



# PERSPECTIVES

Seeing through the Eyes  
Of Black American Artists



These educational resource materials were created in 2020 by Paula Decker Benfer, artist and art educator, My Cellar Studio LLC.

Images are all copyrighted materials and ONLY may be used for educational instruction.

Images may not be reproduced for financial gain.

Contact the above artist if you wish to use the curriculum resources in this Power Point.

[mycellarstudio@gmail.com](mailto:mycellarstudio@gmail.com)



*This curriculum is written in the language of **young adult/ adult learners**.*

*For **children**, their teacher may **adapt the concepts to their level**. They may respond better to one artist's work, or comparing and contrasting two images.*

*Look at it as though  
You've never seen it before  
Try and forget it  
So you can see it.*

The opening lines of the song “See it Like a Baby” by [Marillion](#) (British progressive rock band).



Visual art images may be used many ways. You will be viewing images which were created by both historic and contemporary Black American Artists. Images selected highlight many issues. Look through the perspective of the Black American Artists. Try to find out more about the issues the images highlight

### Learning Objectives:

**The Viewer Will:** describe a visual image created by a Black American artist.

**The Viewer Will:** interpret a visual image.

**The Viewer Will:** explain or defend their interpretation by sighting “evidence” in the art work to support their observation.

**The Viewer Will:** compare and contrast two or more images with similar subject matter.

**The Viewer Will:** reframe personal responses to reflect the cultural perspectives of Black American artists.

**The Viewer Will:** predict the responses of the general public to specific art works.

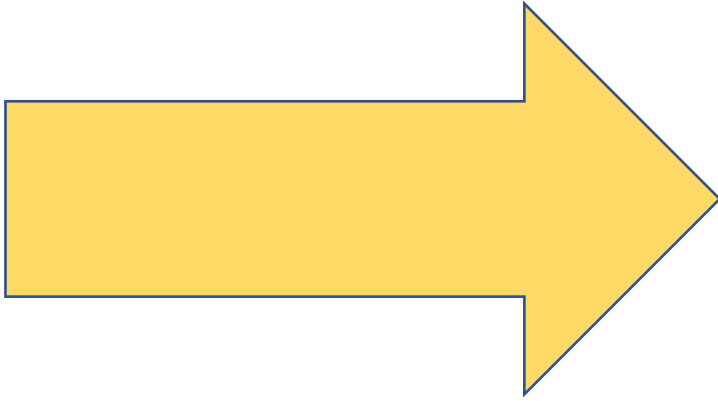
**The Viewer Will:** appraise their own communities about the aspects of local, state, and national poverty

**Extension task :** reframe an issue contributing to racial inequality , and illustrate what they learned within a creative presentation.

**Extension task :** select an art piece from this Power Point (or another Black American artist approved by the teacher/leader), and use it as a springboard for creating another work of art.

**Extension task :** present your created presentation to a specified audience; then summarize their response.

The **target GRADE LEVEL** of the curriculum is written for Middle School, High School, or adult learners. However, a skilled educator would be able to pull from the materials and adapt the discussions to elementary children. For example, using images found here of *home life*, and creating compare/contrast lessons with other artists of other cultures would work well.



## SLIDE PRESENTATION FORMAT:

- As this curriculum proceeds you will see only work of Black American Artists.
- On a slide, you will see one art image at a time.
- Study the image and follow instructions for DESCRIPTIVE REVIEW.
- The next slide will repeat the same image and guide you through interpretive questions.
- You may wish to do some RESEARCH in order to understand issues which the images present.

# Descriptive Review: a method for critique.....how do you look at art and stimulate discussion?

**It's a good idea for each student to take notes/ or have one student step forward and record a list for the whole class.**

## PHASE 1: (Describe)

**Study the image before you.**

Talk about what you see. What do you notice? What is going on in the work? What details do you see?

In a sense, you are “making a list” or “taking inventory” of what is in the work.

## PHASE 2: (Speculate/ Interpret) Support your comments with “evidence” found in the art piece.

If you were to title this work, what might you suggest?

When do you think the artist might have created it? Time period?

What do you notice about the way the artist presents the subject matter?

What “style” of art might have influenced this artist?

Why do you think the artist selected this subject matter?

What questions does it bring up for you as an on-looker?

Speculate about “what do you think the artist is trying to say?”

What can you guess about the artistic training of the artist, based on their style?

***ASK STUDENTS TO ADD TO THESE QUESTIONS...WHAT WOULD THEY ASK THE ARTIST IF THEY WERE PRESENT?***

## PHASE 3: (Response/ Critique/ or Evaluation) Research on the artist or their time period may enhance this phase:

What is your emotional response to this work of art? What do you want to do with that emotion?

What other kinds of subject matter do you think this artist would present?

Why do you think this representation is important for a Black American Artist?

What do you think the artist is trying to “get” or illicit from the viewer?

How did the medium the artist chose for the idea, contribute to the mood and quality of the “message?”

What ideas do you have which would respond to the ideas presented by this artist? Use what medium?

# Suggestions for expanding concepts through art creating:

Prior to doing ANY of the following activities, a SENSITIVE teacher would take the “pulse” of the classroom. There may be children who are homeless, hungry, or in harms way. How are you going to prevent “labeling,” “bullying,” or “embarrassment” for those children? These activities are valuable lessons, but without class preparation and expectations clearly stated prior to the lessons, the teacher may not avoid problems. PLEASE anticipate and adapt for your audience.

- Drawing skills may be reinforced, by asking students to refer to the David Hammons image of the homeless figure. Students may pose for one another, wrapped in a blanket, perhaps holding their own sign, and only revealing their face.  
(Instructor should specify their evaluation criteria to students, prior to activity.)
- Students should research hunger issues in their community, county, etc. They might summarize their findings and add personal statements. They may give that writing to people in the community and solicit items for a local food pantry or organization. Before the items are delivered, the items might be set up in the classroom and drawn as a still life. OR they might be the subject of photography OR their drawings or photos may have a collage frame made of labels and advertisements mixed with statistics about poverty.  
(Instructor should specify their evaluation criteria to students, prior to activity.)
- Students may create a monotone painting of shoes which are “worn out.” They might paint a series, and contrast them with new shoes out of the boxes. They then may write an interpretation of the statement: “Walk a mile in my shoes.” In the statement there should be evidence of their attitudes and learning regarding poverty. The statements may be enhanced by calligraphy.  
(Instructor should specify their evaluation criteria to students, prior to activity.)
- 3D Assemblages may be created with worn, discarded items. Include writing and photocopied images and other paper/cloth materials using polymer glues (mod podge/ polymer). The piece should illustrate an aspect of poverty learned through Blk Am Artists’ eyes. (Instructor should specify their evaluation criteria to students, prior to activity.)

# Images utilized in this Power Point: Black American Artists

Romare Beardon

John Biggers

Elizabeth Catlett

Robert Colescott

David Hammons

William Johnson

Jean Lacy

Jacob Lawrence

Faith Ringgold

Alison Saar

Betye Saar



“All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique. All artists, if they are to survive, are a force, at last, to tell the whole story; to vomit the anguish up.”

**James Baldwin,** Author and advocate

“Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.”

**James Baldwin,** Author and advocate

“The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose.”

**James Baldwin,** The Fire Next Time

Speaking to Black Americans about white attitudes, Baldwin wrote:

“Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity.”

**James Baldwin,** The Fire Next Time

Artist: Elizabeth Catlett



### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What medium is used to create this?
- Why would Catlett select purely black and white?
- What is happening to this woman?
- What symbolism is present in the image?
- Describe the figure in the image.

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What feeling is communicated in this image?
- What sex is the figure? How does that change the story?
- What do the lines in the sky convey about feeling?
- At what do you think the figure is looking?
- If you were going to give the image a title, what would it be? Why?
- What story might go with your title?
- If you **research current events**, what true story could you find to use with this image?



**Look up Elizabeth Catlett. Where did she live? Why? What extra meaning does the image have?**

Elizabeth Catlett





Artist: Elizabeth Catlett



### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Who do you think Catlett is drawing in her print?
- What can you observe about the figure?
- What are the working conditions?
- Where is the action taking place?
- What do the gestures of the figures suggest?
- What do you think drew Catlett to this scene?
- Why would Catlett want to showcase this scene?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- Why do you think Catlett wanted to record this scene?
- What might Catlett want you to feel or learn?
- If you were Catlett, what would you title this image?
- Why do you think the artist worked in monotonics?
- If you could ask the figures in the image questions, what would your questions be?
- What do you think happened before the action in the image?
- What do you think will happen to the figures after this scene is concluded?
- What do you think the boy is thinking

Elizabeth Catlett





Artist: Elizabeth Catlett





Elizabeth Catlett

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What has Catlett asked us to see in this image?
- Point out the details.
- How does Catlett use line and color?
- How are the figures positioned?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- Who is represented in this image?
- What do you believe has happened here?
- What kind of struggle has taken place?
- How does Catlett communicate power or judgement?
- Why does the artist think this image needs to be shared?
- How does the absence of color change the mood?
- What three words do you think would summarize the story?
- What do you imagine will happen in the next “chapter” of the story Catlett is trying to tell in her work?

**Research:**

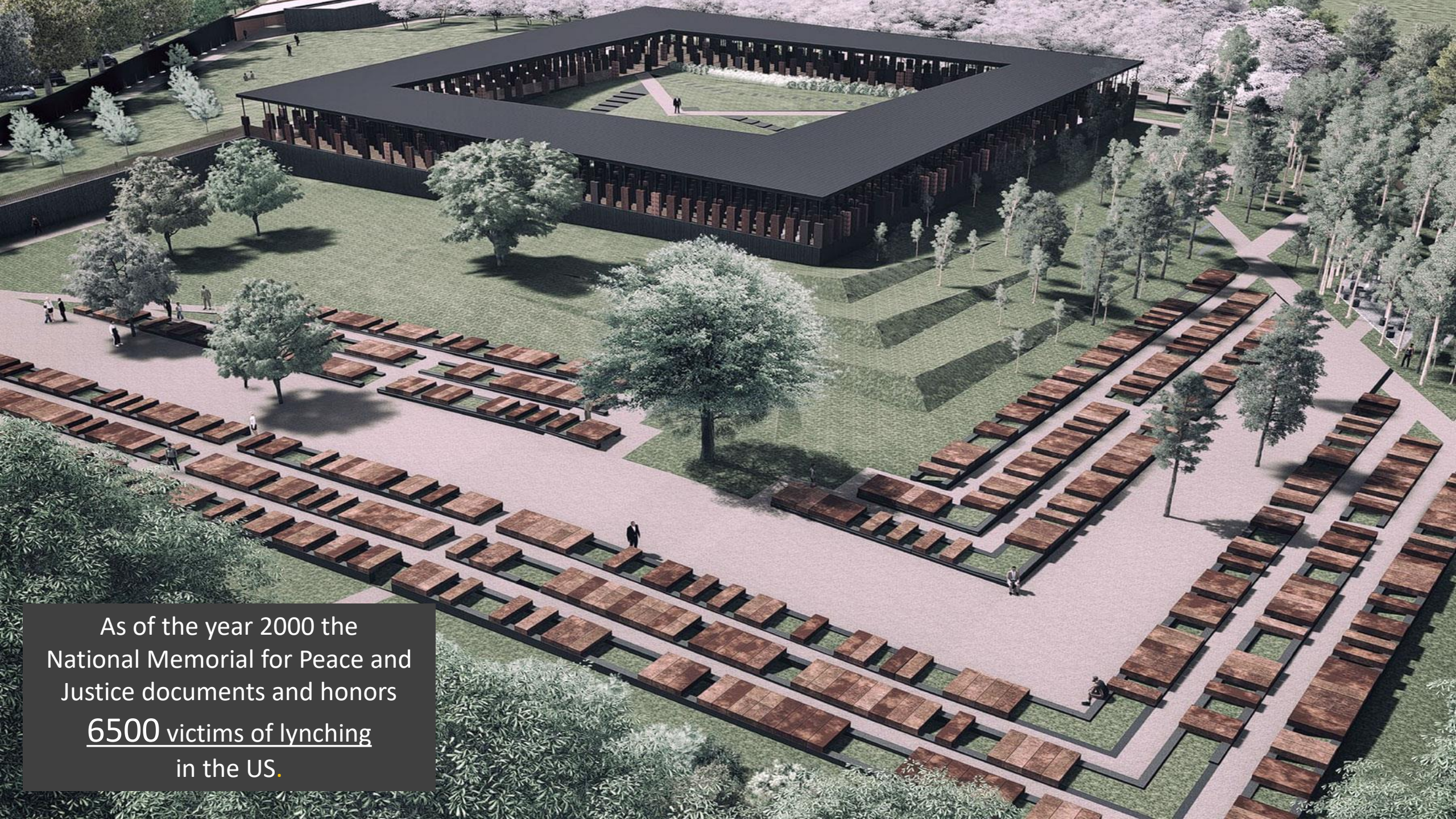
[Learn about lynchings](#)

***National Memorial for Peace and Justice***

***What is the Equal Justice Initiative? What are the goals of EJI?***

[Washington Post Article](#)





As of the year 2000 the  
National Memorial for Peace and  
Justice documents and honors  
6500 victims of lynching  
in the US.





