META VAUX WARRICK FULLER
The Life Of An Artistic Woman

By

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CHAPTER 1
AN INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the work of Meta Warrick Fuller with the goal of clarifying her contributions to the world of African American art. There were three basic contributions. First, Fuller helped to create a new aesthetic that embraced Afrocentic images and themes. Fuller's positive images of African Americans were a departure from the caricatures popular at the turn of the century. She offered a new perspective of African Americans as thinking, feeling people with spiritual strength and quiet dignity. Mary Schmidt Campbell's The Harlem Renaissance: The Art of Black America describes Fuller as "an exemplar whose works were among the earliest examples of American art to reflect the formal exigencies of an aesthetic based on African sculpture. [She] memorialized the awakening defiance of her people" (27).

Second, by using art as a vehicle to publicly express sentiments that African Americans, silenced by threats and violence, could not verbalize, she helped effect a change in the social condition of African Americans. Like other artists of her day, Fuller's work reflected important contemporary issues. A number of her sculptures depicted the plight of newly arrived immigrants and other disadvantaged people. The most pressing issue for African Americans at the turn of the century was the rising number of lynchings occurring across the country. Compelled into action by the

escalating violence, Fuller directed her energies into creating a visual protest against the injustice. In Long Memory: The Black Experience in America, historians Mary Frances Berry and John W. Bassingame comment on the role that black artists played in effecting change in the nineteenth century:

> The black artist played a significant role in creating the preconditions for large-scale protest movements among Afro-Americans. Creative artists reflected the thoughts, moods, and feelings of Afro-Americans and [compelled] them to action. They shaped and transformed the collective consciousness of blacks with their prophecies and presentiments of the future. At the same time, they helped whites to understand the black situation, elicited sympathy from them, and helped to discourage them from using violence against Afro-Americans. (354)

Finally, by continuing to compete for commissions and portrait work, participating in public exhibitions, Fuller helped to break down barriers that prohibited black artists from being recognized as competent and gifted professional artists. In his essay *The Flowering of the Harlem Renaissance*, David Driskell comments "Fuller's art bridged the gap between a well established Black presence in European art circles and the gradual acceptance of the Black artists work at home" (Campbell 154).

Meta Warrick Fuller's work spans over seventy years. She was a prolific artist and the body of her work is quite expansive. My research focuses on Fuller's work from 1899 to 1919. The work that Meta Fuller produced during this 20-year period helped create an artistic environment ready to embrace the art of the Harlem Renaissance. Like Fuller, the Harlem Renaissance artists celebrated African and African American heritage in their work. Historian Mary Schmidt Campbell notes that "Meta Fuller was the first Black American artist to draw heavily on African themes and folktales for her subject matter" and refers to her as one of four pre-renaissance artist "Who helped establish a new tradition among Black American artists that affirmed both their individual and racial identities." (107)

I became aware of Meta Fuller's work in a Women's Studies class in which we were examining the art of women of color. The professor showed some works by African American women, including Fuller's Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence and The Talking Skull. I was very interested in the two pieces, but I was especially moved by Mary Turner, a sculpture depicting an attack on a pregnant Black woman by a mob of angry white men. I wanted to discover more about the woman who dared address this issue in 1919, the height of the Jim Crow era and one of the most violent periods in American history. I consulted the resources on African American art available in my university library to find more information about Meta Warrick Fuller. I found only a few brief references to Fuller's work and I was

puzzled that so little attention had been given to an artist whose work was so powerful.

In 1987, when Mary Schmidt Campbell's book The Harlem Renaissance: The Art of Black America was published, I was excited to discover that at last Fuller was receiving some attention. Campbell proclaimed Fuller "one of the most important precursors of the Renaissance" and included three color plates of her sculptures (Campbell 25).

I wanted to learn more about Fuller's work and determined to develop my Master's Degree thesis around the research.

Much attention has been given to the Harlem Renaissance period and the proliferation of work that was produced at that time. America was awakened to the rich cultural heritage that developed out of the African American experience. In his Anthology Voices From the Harlem Renaissance, historian Nathan Huggins speaks to what the Harlem Renaissance symbolizes:

> [...] the Harlem Renaissance has become a phenomenon marking something more than the fact that Afro-Americans wrote poems and stories, painted and sculpted and infused new life into the American theater. Rather, it symbolizes black liberation and sophistication--the final shaking off of the residuals of slavery, in the mind, spirit, and character. (3)

