, and Booker T Washington.

The General Manager of the Hall was Jesse O. Thomas, who was an early civil rights leader and protege of Booker T. Washington. He also wrote the comprehensive book, *Negro Participation in e Texas Centennial Exposition*. The Assistant Manager was A. Maceo Smith, who was an

educator, entrepreneur, and civil rights pioneer for Dallas, fighting against segregation in the schools which eventually led the way to the famous court case, Brown vs. The Board of Education.

There were six different halls in the Hall of Negro Life with displays of accomplishments of Negroes after Emancipation to 1936. The halls were Education, Health, Agriculture, Mechanic Arts, Business/Industry, and Fine Arts.

### **Attendance at the Hall**

From the opening on Juneteenth, 1936, a constant flow of people of many different races poured into the building. Over 400,000 people attended, with at least 60% being white. They came from all walks of life, from every section of the United States and from many foreign countries. Many of them had read editorial comments in the daily papers, others had talked with friends concerning the Hall of Negro Life. Still others stumbled upon the building, being attracted by its architectural design and beauty. All of them either came to see and/or hear first-hand what the African Americans had done since Emancipation as a productive citizen “to justify his citizenship!” Many people visited the building more than once expressing compliments and surprise by the information at the information desk and hearing the intelligence of the people working in the Hall. Many people were heard to say, “It is just like we were told we would find it.”

The building of the Hall of Negro Life was the first time in American history that Negroes had the opportunity to tell their own story at any exposition. In the past their stories were told by whites and were often based on assumptions and biases. The displays were well done as evidenced by the fact that this building was a center of attraction at the Texas Centennial Central Exposition. The creation of the Hall of Negro Life sparked the beginnings of the civil rights movement; however, as W.E.B. DuBois said, and history proves:

“The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.”

## QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES:

1. If you created an updated brochure titled, “What African Americans have done for America and (your state)”, what would you include in your information? Create a brochure to share with your class.
2. The information stated that the Negro needed to “justify his citizenship.” Since Negroes were considered citizens by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment adopted in 1868, why do you think Whites would think Negroes had to justify their citizenship? How did Whites justify their citizenship?
3. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment apparently did not translate to the right to vote, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment had to be passed. Read What the Colored Man Should do to Vote. Discuss the obstacles that Negroes faced to vote.
4. Click on the links to the names that were listed below the paintings of Aaron Douglas. Complete the chart titled, *What did I do?*
5. Discuss: What is the message of the DuBois quote, “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery”? How did Reconstruction influence this quote? Did the slave really move back toward slavery?
6. Read about Jesse O. Thomas and A Maceo Smith. What did they do after their involvement with the Hall of Negro Life to further the rights of the Negro?

*Note: Nothing is mentioned in the above information about Jesse O Thomas’s book, Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition. It is a comprehensive look at the Hall of Negro Life.*

## Celebration or Not?

### Lesson 5: Hall of Negro Life

| Characteristic                                                      | Yes | No | Comments |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| Positive event                                                      |     |    |          |
| Social interaction with others                                      |     |    |          |
| Looked to the past                                                  |     |    |          |
| Remembered past accomplishments.                                    |     |    |          |
| Reflected on what was done well and what could be done differently. |     |    |          |
| Took stock of people and resources needed to move forward.          |     |    |          |
| Paved the way for future success.                                   |     |    |          |
| People felt more supported after participation.                     |     |    |          |

# What did I Do?

| Name                         | Accomplishment |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| <u>Richard Allen</u>         |                |
| <u>Crispus Attucks</u>       |                |
| <u>Benjamin Banneker</u>     |                |
| <u>Wright Cuney</u>          |                |
| <u>Frederick Douglass</u>    |                |
| <u>Paul Laurence Dunbar</u>  |                |
| <u>Sojourner Truth</u>       |                |
| <u>Harriet Tubman</u>        |                |
| <u>Booker T Washington</u>   |                |
| <u>Dr Daniel H. Williams</u> |                |
| <u>Col Charles Young</u>     |                |
|                              |                |

## REFERENCES:

### **Overview of the Hall of Negro Life**

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/hall-negro-life-texas-centennial-exposition-1936/>

<https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/hall-of-negro-life>

### **Statistics of the Negro in America, Charles Hall**

[https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/api/collection/tex/id/4519/page/0/inline/tex\\_4519\\_0](https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/api/collection/tex/id/4519/page/0/inline/tex_4519_0)

### **Book with details of the Hall of Negro Life**

Thomas, Jesse O. (1938.). *Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition*. Christopher Publishing.

### **Murals of Aaron Douglas**

<https://usso.uk/2014/10/23/from-harlem-to-texas-african-american-art-and-the-murals-of-aaron-douglas>

### **Video about Aaron Douglas murals**

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/american-art-to-wwii/harlem-renaissance/v/a-beacon-of-hope-aaron-douglass-aspiration>

### **What the Colored Man Should do to Vote African American Pamphlet**

Collection. (1900) *To the Colored Men of Voting Age in the Southern States*. [Philadelphia: Press of E.A. Wright, 190-?] [Pdf] Retrieved from the Library of Congress,

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbaapc.33200/?st=gallery>