Artist: David Hammons

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the materials the artist used to create the art installation.
- Discuss the devices the artist uses to support the objects.
- What is the condition of the objects?
- Where do you think the objects are located?
- What can you say about the way the artist placed the objects?
- If you were in physical proximity of the objects, how would you interact with them?
- What did the artist do to change the objects?

### INTERPRETATIONS:

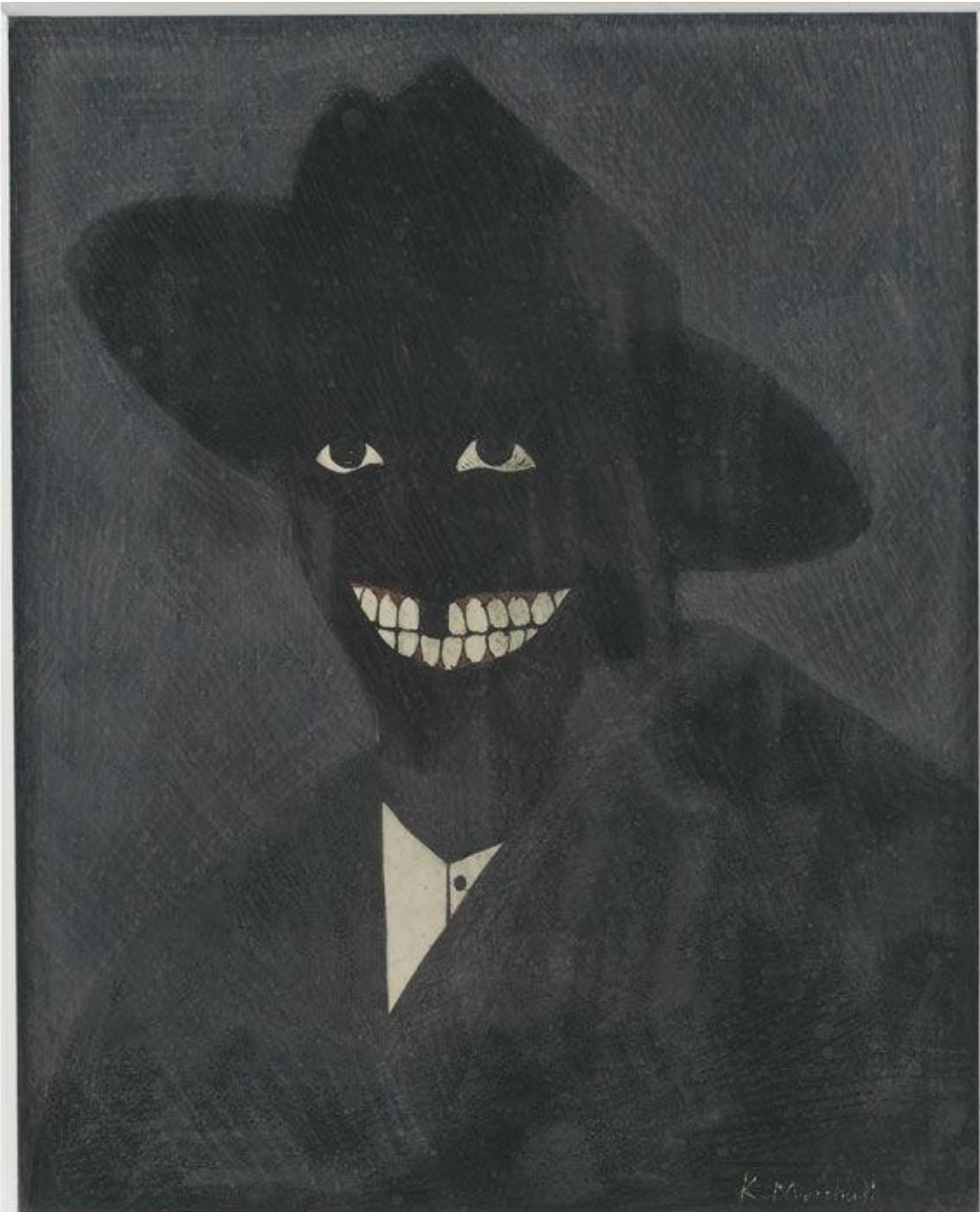
- Speculate, what do you think is happening here?
- What is a symbol? Why might the objects in this piece be symbolic?
- How would the meaning of the piece change if the “parts” faced different directions?
- Why do you think Hammons chose these materials?
- Consider titles you might give to the piece. (research)
- What is an assemblage? How is this piece an assemblage?
- ***Research the “wealth gap” in the USA.***

David Hammons





Artist: David Hammons





### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Compare and contrast the two images.
- Contrast their mood.
- Contrast their artistic style.
- What is happening in each image?
- What details do you see now that at first glance you did not?
- Which is a true portrait? (Based on your definition)

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- Why do you think Hammons put these images side by side? About what does he want us to think?
- Why do you think Hammons uses such a contrast in styles?
- If you saw these figures in real life, how would you react?
- Why is it so difficult to stop looking at these figures?
- What important alterations or objects serve as symbols? What might they symbolize?
- How does Hammons use **satire**? (Satire is often used in theater. Look up its many meanings.)
- [Learn about stereotypes](#) How does Hammons challenge your view of stereotypes?
- What do you really know about **homelessness and living on the street**?

***Research Homelessness issues in America and your own community. What help is in place?***





Artist: Robert Colescott





Robert Colescott

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

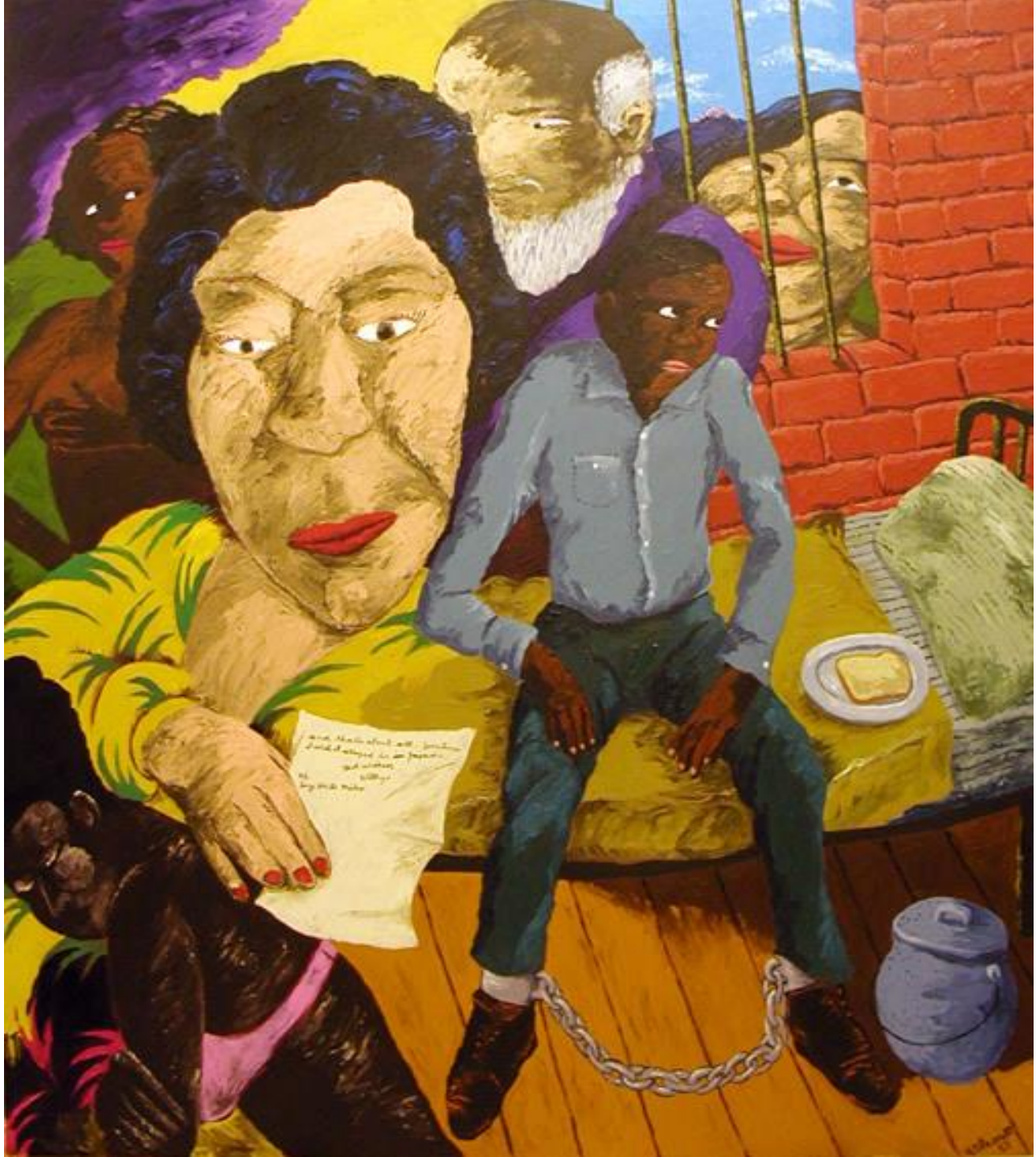
- Look up Van Gogh's "The Potato Eaters" and explain why this is a **parody**.
- Describe the location and props.
- Describe the figures.
- What else is in the picture that is missing in Van Gogh's work?
- What is the mood? How do colors affect that?
- What makes the scene "comical?"

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What is the "attitude" of each figure?
- Why would Colescott portray this as "comical?"
- Why do you think Colescott makes a parody from an image created by a famous, well known, white artist?
- Read the phrase out loud. If you heard it in real life from someone, what might your impression of them be?
- What is the financial status here?
- What is your interpretation of the figure closest to you?