During the Harlem Renaissance a new aesthetic that was less dependent upon Euro-American values and one that acknowledged the proud heritage

of African ancestry emerged. The work of Meta Warrick Fuller was instrumental in establishing the foundation for this new aesthetic. Her noble treatment of the Black American not only helped set a new criteria for African American art that carried through to the Harlem Renaissance, but also had a lasting impact on the greater society. Historian Nathan Huggins explains the broader impact of art of the Harlem Renaissance:

> [...] the Harlem Renaissance stands for something more that the actual works of art it produced. Like all symbols, its primary significance is the deep emotional force it embodies, both for those of us whose experience it was and for those of us who find in it an important moment in our past. It is for us a principal emotional source, verifying our manliness and womanliness. Through the impact of it, we re-experience the triumph of that time and emerge as sensitive, sophisticated, complicated, and resourceful human beings who are capable of tolerance, co-operation, and love but who also have ample capacity for anger, hatred, resentment, and retaliation. The experience of the Harlem Renaissance tells us that we are to be taken seriously—by ourselves as well as by others. (Huggins 2, 4)

Fuller's contributions to African American art prior to the Harlem Renaissance and her efforts to become established as a respected working artist paved the way for the artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

Few African American artists of her day were recognized for their artistic talents, and many of those who were became expatriates in order to achieve and sustain success. Before, Emancipation, the artistic expression of African Americans was reflected in objects created for practical use. Blacks had little opportunity to create works of fine art. Availability of resources, demanding work schedules, and the skepticism of white patrons regarding the creative abilities of African Americans impeded progress (Bontemps 7). The work of a few fortunate artists like engraver Patrick Reason, a free Black man whose work was used in support of abolition, were able to achieve recognition.

During the Anti-Bellum period a number of artists of African descent like landscape painters Robert Scott Duncanson and Edward Bannister, sculptress (Mary) Edmonia Lewis, and the renowned painter Henry O. Tanner began to gain recognition. These early artists had much more to overcome than the simple mastery of artistic technique. Historian Margaret Just Butcher comments on their plight:

> The task of the early Negro artist was to prove to a skeptical world that the Negro could be an artist. That world did not know that the African had been a capable artist in his native culture and that, independent of European culture, he had built up his own techniques and traditions. It had the notion that for a Negro to aspire to the fine arts was ridiculous. Before 1865,

> any man or woman with artistic talent and ambition confronted an almost impossible barrier (214).

Few historians have examined the full contribution of Meta Warrick Fuller to African American art. In addition to the usual biographical information, only brief commentaries on her contributions can be found in books on the art of the Harlem Renaissance. The 1978 publication Art: African American, by Samella Lewis, proclaimed Fuller "a transitional figure in the history of black art"(55), and in the 1987 publication Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America, Historian Mary Schmidt Campbell states that Fuller was "one of the most important precursors of the Renaissance"(26). Still, the full value of her contributions is frequently overlooked. The 1993 publication A History Of African American Art From 1792 To The Present, written by Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson and is considered a definitive history of African American art, included this quote from painter Lois Mailou Jones, which clearly disregards the value of Fuller's contributions:

> Her work initially depicted suffering, pain, and despair in such powerful, symbolic terms that many found it disturbing. After her marriage to Dr. Solomon Fuller, America's first Black Psychiatrist, her work lost this character and its emotional impact. Jones attributed this loss to the influence of Dr. Fuller. "After her marriage she changed entirely. She then did busts and portraits." (14)

This paper is the result of my desire to learn more about Meta Warrick Fuller's lifetime struggle for respect and equal treatment as an American artist. I obtained funding from the Afro-American Studies Department for a research trip and traveled to Borne Massachusetts to interview Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr., the son of Meta Warrick Fuller. I spent two days interviewing Mr. Fuller and was able to view some small pieces of Meta Fuller's work that remain in his private collection. Mr. Fuller gave me access to the letters, journals, and a variety of other papers that had belonged to his mother. I was allowed to photocopy anything that I thought might be useful. Mr. Fuller also held a collection of antique glass slides that served as a photographic record of her sculpture. Later, Mr. Fuller arranged to have copies of the slides made for me to use as part of my research. The collection includes images of some of Fuller's early work that was destroyed in a warehouse fire in 1910 and other pieces that have since been lost or destroyed.

CHAPTER 2

A Brief Biography of Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller

Meta Vaux Warrick was born in the city of Philadelphia in 1877, into an unusually prosperous Black middle-class family. Her parents were from families that were among the Black elite of Philadelphia. They were very active in the Anti-slavery Association and other equal rights organizations. In 1865 William Warrick, Jr. and Emma Jones married and by the early 1870's William was a master barber with 12 journeymen under him in his shop in the prestigious Colonnade Hotel. Emma, who became a ladies hairdresser attended to the wives of William's clients who were among the most prominent white citizens of Philadelphia. During the summer months when these prominent whites vacationed in fashionable places like Cape Cod, the Warricks relocated their business in order to accommodate their well-paying customers (Campbell 27).

By the time Meta was born, her family was financially solvent and began to pursue cultural and social opportunities. Like many middle-class Black families of the period, the Warricks began by creating a home in which literature and art were highly valued. In Aristocrats of Color historian Willard B. Gatewood comments:

> The family and the home environment were keys to the perpetuation of the tradition of literacy and education bequeathed by antebellum forebears. Ambitious for their children, upper-class parents, like other Americans, were

> imbued with the idea that education was essential for a productive life. Not only did they preach the gospel of education and mount crusades for more and better black schools, but also they made great sacrifices to secure for their children the education they considered essential for success. (248)

The Warricks desired that their children have the same advantages as the children of their white clients and those of their social peers. They enrolled their children in the finest schools and educational programs that they could afford. In addition to creating a home environment that nurtured literacy and culture, they took their children to museums, concerts, and to the theater. Gatewood observes:

> Upper-class children grew up in homes in which books, magazines, music, and art were an important part of everyday life. When possible, the informal education of upper-class children included exposure to art galleries, museums, concerts, and the theatre. Upper-class homes often possessed sizable and well-selected libraries which included works by both white and black authors. Few such homes were without a piano, violin, or other musical instruments, and it was not uncommon for upper-class children to receive private instruction in music and ballroom dancing. On occasion children especially talented in music would perform at evening musicales held in

their parents' home. (248)

William Warrick knew the importance of early exposure to the fine arts, and he began taking Meta to the Philadelphia Museum before she was old enough to attend school (Kennedy 3). When Meta was six, she began attending the Locust Street Girl's School. Locust was an integrated school that accepted girls from the "colored caste," which was considered a different class of people from the "Negro" (Kerr 18). Later, Meta followed her sister Blanche in attending the Hollingsworth School, where she excelled in drawing and the visual arts. When the Warricks realized that Meta possessed artistic talent, the they did all that was possible to encourage her creativity. At the age of twelve, Meta was enrolled in the J. Liberty Tadd School of Industrial Arts where her sister Blanche had been a student. There she attended classes once a week in addition to her other academic studies.

Upon graduating from The Tadd School, Meta won a three-year scholarship to the Pennsylvania Museum School For Industrial Arts. There she learned the basic rudiments of art. She studied Industrial drawing, interior decorating and applied design. Meta's graphic work was often less than adequate and it soon became apparent that drawing was not the best medium for her artistic expression (Kerr 54). She also studied decorative sculpture. It was here that Meta began to feel a true artistic connection to the medium. At the end of her experience at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial arts, Meta's work received high acclaim. She became the recipient of the Crozer Prize, a high honor reserved for graduating students.

By then it was evident that she was truly gifted and she was encouraged by her fellow students and by her instructors to study abroad.

The family's decision whether or not to send Meta to Paris to study was complicated by the fact that her father had passed away during the time she studied at the Pennsylvania Museum School. His untimely death left the family well able to sustain their standard of living, but there was concern about managing additional financial responsibilities. Her father had also been the most ardent supporter of her artistic pursuits and without his influence Meta believed that Paris was out of the question (Dannett 33).

At Meta's commencement ceremony Paul Lachenmeyer, one of her professors, spoke to her family, convincing them that Meta could derive much benefit from studying abroad. With the encouragement of her professor and the added support of her aunt Mary Elizabeth Lewis, Meta was able to persuade her mother. One of Meta's uncles arranged for the renowned artist Henry O. Tanner, who was a close personal friend, to act as Meta's "guardian" during her Paris stay.

Henry Osawa Tanner was fast becoming the most noted African American Painter in Europe. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the son of an African American minister, Tanner studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia with Thomas Eakins. In 1889, Tanner went to Paris to study at the Academie Julien. Three years later, during a return visit to states, Tanner turned from landscape painting to genre painting, creating

one of his most well know works, the Banjo Lesson. Tanner's romantic depictions offered a new perspective on African American daily life (Driskell 50). Art historian David Driskell comments on the importance of Tanner's work:

> The life of Henry Tanner offers an important insight into the dichotomy in American society between race and the role of the artist in a democracy. With his autocratic spirit and immeasurable self-pride, Tanner asserted his right as an artist to be independent, a free agent. Unlike any earlier black American artist he informed the world that he could not be productive in a country where his skin color was equated with inferiority. Because he demanded acceptance based only on his indisputable talent he was determined to travel and study in those European centers where he could receive the encouragement he knew his work deserved. (50)
>
> Though Tanners work was gaining recognition from American art critics, he chose to return to Paris where he was free from the burden of racial discrimination. By 1899, when Meta came to Paris, Tanner had taken up permanent residence in Paris and was newly married to Jessie M. Olson, a white American woman (Driskell 53).