### Research Topics:

*Hunger in America/ Poverty Thresholds /and Government Assistance*



Artist: Robert Colescott





### **OBSERVATIONS:**

- Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:
- Describe the location and the conditions in the image.
- What are the figures doing?
- What are the proportions and locations of the figures?
- Is this a **parody**? Why or why not?
- Is this image **symbolic**? Why or why not?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- What do you think is happening in this scene?
- What is the main figure communicating?
- Why do you think different races might interpret the actions in the scene differently?
- How do our own experiences as “observers of art” get in the way of understanding the “meaning the artist is sharing?”
- What title might you give this image?
- What current events might you associate with this image?
- Why do you think there is a figure outside? What do they look like they are thinking?

***Research: Incarceration in Minority Communities***

***Policing of Minority Communities***

***Consequences for families due to incarceration***

Robert Colescott





Artist: John Biggers





### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Make a list of the objects you identify in the painting.
- Describe the location of the scene.
- What do you notice about the figure in the image?
- What actions are taking place before you?
- What is the figure communicating? What feelings are evident?
- What is the figure's body language?
- What do the textures, colors, and patterns communicate?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- What do you think the story is?
- What is the location for the action?
- What is Biggers trying to tell you are concerns in his community?
- What kind of title would be appropriate for this image.
- Biggers uses a lot of symbolism. What messages is he communicating through the objects and the body language of the figure?
- What does Biggers want you to feel as an observer?

***Research: Issues of Poverty in the USA.***

John Biggers





Artist: John Biggers

## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Where is this figure?
- Describe the figure?
- What is the figure doing?
- What objects do you see?
- What colors does Biggers select for the image?

## INTERPRETATION

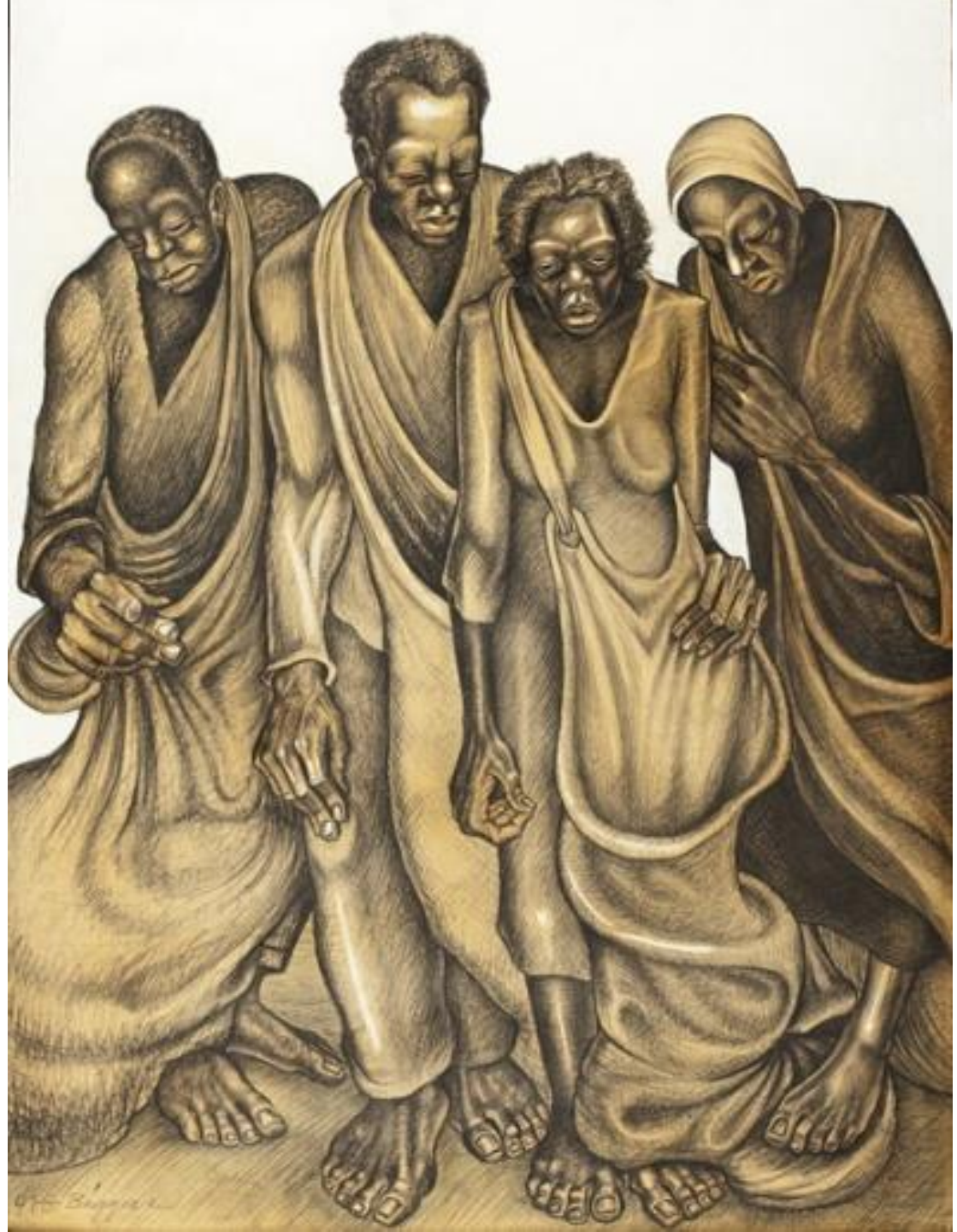
- What do you think the figure is doing?
- Based on your answer, why do you think they are doing so?
- What feeling do you have about the figure based on their appearance?
- How would you feel if you were in this location with the figure?
- What might Biggers title the picture?
- About what is it that Biggers is trying to get you to think?
- If you were in the same situation as the figure, what would you do?
- Who might help you? How?

**Research: Issues of fair housing**  
**Black access of home ownership**

John Biggers







Artist: John Biggers



### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the figures in this image.
- Describe what they are doing.
- Who is the center of interest in the image?
- What evidence is there of exaggeration in the image? Why?
- What is the color palette?
- Describe the environment the figures fill.

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- What do you think the figures are doing with their bags?
- Why do you think their faces look like they do?
- How might these figures represent Black American ancestors?
- Why did Biggers work in monotonous and make the landscape so empty?
- What hopes and dreams might these figures have?

### ***Research topics:***

***What was promised to freed blacks after the Civil War?***

***What is a sharecropper? What are their rights?***

***What are “reparations?” Why is this issue current & debated?***

John Biggers



Artist: John Biggers





## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the figures in this image by Biggers. Where are they?
- What is the work the people are trying to accomplish?
- What **kind** of communities do you see pictured in the image?
- What does the weather appear to be?
- Compare and contrast anything you can see that seems to have an opposite.
- What evidence is there of movement in the scene?

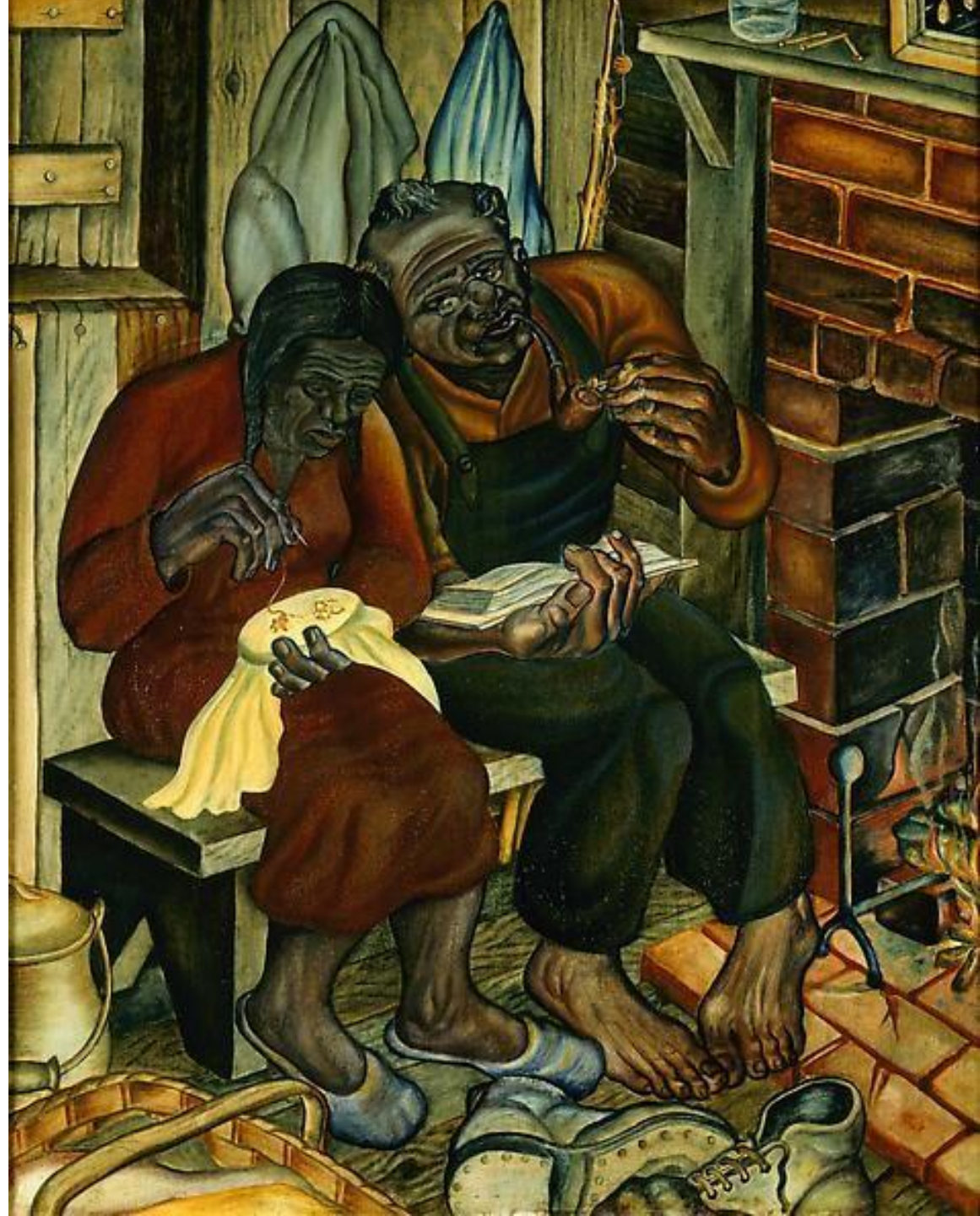
John Biggers

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- Who do you think these people are?
- Why are they working on the same task?
- What do the landscapes reveal in the background?
- Why do you think the artist has used so many contrasting areas?
- What is the point of the train tracks? Why do you think Biggers uses them as symbols in a lot of his art?
- Where do you think these people are now?
- Where do you think they used to be?
- What comforts are missing from the wooden buildings?
- **Research the “Great Migration” to the North.**







Artist: John Biggers



### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What is different about these two figures?
- What evidence in the image suggests that their living conditions are a little better.
- What objects do the people own?
- What tasks are they doing?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- How would you describe the lifestyle of this couple?
- Describe the woman; what do you think her role is?
- Describe the man; what do you think his role is?
- What do you think their relationship is?
- Compare and contrast this living space to your home, or some you may see on television.
- What kind of “home improvements” would improve the living conditions in this home.
- Who do you think “owns” this dwelling? What are the pros and cons of ownership?

***Research the topic of “Home Ownership.”***

***What difference does it make if you rent a space or own your own home?***

John Biggers







Artist: John Biggers



## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What are the figures' in this image doing?
- What is the environment like? Season?
- How are they dressed?
- What are their faces like?
- How are they relating to each other?
- What symbols of transportation are present?