After spending a pleasant few days in London with family friends, Meta traveled on to Paris. Her welcome to the city of Paris was less that cordial.

Henry Tanner was not at the dock to meet her when she arrived. She took a taxi to the American Girls Club, where her lodging had been pre-arranged. Meta's stay at the American Girls Club was brief and humiliating. The directress, upon meeting Meta exclaimed, "you did not tell me that you were not a white girl!" After an exchange with the directress, Meta understood that the American Girls Club did not accept "colored girls" and that she would have to find other accommodations. Fortunately, by the time that Meta composed herself and turned to leave the club, Henry Tanner was there to rescue her. With Tanner's assistance, Meta found a small studio in which to live and work while studying at the Academie Colarossi (Dannett 33).

While in Paris, Meta had the good fortune to be recommended to the great sculptor Auguste Rodin as a perspective student. She carried a portfolio of sketches and a small piece of statuary to her appointment with Rodin. He was very impressed with the small sculpture that she brought and commented on her great potential. Rodin told her that he was unable to accept a new student at that time, but he did agree to serve as her mentor and periodically examine and critique her work. After receiving public praise from Rodin, Meta's work was highly acclaimed in Paris and was in great demand by art dealers through out the city. In 1902, Meta's work was exhibited at the L' Art Nouveau gallery, owned by Samuel Bing. Her success in Europe would be short lived. The time that Meta would have to return to the United States was rapidly approaching (Dannett 35).

Meta became re-acquainted with noted activist and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois during her stay in Paris. She was introduced to him a few years before leaving the states, but it was in Paris in 1900 that their relationship grew into a lasting friendship. She was re-introduced to Du Bois by a mutual friend, Thomas Calloway, who was organizing the Negro exhibit for the Paris Exposition, an event in which Fuller was participating. One evening during the Exposition, Du Bois appeared at her door in the company of Thomas Calloway and offered to escort her to the Exposition events for that evening to spare her the cost of subscription. Since Du Bois was speaking at the event, Fuller graciously accepted the invitation. Thereafter, she saw Calloway and Du Bois daily during the time of the exposition, joining the assembly of African American artists and scholars that were drawn to Paris where they were allowed to create in relative freedom. They often gathered for dinner, the theatre, or just an evening at someone's home (Kennedy 4).

Though European critics raved about her work in Paris, American critics were less receptive upon her return to the U. S., pronouncing her work "too domestic" to sell in a market where imported art was in demand. To Meta this harsh criticism was devastating emotionally and financially. The rejection of her work stifled her creativity and left her with little inspiration to work. This rejection also meant that since she could not make a living through the commission or sale of her work, she would remain dependent upon her family for support. Though her mother and Aunt Liz had supported her

artistic development, her they felt that, ultimately, she should marry well and settle into proper family life (Hoover 679).

Meta was encouraged when, upon the recommendation of Thomas Calloway, she was appointed a sculptor for the 1907 Jamestown Exposition's Negro Exhibition. Meta received a gold medal for the Warrick Tableaux. The exhibition brought Meta national attention and journalists from all over the country were competing for interviews. Meta was unable to take advantage of this positive turn of events because of a number of personal concerns that demanded her attention. Meta's maternal grandmother Margaret Jones became ill and Meta set her work aside to help with her care. In 1905, Meta became engaged and began planning a wedding. She spent a great deal of time corresponding by mail and telephone and traveling between Boston and Philadelphia to help her fiancé work out the complications of building a new house. In 1909, at the age of 32, Meta Vaux Warrick married Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller and moved to Framingham Massachusetts, where they would establish their permanent residence.

Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller was born in Monrovia Liberian 1872. Solomon's paternal grandfather, John Lewis Fuller, a former slave from Norfolk, Virginia, purchased his freedom and that of his wife, and sailed for Liberia where a colony for ex-slaves had been established. In Monrovia, the capitol city of Liberia, John Lewis Fuller built a prosperous business in carpentry. Eventually, in an effort to share his good fortune, he established an organization called the Charitable Mechanics Society of Monrovia, which

provided shelter and care for aged, handicapped and destitute carpenters. John Fuller had two sons, Thomas, a judge who became the Mayor of Monrovia, and Solomon, who began his career as a coffee planter and then became a high sheriff specializing in land claims.

Solomon, Jr. was a precocious student who was able to read Latin literature fluently at age ten and completing high school by the age of sixteen. At age 17, Solomon left Liberia to study at Livingston College in Salisbury, North Carolina. After obtaining a degree in Liberal Arts, Fuller attended Boston University School of Medicine, where he studied neurology, graduating in 1897. He accepted a position at the Westborough State Hospital for the insane where he became Chief of Pathology. After Westborough, Dr. Fuller taught at Boston University for many years and for a time, unofficial headed the school's Department of Neurology. When the University passed over Solomon to appoint a less accomplished white assistant professor to full professor and make him the department director, Dr. Fuller retired. Solomon Fuller was America's first African American psychiatrist. He is best known for his pioneering work in Alzheimer's research (Gale, Solomon 3).

The newlywed Meta set about establishing a proper home for Dr. Fuller and herself. Though he enjoyed her art and was proud of her accomplishments, Dr. Fuller considered Meta's art a pleasant hobby and did not encourage her to continue pursuing a career. Soon the responsibilities of a busy household

and growing family would complicate the creative process. Meta began a six-year hiatus from sculpting after the Jamestown Exposition that continued until 1913 (Hoover 679). During those years, Meta would experience a number of life-changing events.

In March of 1910, in the second year of their marriage, Meta and Solomon welcomed their first child, Solomon, Jr. to the family. Late that same year, Meta suffered an incredible loss when her life's work was destroyed in a warehouse fire in Philadelphia. Meta's second son, William Thomas was born in 1911, but also, that same year, her only sister Blanche Cardozo died. Meta retreated from sculpting and did not resume until 1913 when W. E. B. Du Bois insisted that she create a piece for the 50th celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Spirit of Emancipation, a pivotal work, was the result of Meta's effort (Kerr 193-197). Meta resumed working and directed her artistic abilities around home and family. In AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN: The Life and Art of Meta Warrick Fuller, historian Harriet Kennedy cites Meta's involvement in the Framingham and Boston communities:

> Meta returned to the church as an acceptable way of developing a life outside of her home, and her art focused increasingly on religious themes. Always involved in community activities, Meta began designing costumes for local theatrical groups and producing "living pictures" . . . She was a member of the Boston Art Club and honorary member of the

> Business and Professional Women's Club, and she became the only black president of Zonta, a women's service club. (Kennedy 5)

Meta built a studio near her home where she worked and taught for many years. She produced a number of sculptures that brought her national notice. In 1915 she won recognition for Peace Halting the Ruthlessness of War, a sculpture entered into a competition sponsored by the Women's Peace Party, and in 1922 she again received national recognition for Ethiopia Awakening, which was part of an exhibition for the Tanner League, held in Washington, D. C. In a biographical sketch of Fuller's life published by Biography Resource Center, it is notes:

> Although Fuller designed and created many works for shows, exhibitions, and eventual sales, her community and the black colleges were the beneficiaries of specially commissioned works and outright gifts. In Framingham there are prominent works in the public library, the hospital where Solomon Fuller served as staff consultant, and the church she attended. (Gale, Meta 2)

Meta Fuller died in 1968 at the age of ninety-one. In 1985, Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller was honored and celebrated when for the first time, an exhibition of the existing and available body of work was assembled at the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts (Kennedy 5).

CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES

The Black Elite Class

The environment, in which an artist lives and works, is an important factor in the development of perspective, attitude and artistic style. Economic standing, social class and race often dictate access to educational opportunity and resources for art making. Current events and social concerns, political discourse and opinion all played a part in shaping talent and work of Meta Warrick Fuller.

The Warricks became prominent citizens of the elite class of Black society living in Philadelphia at the turn of the century. These Black aristocrats enjoyed the status and comfort that exposure to education and financial resources afforded them. Many were descendents of slave-master relationship in which the master assumed responsibility for the off-spring. Some were descendents of free Blacks who had the good fortune never to have been held as slaves. They established livery stables, barbershops, catering services and other businesses that were patronized predominately by upper class white clientele. Encouraged by their prosperity, these Black entrepreneurs who were constantly exposed to the standard of living enjoyed by the white upper class, began to emulate the lifestyle.

In 1883 Willard B. Gatewood wrote about the elite class of African Americans:

> [. . .] the younger members of the black upper class possessed a "degree of culture unknown to the average white youth." Even more surprising . . . was the discovery that the black aristocrats resided in comfortable, tasteful homes and often employed one or more servants. (8)
>
> For middle-class African Americans of that period, civility and refinement were important in disproving the stereotypes of Black people as ignorant and savage. Men with financial resources provided their families with the best they could afford. Though they could not escape institutionalized discrimination, they were able to shield themselves from the daily brutalities of racism (Gatewood 8).