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- Why do you think these people are in this situation?
- What is their relationship with each other?
- Where do you think they are going? Why?
- How do they look different from one another?
- Read their faces, how do they feel?
- How is this scene different from the one the figures ancestors might have known?
- What might these people have "lost" as they moved away from their families?
- What do they have to do to survive in new situations?

**Research: What drew people North in the**

**Great Migration?**

**What new issues were faced in the North?**

John Biggers





Artist: John Biggers





## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

Look up the word **SYMBOLISM**.

John Biggers

*"The Tree of the Root" is the title of this image.*



- What objects are in this image?
- Where are they?
- What are they doing?
- What symbols are present?
- What fabrics are in the image?
- How does the artist imply directions and movement?

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- What meaning can you apply to some of the symbols Biggers uses?
- What do the patched fabrics symbolize?
- Why are books so important in the artist's scenes?
- What importance is the tree symbolically?
- What direction are the figures moving?
- What do the symbols tell you? What is being left behind?
- Who will carry the responsibility of keeping the history and carrying the family?
- Now explain the title of the piece.

**Research issues:**

***Black Americans seek to trace their genealogy.  
How did slavery change "identity issues?"***



You have seen several images by John Biggers. Here is something else which might surprise you!

In 1950, Biggers won first prize for his painting *The Cradle* at the annual exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. "Segregationist policies, however, allowed black visitors into the museum only on Thursdays, so he could not attend the show's opening."

[Learn about John Biggers](#)

*Consider that you are hired by Texas Southern University as the chairman of the art department. You have a reputation as an honored art instructor. It is after World War II. You have received national honors and are a leader of the Harlem Renaissance.*

*You won a top prize and people are coming to the museum to see the winning art.....BUT YOU CANNOT ATTEND THE HONOR. How would you feel? How would you react? How should the public respond? How might the museum respond?*

Artist: Jean Lacy





## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

Jean Lacy



- What kind of building is in Lacy's artwork?
- Describe the figures.
- What are the figures doing?
- How are the figures arranged in the picture?
- What kinds of art do you see in the art?
- What symbols do you see here?
- What do you notice about the colors

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- How are people going in and out of the building?
- Where would you expect to see a similar type of building?
- How are the people showing that they are acting like neighbors?
- Why do you think Lacy likes to use other cultures in her art images? What cultures do you see referenced? What symbols are clues.
- What feeling do the colors communicate?
- Describe the way Lacy views cities, families, and community? How many generations live here?

### *Research questions :*

*What cultures were targeted by slave traders?  
What royal, advanced cultures populated Africa?  
Investigate the continent of Africa and one of its countries. How does Africa compare to N. America?*





Artist: Faith Ringgold

This is from her children's book called **TAR BEACH**. What others did she author?



## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the scene, the location, the time of day.
- What are the adults doing?
- What are the children doing?
- What is in the background?
- What symbols are present?
- What is on the table and the roof?
- What is the edge of the art piece like?

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- Which figure do you think is the “narrator” of what is happening in the scene. What story do you think they are telling?
- What kinds of things do you see these families doing that families from other American cultures would do too?
- How does the location change the story that is being told?
- What do you think the children are doing?
- Are there any symbols that enlarge the story?
- What does the use of scrap cloth, sewn together, tell you about the image?
- Why do you think the artist created this piece?

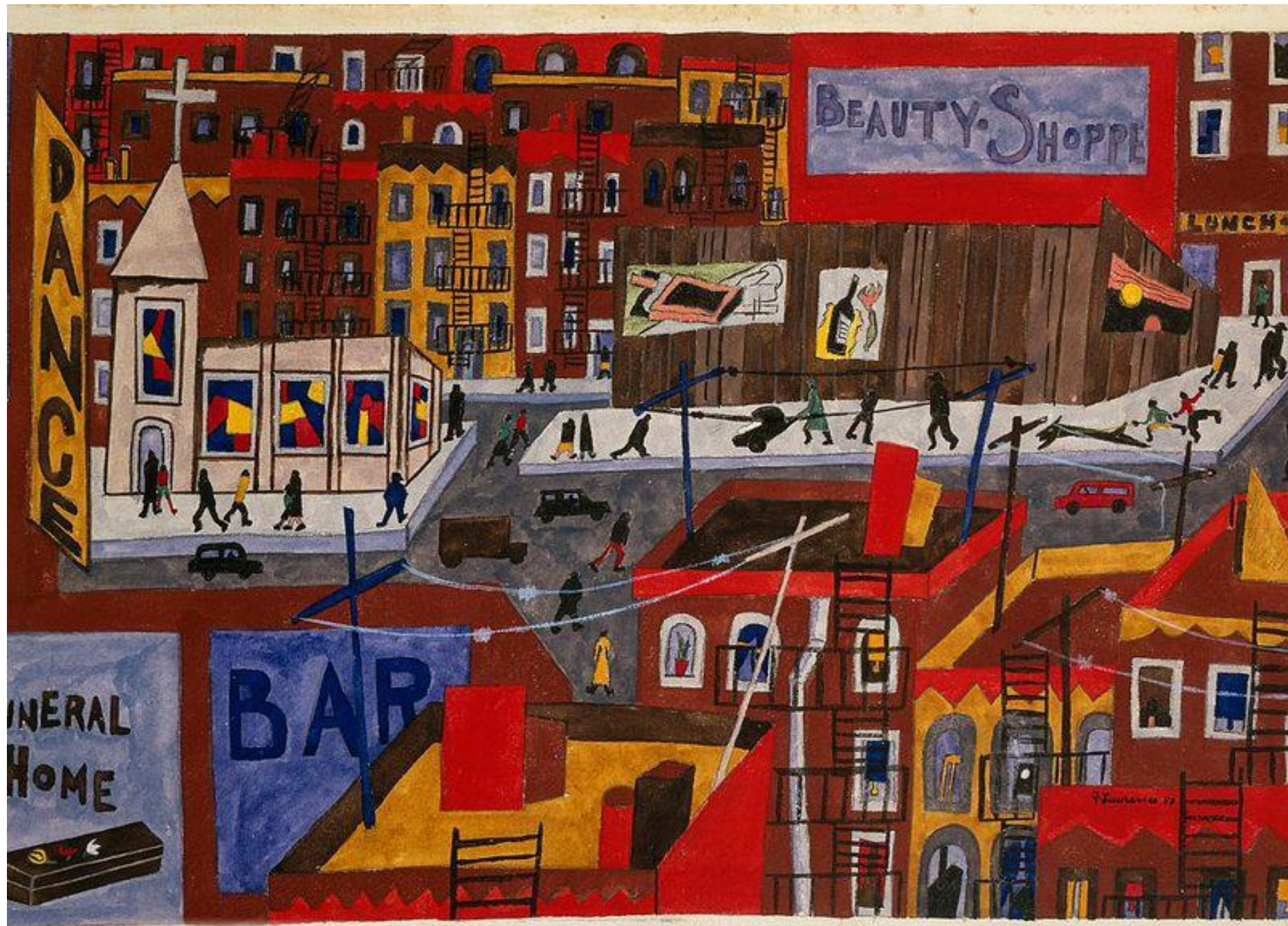
***Research Black Am. Quilt Making***

Faith Ringgold

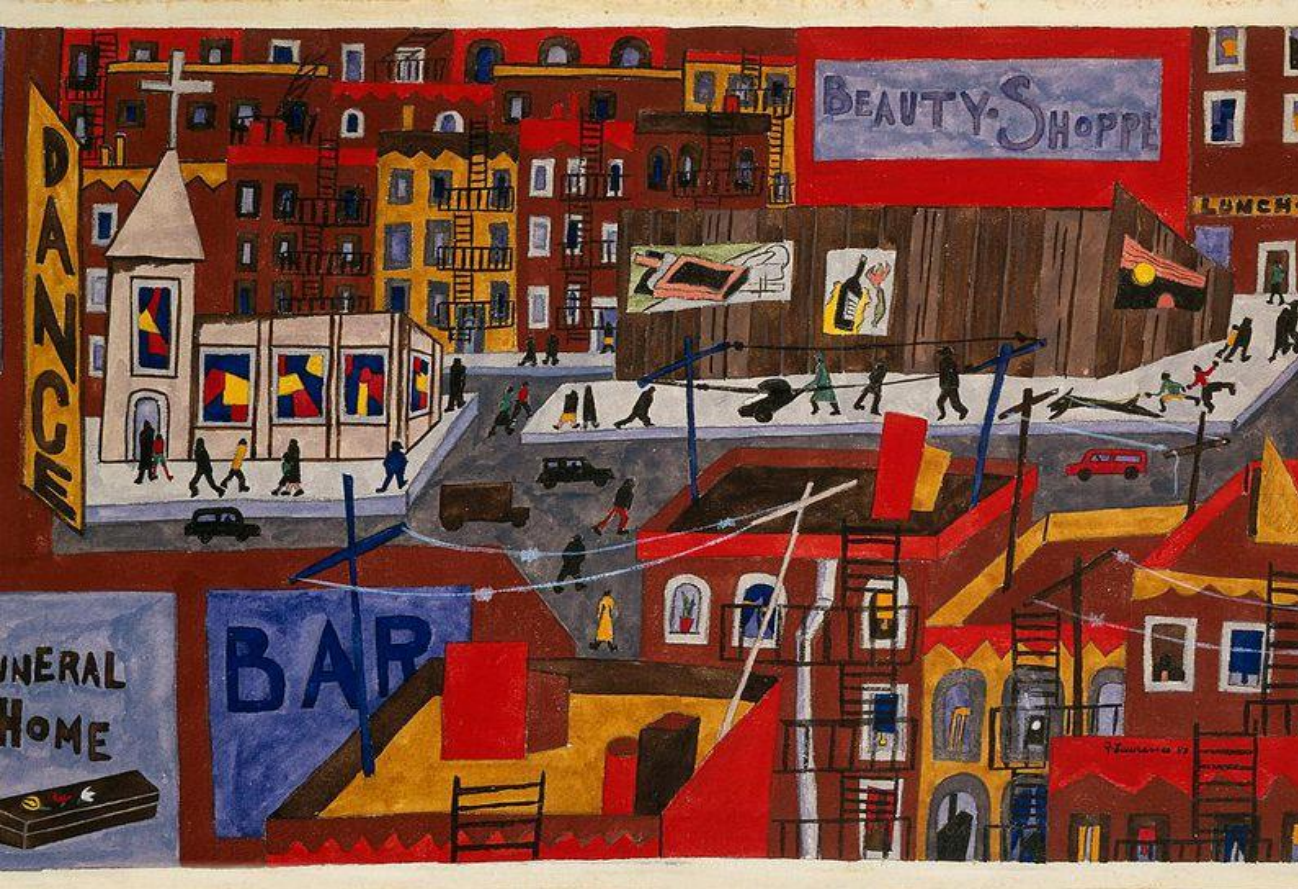




Artist Jacob Lawrence







This neighborhood is filled with “row” houses, or “tenements.” They are multi-family dwellings. In cities they are very close together. So like “Tar Beach” by Faith Ringgold, some tenants think of the top of the building as “the shared yard.” Prior to people of color moving to the cities in the north to take jobs and follow dreams, these tenements were often neighborhoods for immigrants who came to America. Some were German, Swedish, Italian, Irish, etc. Do you have ethnic neighborhoods in your city? Why would they tend to live closely together?

Jacob Lawrence

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image.

- Examine the image and make a list of all of the types of buildings or businesses you see.
- What details do you see on the buildings?
- How does the artist create a sense of crowding in the neighborhood?
- Describe the colors and patterns.
- How are people represented? What are they doing?