In The Philadelphia Negro, a study of the black aristocracy, W. E. B. Du Bois agrees with Gatewood. Du Bois states:

> "They lived in homes [that] exhibited good breeding and taste. Their social life revolved around small receptions, musical events, and private parties attended only by individuals of their own class." (100)

While the aristocrats were singled out as leaders and spokes persons of the Black community, they seldom had contact with Blacks of lower status. They were never found at ordinary assemblies of Negroes nor in their usual gathering places (100).

Since there were no hotels that would house Black visitors, it was expected that when important Blacks arrived in town, they would be guests of the prominent Black families of the city. Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr. remembers that his parents often hosted the most important Black leaders of the period.

> Blacks, no matter how prominent you were, couldn't go to a hotel and stay. So what you did, when you traveled from city to city was to contact the other prominent people in that city and you'd go to their houses and seek their hospitality [. . .] They would come to our house now, W. E. B. Du Bois, Harry Burley, who was a great musician [. . .] Now these people were commonplace to me because they were in our house all the time. (S. C. Fuller 6)

Solomon, Jr. remembers growing up in a household where prominent Blacks were frequent guests. Many of these guests like were people whose philosophies and actions greatly influenced social conditions for Black Americans for generations to come. Meta Fuller's exposure to these people had a profound and lasting influence upon her life and her work.

Rodin and the Paris Years

The sculptures that were created in Fuller's Paris years were extremely dramatic thematically and gained her a reputation as the "Sculptor of Horrors" (O'Donnell 1139). Many of the figures that were produced in this period were depictions of pain and suffering, an unusual focus for an artist so

young. These gruesome themes permeated the bulk of the art produced by Fuller at this period in her life.

When the artist herself was asked about these themes, she answered that she was fascinated by the horror stories her grandfather and brother would tell her when she was a child, and indicated that she was intrigued rather that frightened by them. She was interested in exploring horror, fear and other powerful emotions through her art. When asked to comment on the fact that often her work was pronounced "ugly", Fuller indicated that she felt that it was spiritually expressive. It is reported that she remarked, "Truly, interpretation of this work cannot come from merely assessing the physical values of the piece, but the spiritual quality must be given a more than equal share of consideration" (Bontemps 22).

In studying Fuller's work, one can see a concentrated usage of this theme matter in the early part of her career, from approximately 1899 until 1910. During this period, she produced Secret Sorrow (or Man Eating His Heart), Oedipus, The Wretched, and Man Carrying Corps. (Campbell17) These sculptures contain images of tortured beings in agony and confusion. They appear to be painted plaster, a medium in which Fuller often worked. The surfaces of the pieces are highly textured, adding to the foreboding spirit of the works. The figures are impressionistic, without fine detailing of features. In each piece, the characters depicted are in submissive postures; some kneeling and some crouching, implying their oppressed condition. All of the subjects depicted in these pieces are Caucasian.

At the time that Fuller created these pieces, Reconstruction in the South was in full flower and the process of disenfranchisement was well underway. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan and other white racist organizations meant that Southern Blacks were being lynched with regularity. The horror and outrage that was felt within the Black community because of these violent acts, profoundly effected every Black American and found expression in Fuller's work.

No doubt Meta's association with the great Auguste Rodin had a profound effect on her work. Considered to be the most important sculptor of the twentieth century, Auguste Rodin was at the height of his career at the time of their meeting. By the late 1800's he had received wide acclaim and was revered and respected internationally (Champigneulle 1967). His greatest innovation as a sculptor rested in his presentation of the detail, a torso, head, or appendage as a finished work of art.

> No sculptor before Rodin had deliberately made an independent torso (apart from Rude's Christ on the Cross). By the time Rodin presented the torso to the public in 1888, he had opened up a whole new sculptural field, that of the incomplete figure, which gained its expressive focus through omission. (Janson 483)

Rodin had just completed the most challenging work of his career during the time that he was Meta Fuller's mentor. Begun in 1880, The Gates of Hell, a work based on Dante's book The Inferno, consists of a number of

panels containing images that depict the degradation of the damned. One of Rodin's most noted sculptures, The Thinker is part of this monumental work.

The influence of Rodin is apparent in many of Fuller's early pieces. Historian Judith Kerr notes that Meta Fuller herself recognized the similarities in a piece of sculpture that she had created:

> She had almost finished it when she happened to see a photograph of Rodin's She Who Was Once The Helmet-Maker's Beautiful Wife in a magazine. When Meta realized how much The Scandalmonger resembled Rodin's "Old Beauty" she feared that the admiration she felt for the master sculptor had led her, subconsciously, to recreate his figure in her own. Without hesitation, Meta seized a mallet and destroyed her statue with one blow (145).