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- Lawrence selected these businesses and buildings carefully. What do you think he is trying to tell us about the lives of Black Americans living in the cities?
- Why do you think Lawrence included so many ladders and fire exits in the picture?
- Are there any places pictured that seem like “anchors” in the community?
- Why do you think Lawrence uses colors like “building blocks” to build the composition?
- How does Lawrence feel about neighborhoods?

**Research:** *What immigrant groups are living in your area? What obstacles to they face? Is help available?*



Artist: Jacob Lawrence



### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Lawrence created many images of black families moving from the South to the North. **Check out his “The Migration Series”**
- What are these four people doing?
- What are the figures in the back doing?
- What colors does Lawrence use?
- Describe the four people in the foreground.
- Describe the three people in the background.

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What dream is represented by this image?
- How does this family group represent an average American family?
- Who is directing the work that is taking place in the back of the picture? Is the work equally divided? Why does one person look like they are in charge?
- Where do you think the four figures are going?
- What visual clues tell you about the family relationships?

### Research questions:

***What careers do Black American women often fill?***

***What careers are commonly filled by Black Americans?***

***What levels of education do most Black Americans fulfill?***

***What are “quotas” in education and in career fulfillment?***

Jacob Lawrence







Artist: Romare Beardon





## **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image

- What is the art medium which differentiates Beardon's art images?
- Describe the colors and the patterns of the materials.
- What tiny details do you see in the images?
- What do you notice about the proportions of the figures?
- Compare and contrast the figures.
- What are the larger figures doing?
- Describe the background. What is the scene?

## **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- Where do you think the figures are going?
- What are the figures' responsibilities?
- What are the ages of the figures?
- Why do you think Beardon uses real images of faces, hands, and feet?
- Why do you think the colors are so amplified?

## ***Research questions:***

***What is a "normal" family unit?***

***Why is it harder for single parents to work?***

***Who are the childcare workers in many Black American homes?***

***How can communities support with child care?***

Romare Beardon





Artist: Romare Beardon



### Look closely:

- Where do the figures live?
- What are the figures doing?
- What is the form in the background? Where is it going?
- What is not being done in the picture?
- Describe the medium used by Beardon.
- Describe the colors and patterns in the work.

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What stereotypes is Beardon showing you in the image?
- Why does he contrast a house and a train?
- What dream is highlighted?
- What will be sacrificed for the dream?
- Why do you think so much popular music borrows from the traditions of African American sounds/ music and instruments?

***Research.....ask your friends and family:***

***What talents do you “expect” from Black Americans?***

***Why do you think Black Americans have been allowed to be successful in some fields but not others?***

***How has their history influenced their skills and talents?***

Romare Beardon

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:







Artist: William Johnson

W.H. Johnson





William Johnson

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What can you observe about the location and time of year?
- Describe the figures.
- What objects are in the image?
- Describe the artist's style?
- What color palette did the artist choose?

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What is the relationship of the figures?
- What is the mood of the art piece?
- How do you think these figures feel?
- What are the figures trying to accomplish?
- Speculate about the values of the figures.
- What can the figures accomplish in their lives?

### *Research idea:*

*Find out how many Black American farmers there are in the US. How many own the land they work? What is raised?*

*What is a sharecropper?*

*How have "Jim Crow" laws made it hard for them to own land?*





Artist: William Johnson



William Johnson



## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the landscape.
- List the various objects or name the shapes in the image.
- What are the figures doing?
- What work is being done in the image?
- What colors are used to create a mood?

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- What is the relationship of the figures to each other?
- What kind of work is being done?
- What is the relationship of the animals to the figures?
- What is of value to the figures?
- What do you think the figures are watching?
- What title might be given to the piece.
- Why do you think the artist created in a style that looks like the art of children?

## Research:

***The great Civil Rights Leader, Congressman John Lewis died in July 2020.***

***Read about his life in rural Alabama. How does this image illustrate his early life? How did life inspire him?***





Artist: William Johnson



### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work;  
support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe all the figures in this image
- What objects do you see in the piece?
- What is the background?
- What colors are used?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:.**

- What do the actions tell you is going on in the image?
- What kind of vehicle is shown?
- What are the people in the vehicle doing?
- Look in the background, what is going on there?
- What decisions do you think the people are making in the picture?
- Which figures do you think will be successful one day? Why?

### **Research:**

***In your community what facilities are provided for youth? Why are they necessary?***

***What concerns are related to safety in urban areas?***

***What happens to youth if they are not busy or work is not available?***

***How are they transported to work?***



William Johnson





Artist: William Johnson



### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- Describe the building the artist painted.
- Describe the colors and brushwork in the piece.
- What do you notice about the condition of the building?
- How does the artist use line and angles?
- What details does the artist add?
- Describe the location of the building.

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

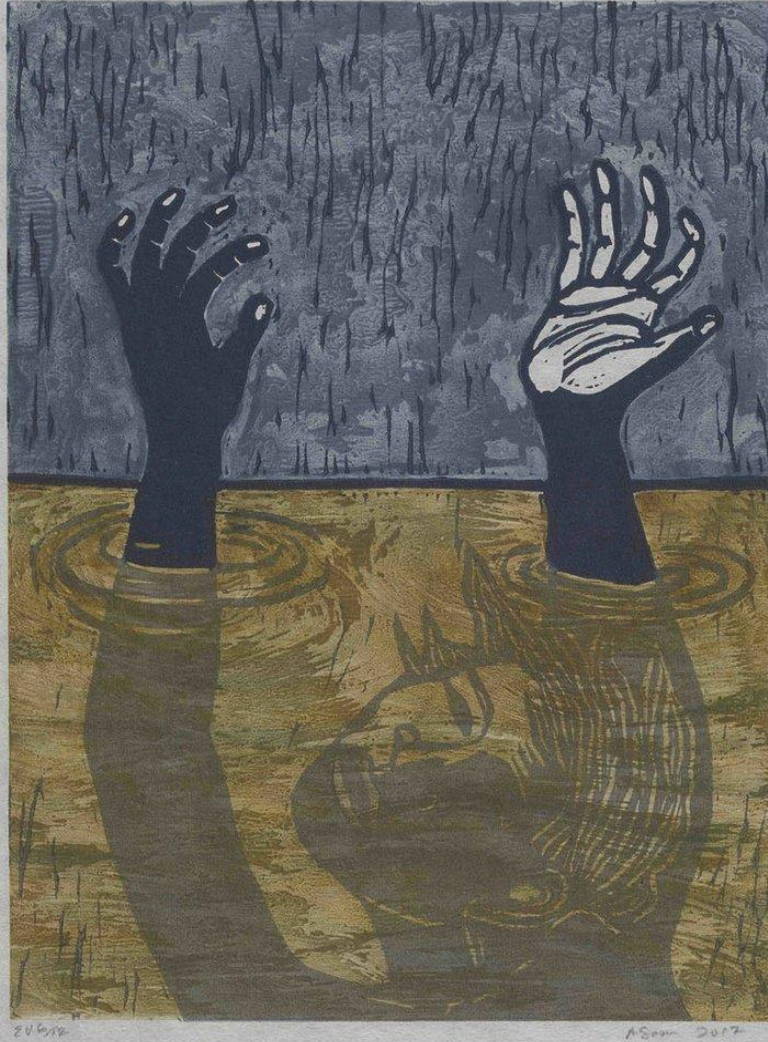
- Why do you think the artist chose to paint this building?
- What feeling is communicated?
- If the figure could tell a story about “migrating north” what do you think the story would be about?
- Why is the road so symbolic?
- What do you think the lives of the people who live here are like?



*Look at the last three slides again. Johnson was self-trained as an artist. His earlier style is happier, but more primitive. What changes in his life might have made his mood and style change so much? Give this piece a title.*

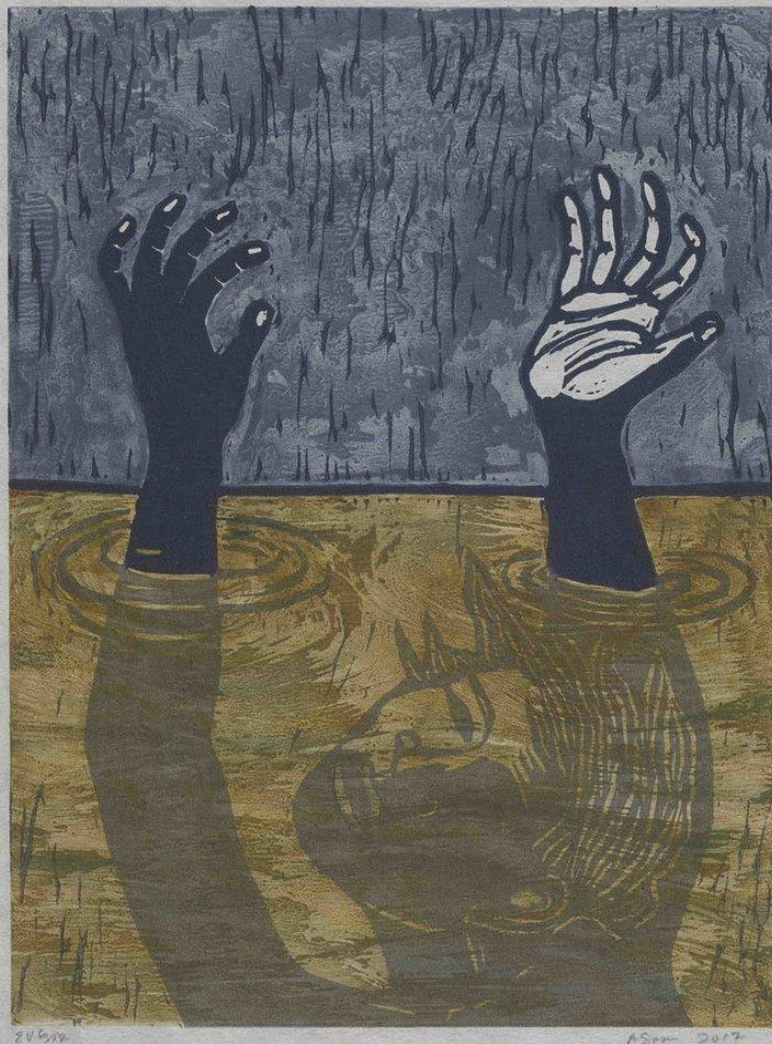
William Johnson





Artist: Alison Saar





Artist: Alison Saar

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What is happening in the image on the left?
- What do you observe about the figure in the image?
- What patterns and colors are used?
- What medium do you think the artist has chosen to create the image?

### **INTERPRETATIONS:**

- What is your emotional response to the image?
- What title do you think the artist gave this piece of art?
- This is a woodcut print. How do the qualities of wood match the image created with it?
- The colors are very limited; how does that make you “look?”
- Why would the artist create an image that might depress the observer?
- Who do you think the figure represents?
- How might this image be a symbol?

### **Research:**

***What are the top ten health issues for Black Americans?***

***What prevents this population from getting good health care?***

***What is the average lifespan: for adults, for youth, for infants in this populations? What % die from suicide, or from violence?***



Artist: Alison Saar







Alison Saar

This is a type of sculpture called an **ASSEMBLAGE**. What verb is in the word? What does that tell you about the way this artist works? Why are assemblages a good medium to share symbolism?

**Research:** [Compare to this art piece](#) at **THE LEGACY MUSEUM**  
***After examining “Remembrance” compare and contrast both assemblages. How do they both advance the history of African Americans in the USA? What do they say about violence?***

### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What objects do you see in this image?
- What is the color palette used by the artist?
- What details do you notice?
- How does the artist change the object?
- Where would you expect to encounter this piece?