In an article published in the Negro History Bulletin, historian Velma Hoover, who interviewed Meta Fuller in 1977, notes a change in the artistic style of Meta Fuller. Hoover indicates that Fuller felt a need for social acceptance in her personal life and in her artistic endeavors. She believed that the experience of being oppressed as a Black woman in the United States as well as in Europe and the frustration of being rejected by American art critics, caused Fuller to subconsciously redirect the thematic emphasis of her art away for the "gruesome" to more palatable themes (Hoover 679).

The departure from themes of the "horrible" and the impressionistic style observed in her earlier work might also be attributed to Fuller's exposure to the progressive ideals of the proponents of the Pan African Movement and the new political and ethnic consciousness that was developing among people of color.

Domestic Life

The impact of domestic life must also be taken into consideration when examining the life of a married woman with a family living at turn of the century. The weight of familial responsibility had a great impact on the art of Meta Warrick Fuller. The demands of domestic life increased as her family grew. Meta was the wife of a prominent psychiatrist whose reputation and position brought with it certain social obligations.

Dr. Fuller's pioneering work in neuropathology and the study of Alzheimer's disease brought many prominent physicians to their home. As one of the most prominent African American families in the Boston area, the Fuller's were often called upon to extend hospitality to friends who, because of their race, would be denied lodging in local hotels. Additionally, Meta's social standing dictated certain social obligations. She was expected to lend her time, talent, knowledge and financial resources to community service and volunteering. These obligations could not be ignored because they affected the community's perception and acceptance of the Fuller family. A dutiful wife and mother was expected to manage the home and family so that her

husband could concentrate on his career. The Fuller's had three children the death of her sister Blanche in 1911, Meta also assumed responsibility for raising her niece in addition to her own sons (Kerr 195).

Though the Fuller's could afford domestic help, Meta's lack of skill in organizing the house and delegating work meant that they were often without the help they desperately needed. This compounded her frustration and left her feeling that it was impossible to find the time and space to sculpt. Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr., recalls:

> [. . .] Mother didn't do any housekeeping, which wasn't ladylike, it was simply that. Now Mother could paint a room and decorate it in one damn day, when most people take a week! And it would be done right. But she wouldn't bother cleaning. [. . .] But I can remember we had some of these women ironing, washing and [the] cleaning. Because Mother was not a good housekeeper, the cleaning was inferior. In other words, you have to be a good organizer to operate a servant. And if you don't set some standards, it isn't going to do it. (S.C. Fuller 4-5)

Her devastation over the warehouse fire of 1910 to which much of her life's work was lost and the death of her only sister the following year, her grief and despair was such that she was unable to work. When friends tried to encourage her to resume her work, she would respond that she was too busy (Kerr 195).

During this very busy time in Meta's life, she found ways to incorporate artistic expression into daily living. Solomon, Jr. remembers that his mother engaged the whole family in gift making during the holidays:

> [. . .] at Christmas time, Mother used to send these relief things out as Christmas cards. Little plaster things that she would do. Dry them on all the radiators, all over the house we'd be drying them and then she'd put shellac on them and the smell of turpentine and paint was always a Christmas thing in our house. And Dad participated in all of this. He was always right along with the creation of these things and the little things that we made for her to give our friends (S. C. Fuller 3).

Meta Fuller was a woman of strong religious conviction and was always very active in her church. She was a member of the Alter Guild and sometimes sang in the choir. She was particularly gifted at producing religious plays and dramas, many of which were well, attend by the Framingham community. Solomon, Jr. recalls that her annual production of the Service of Lights during the Feast of the Epiphany became one of the highlights of the season:

> [. . .] she costumed all the characters and put together a perfectly marvelous religious drama which was symbolic of the history of the church, the nativity and the Apostles, priest and deacons. In other words she put the whole history into this [pageant]. Beautifully done and everybody leaves church with

> a candle. And in those days the idea was to bring the candle home and keep it lighted. If the candle went out on the way home, someone re-light for you who [were] traveling. It was really terrific, the notion of Christian impact. How one lights another and how we nourish each other (S. C. Fuller 9).

Fuller would not resume sculpting until 1913, when W. E. B. Du Bois demanded that she create a sculpture for New York State's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (Ovington 195).