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- What would be the history of these objects?
- What story would these objects symbolize?
- Who would have used objects like these?
- Where would objects like this be needed?
- What would be the life-style of the people who use these objects?
- What do you think the tags and labels say?
- Does the artist want the viewer to touch or handle the objects?
- How would the meaning of the art piece change if it were only two objects? Why are objects in multiples? What might that symbolize.





Artist: Betye Saar



## OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What is the main object that becomes the format for the art areas?
- What objects are placed in some of the frames?
- What symbols are repeated?
- How is the figure displayed?
- What is the medium the artist chooses for this visual story?
- What do you notice about repetition?
- Describe the color palette.

## INTERPRETATIONS:

- What is the figure doing?
- Why is the placement of the figure so important?
- What do you think the figure wants us to remember?
- What does time have to do with the story?
- Why does Saar use images of the moon and stars? Why in sequence?
- What do the colors suggest?
- Where do you think the artist got these objects?
- How does “collecting” tell a personal story?

*Interesting fact: The artist Alison Saar is the daughter of Bete Saar. The family is inter-racial. Bete is a black woman married to a white man. How might those Facts change the stories this mother and daughter tell in their art?*      *Betye Saar*







Artist: Betye Saar





### OBSERVATIONS:

Speculate based on the evidence in the art work; support your observations citing facts from the image:

- What objects did Saar collect?
- What image is repeated?
- How are the objects organized?
- What colors are used?
- What objects are being held?
- What title might have been given by the artist?

### INTERPRETATIONS:

- Describe the character in the assemblage.
- What surprises do you notice?
- What meaning can you assign to the objects/ symbols?
- Why are the colors so important?
- Saar presents the objects in a specific shape. Why?
- What historic references are here in the piece?
- How does this piece present work and stereotypes?

**Research:**     [Aunt Jemima stereotype](#)     [Stereotype reinforced](#)

***What other stereotypes are used to sell products? Who makes \$?  
How has Saar changed her Aunt Jemima? Look up Aunt Jemima  
products for sale on websites? How might Black Americans react to  
these objects sold as antiques or souvenirs?***

Betye Saar



Appendix Information Follows:



## A Few Other Black American Artists:

Amos, Emma  
Beardon, Romare  
Biggers, John  
Catlett, Elizabeth  
Colescott, Robert  
Hammons, David  
Johnson, William  
Kerry, Michael Ray  
Lacy, Jean  
Lawrence, Jacob

Marshall, Kerry James  
Ringgold, Faith  
Robinson, Amina  
Saar, Alison  
Saar, Betye  
Sherhald, Amy  
Walker, Kara  
Weems, Carrie Ann  
Wiley, Kehinde  
Woodruff, Hale

## Reference: Black American Poets

Maya Angelou

Gwendolyn Brooks

Cave Canem

Lucille Clifton

Kwame Dawes

Rita Dove

Nikky Finney

Nikki Giovanni

Saeed Jones

Angelina Weld Grimke

Langston Hughes

Claudia Rankine

Sonia Sanchez

Jean Toomer

Alice Walker

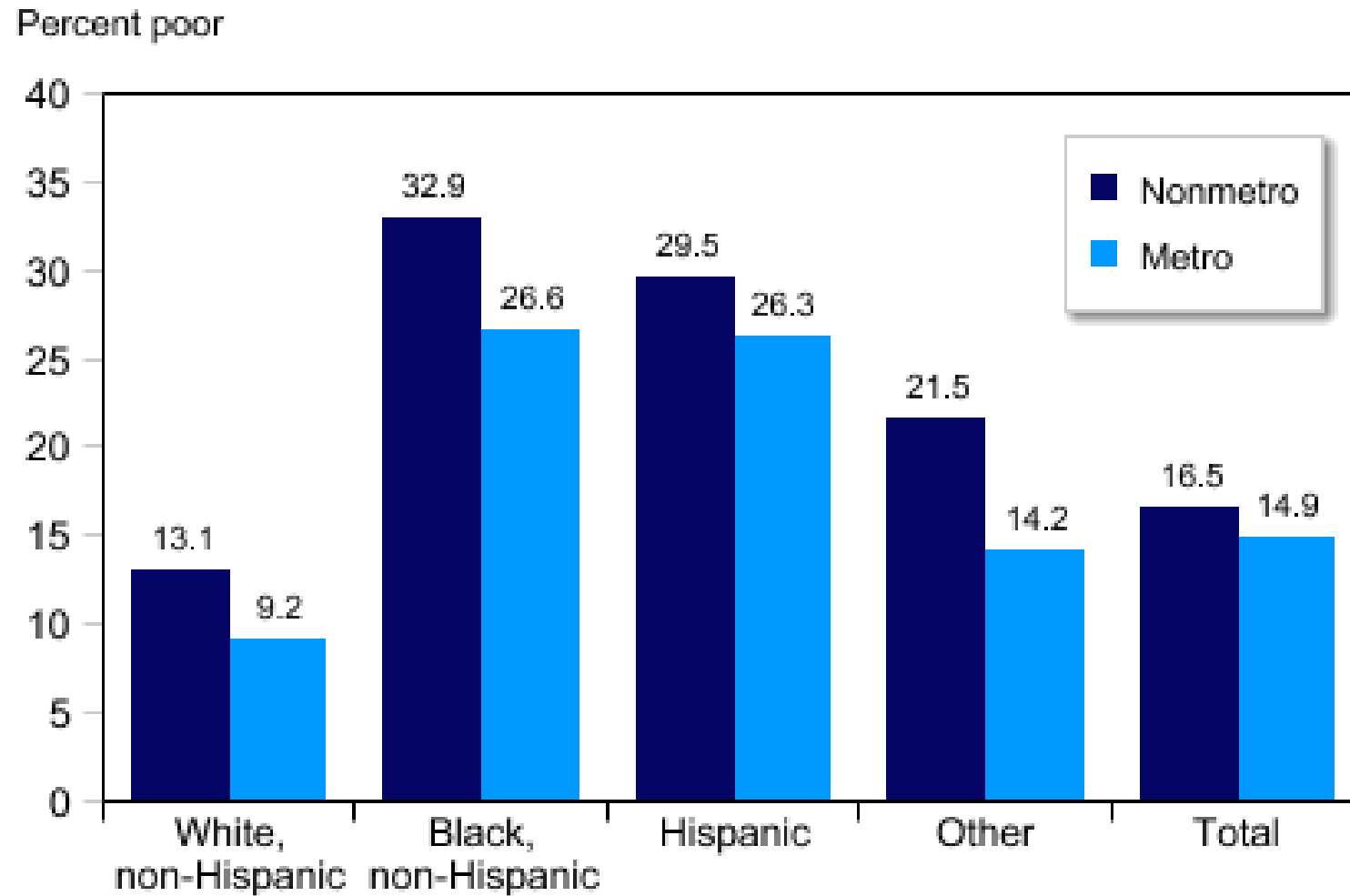
Derek Walcott

Look up a poem that matches one of the visual artists' images. How do artists inspire and collaborate? Does pairing a poem and an image help you understand the emotions of the artist and the poet better?



## Poverty rates by race/ethnicity and residence, 2010

*Non-Hispanic blacks have the highest rate of nonmetro poverty*



Source: Prepared by the Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 Current Population Survey, March Supplement.



US Census is being conducted in 2020

Once each locality reports to the US Gov. new graphs and current statistics may be found on line at :

[Census Bureau](https://www.census.gov)

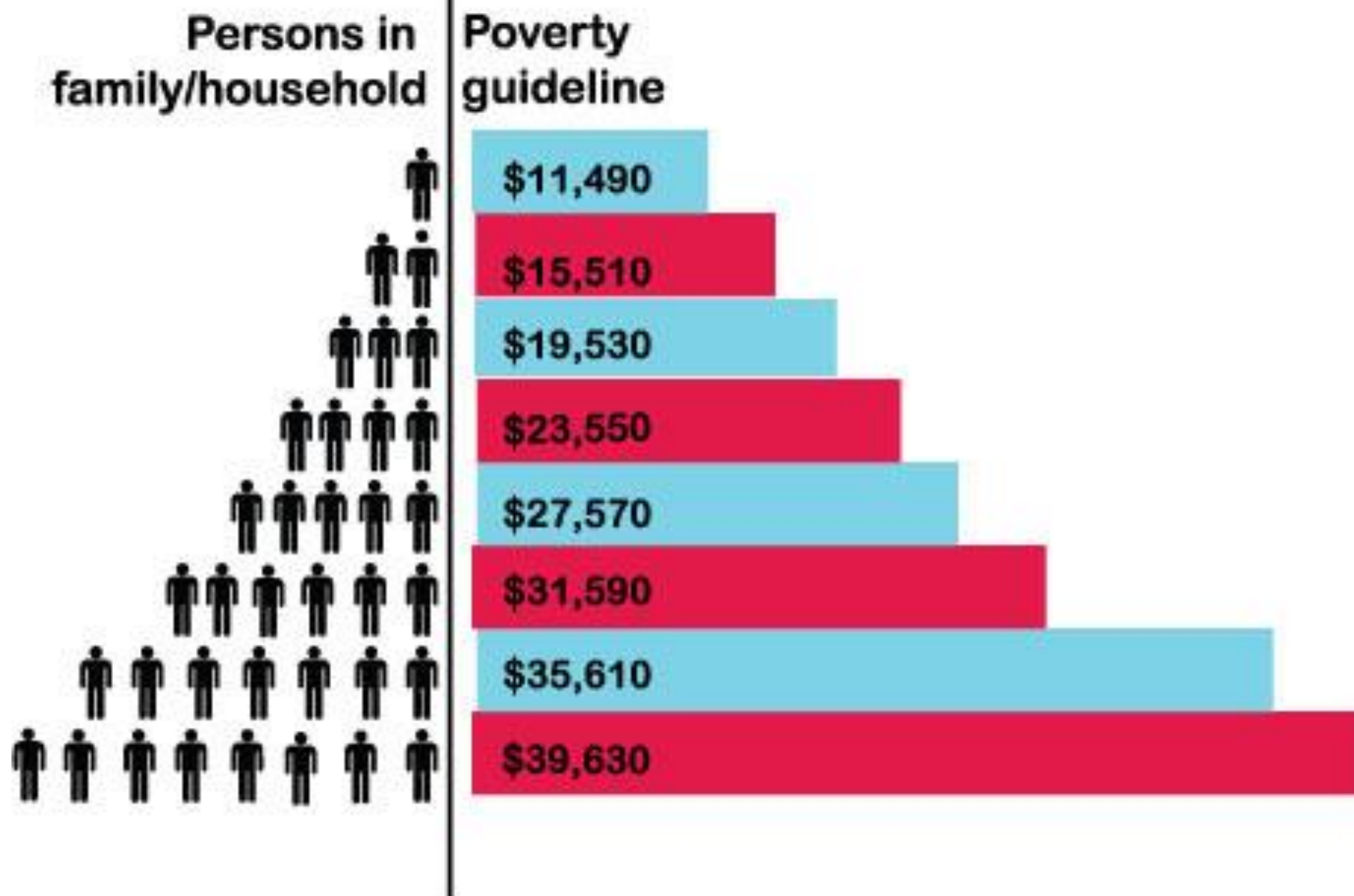
Statistical information is always in a state of flux.

➡ **Poverty Threshold** is the level of annual income which defines whether a person or family is in a poverty status, or simply, "in poverty". An income level below the poverty threshold means the person or family is in poverty; above the threshold and they are not considered as being in poverty.

	Annual income
One person household	\$12,784
Two person household	\$16,247
Three person household	\$19,985
Four person household	\$25,701
Five person household	\$30,459
Six person household	\$34,533

U.S. Poverty Threshold - Federal Safety Net  
[www.federalsafetynet.com/us-poverty-threshold.html](http://www.federalsafetynet.com/us-poverty-threshold.html)





## • Government Benefits | USAGov [www.usa.gov/benefits](http://www.usa.gov/benefits)

When Americans talk about people receiving public assistance – food stamps, disability, unemployment payments and other government help – they often have stereotypes and inaccurate perceptions of who those people are and what their lives are like.

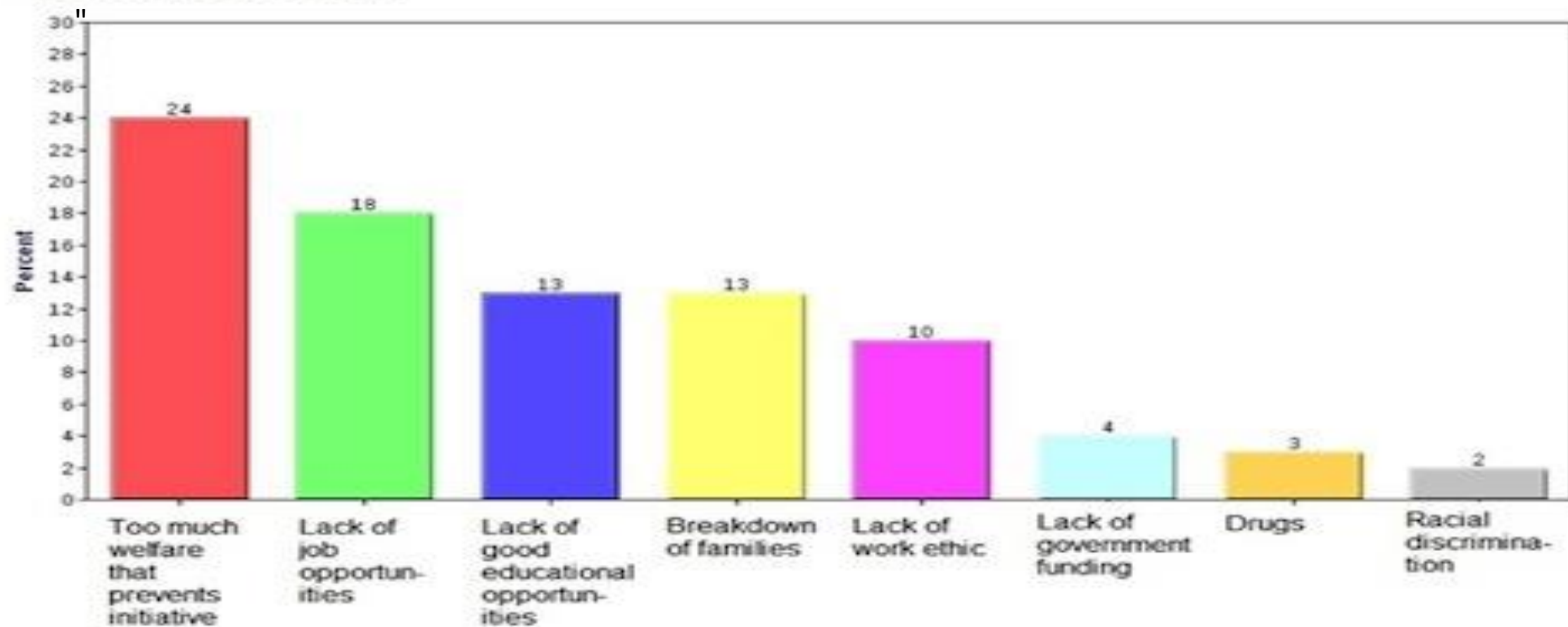
The reasons people find themselves needing assistance are numerous and interrelated. Many children born poor remain poor as they grow up and raise their own families, inheriting the financial hardships of the past as continued pressure in the present.

Millions of Americans still can't get a quality education, jobs that pay a living wage, affordable child care to offset low-wage labor or reliable transportation. But more than anything else, health problems emerged in our interviews as one of the most pervasive causes, and results, of poverty.



## Poverty in America

Which of the following reasons do you think is most responsible for the continuing problem of poverty?



Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, June 2013

Ronald Reagan employed the trope of the "**Welfare Queen**" in order to rally support for reform of the welfare system. During his initial bid for the Republican nomination in 1976, and again in 1980, Reagan constantly made reference to the "Welfare Queen" at his campaign rallies.

Welfare queen" is a **derogatory** term used in the United States to refer to women who **allegedly** misuse or collect excessive welfare payments through fraud, child endangerment, or manipulation.

These assistance programs are put in place to assist and protect the children and their future. If we deny support because of a “few bad apples” who bares the burden?



My family grew up relying on public assistance to help provide meals for our family. Child hunger in America is a real and often overlooked problem, but one that together, we can fix.

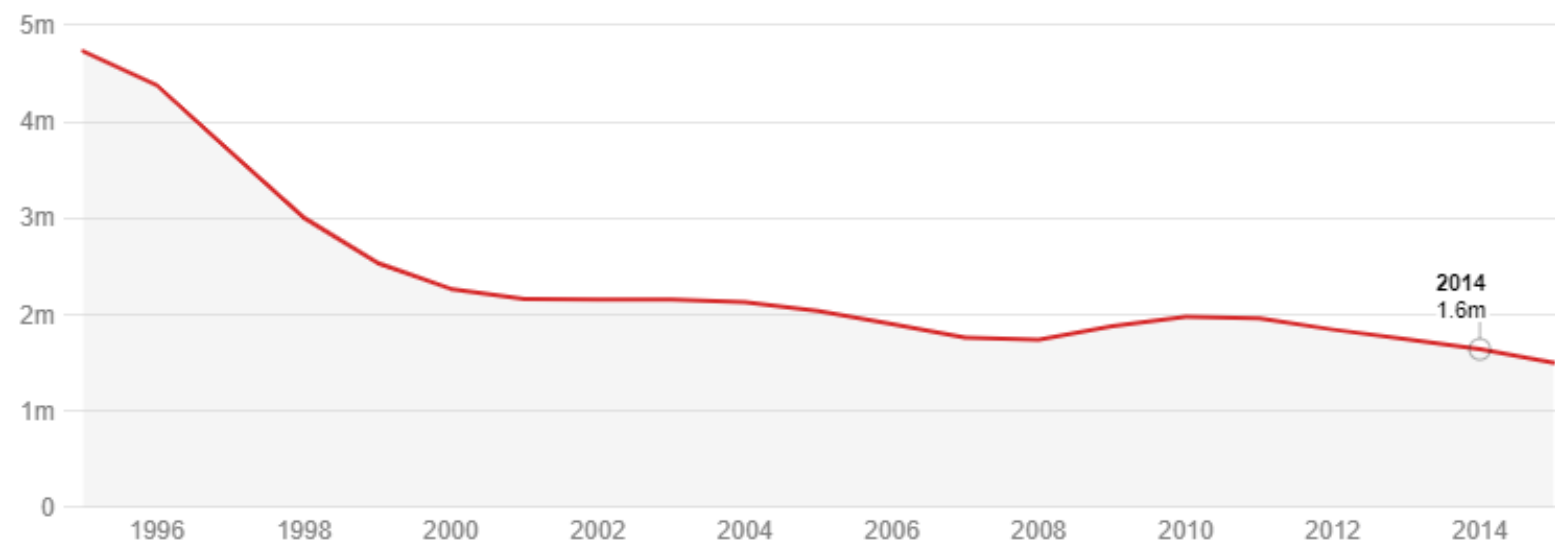
— Scarlett Johansson —

AZ QUOTES



## U.S. families who receive welfare

In the U.S., families have received welfare through AFDC benefits (before 1996) and TANF benefits (after 1996). At 1.5 million families in 2015, the number is at its lowest level in several decades.



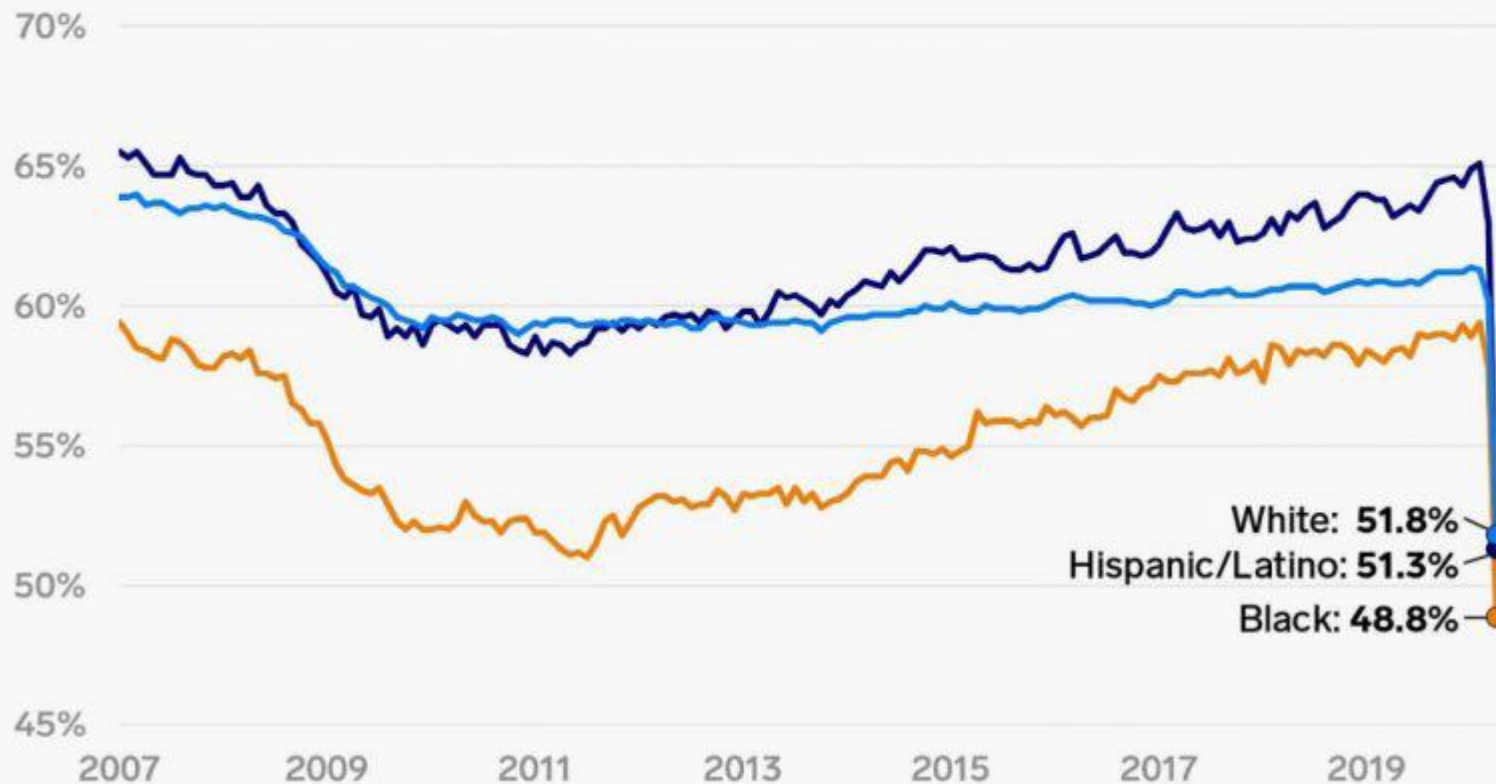
*The Conversation*, CC-BY-ND

Source: [Center for Budget and Policy Priorities](#)

# Employment-population ratio by race/ethnicity

White Black Hispanic/Latino

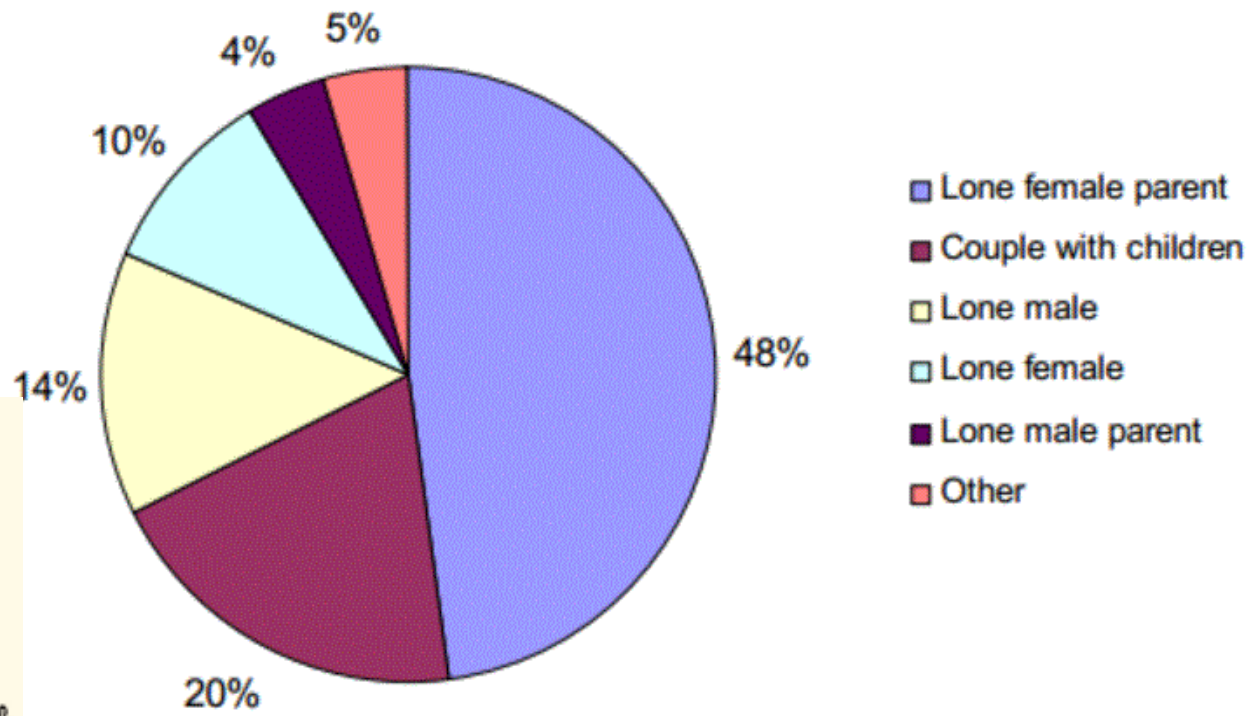
Percent of population with a job



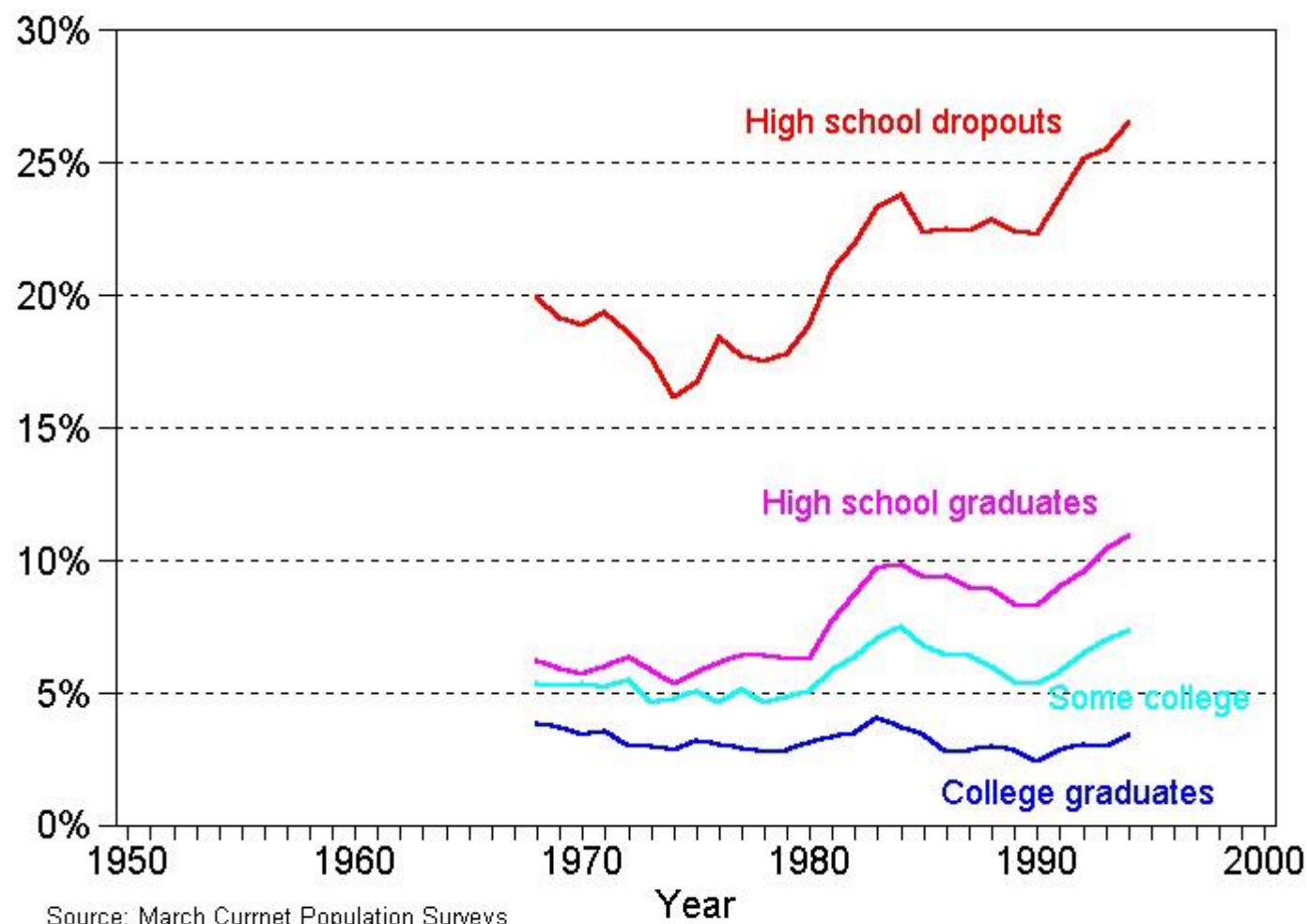
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED

BUSINESS INSIDER





# Poverty rates by education

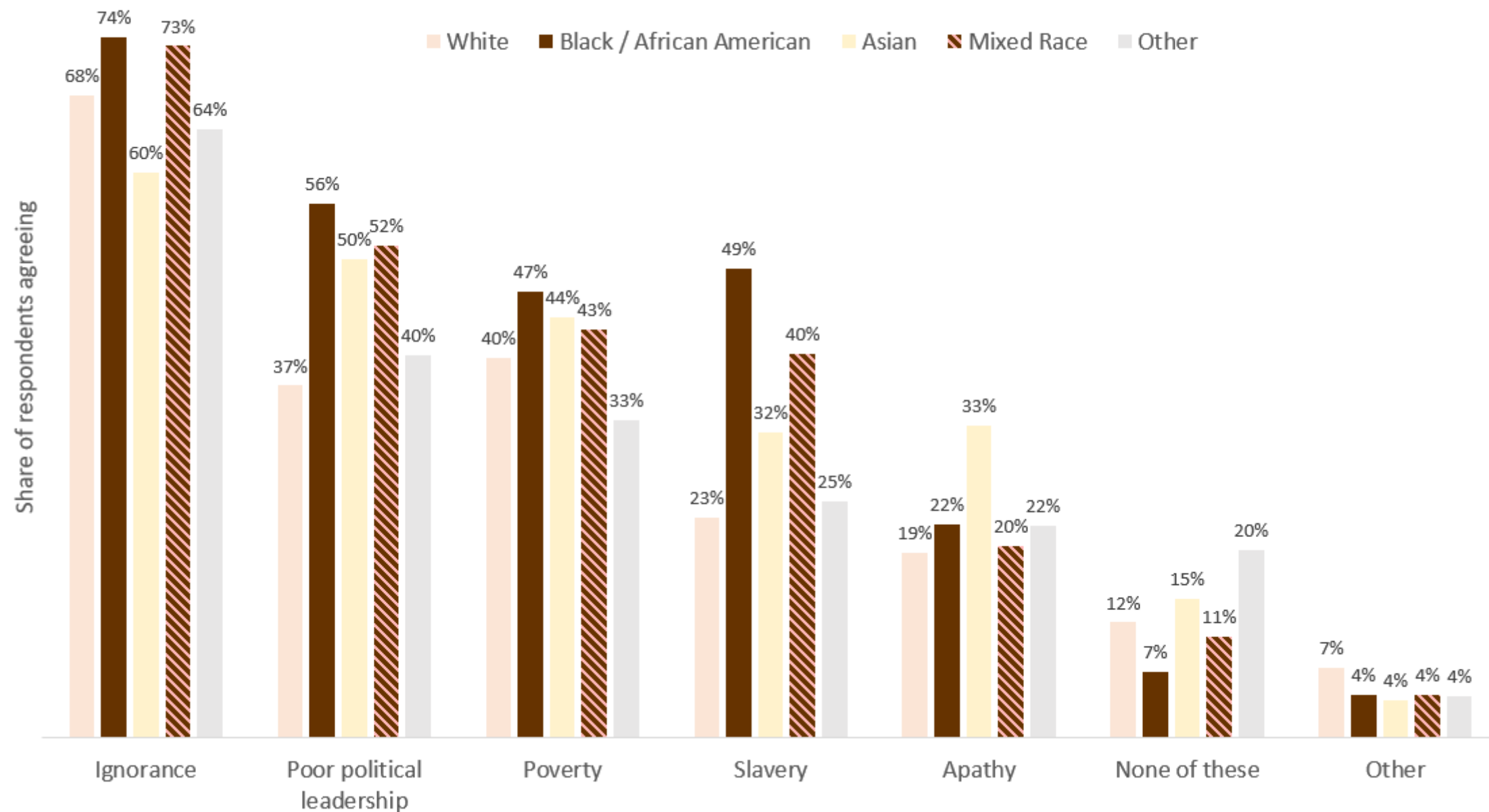


Source: March Current Population Surveys

Note: civilians 25 years and older



## What do you think might be some of the causes of racial bias?



These educational resource materials were created in 2020 by  
Paula Decker Benfer,  
artist and art educator,  
My Cellar Studio LLC.

<https://www.mycellarstudio.com/>

Images are all copyrighted materials and ONLY may be used for educational instruction.  
Images may not be reproduced for financial gain.

Contact the above artist if you wish to use the curriculum resources in this Power Point.

[mycellarstudio@gmail.com](mailto:mycellarstudio@gmail.com)

NBCT, with 36 years teaching art in the public schools of IA, MO, and OH

Listed of CMAB teaching artist roster, MN

Aroha Philanthropies teaching artist roster, MN