The Colored Women's Club Movement And Women's Suffrage

Meta Fuller was acquainted with many of the most influential and powerful African American women of her day. Black women like Angela Grimke, who were politically active at the turn of the century helped define the values and attitudes by which women of their race and class conducted their lives. Inspired by the success of the Women's Suffrage Movement African American Women began to organize to effect social change for their communities. Many like Meta Fuller joined local suffrage leagues. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs played a pivotal role in the development and of the Black community:

> The lesson that Black women were trying to impart was that color, class, or the experience of slavery did not nullify the moral strength of true womanhood. Echoing Maria Stewart's ideas, expressed more than fifty years earlier, Black activists

> attempted to push American consciousness beyond the class and race prejudice that marked Victorian thinking, toward modernist ideas and attitudes. "The moral aptitudes of our women," proclaimed [Fannie Barrier] Williams "are just as strong and just as weak as that of any other American women with like advantages and environment. (Giddings 88)

The idea of regaining voting rights for Black people, male or female had immediate appeal for Black women activists, since voting was a right that had been withheld from Blacks since the end of the Reconstruction Period. Black women organized suffrage groups, which aided in door-to-door voter registration. Colored Women's Clubs throughout the country held lectures, securing important speakers to rally support for women's suffrage, Though there were some detractors, on the whole, the idea of Black women gaining the vote was widely accepted in the Black community as a positive step. (Giddings120)

In his book Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite Willard B. Gatewood writes about the development of the Colored Women's Club Movement:

> The proliferation of black women's clubs, coupled with the example set by white women, prompted upper-class black Washington and Boston to initiate movements that ultimately led to the formation of a national federation of black women's clubs. The Colored Women's League, organized in

> Washington in 1892 was the creation of the District female aristocrats of color. (242)

"Lifting as we climb" was their motto and, indeed, they sought to rise above the dehumanization and genocide that threatened to exterminate their race. Most of the leaders of the Colored Women's Club movement were Black women from privileged backgrounds. They were college educated women who's families owned their own businesses or had invested wisely and were financially well off.

White politicians, on the other hand, were not at all enthusiastic about voter rights for Black women. In fact, the idea was frightening. If Black women joined forces with white women, as indeed, the seemed to be doing, the center of power would shift from the hands of "capable white males" and women would be the controlling factor in the political arena. To put an end to this dangerous situation, they proposed a compromise: a guaranteed passage of the Suffrage Amendment provided the request for voting rights for Black women be dropped from the proposal. In 1916, in order to save their amendment from defeat, white suffrage leaders abandoned the cause of Black women within the movement. These women who had worked so hard to further the cause of women's suffrage felt betrayed and used by their white co-workers (Giddings 120).

This betrayal profoundly effected Fuller, as she was an avid supporter of the movement and actively supported the Women's Peace Party and the

Equal Suffrage Movement. However, when she realized that the suffrage effort would succeed and that African Americans were still being systematically stripped of their rights, she became disillusioned.

Race And Political Influences

During the early 1900's African Americans in the United States were experiencing devastating setbacks. Politicians at every level in the south advocated the revocation of rights extended to blacks during Reconstruction. Violence and terror reigned through out the South. Between 1882 and 1900 some 3,011 lynchings occurred in the United States, mostly in the South where most of the victims were Black.

> From 1890 to 1920 southern politicians subordinated almost all other issues to that of white supremacy. The black was pilloried in a virtual bacchanalia of racism. The most infamous of the degenerate crew were James K. Vardaman of Mississippi and Cole Blaease and Ben Tillman of South Carolina . . . In 1908 Vardaman asserted that the very idea that the black was human and thus capable of improvement was "the most damnable and dangerous doctrine . . . in America." The even more despicable " Blaease argued, " In the Bible history and in all profane history, you will find that the superior race has ruled and controlled: and the white people of this

country are going to rule it, and control it, if it be necessary, to wipe the black race off the face of the earth. (Berry 348)

Extremists were determined to roll back the freedom extended to blacks at Reconstruction, and many felt there was no price too great. The rise of Jim Crow mentality had a negative impact on the American art scene. Many white artists who could no longer draw on themes of everyday life in American for subject matter turned to impressionism and themes of nature rather than portraying the American social condition. Others chose Europe as a safe-haven.

Eventually these same general developments in American art had a profound impact on the work of Black artists, but Black creativity in the fine arts was virtually smothered during the two decades that followed the end of Reconstruction in 1876. Consequently, the full weight of their impact was delayed (Bontemps 19).

The philosophies of two men had a profound effect on African Americans at the turn of the century. Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois each represented different segments of the African American population. Seeing the destitute conditions under which southern Blacks lived fueled Washington's belief that economic survival must come before the quest for civil rights. Self-help and economic stability within the Black community were the cornerstones of his philosophy. In order for Black people to build a strong economic base they must amass capitol as quickly as possible. He

advocated the creation of vocational schools to give Blacks the skills necessary to seek gainful employment. The pursuit of intellectual endeavor, i.e., university education and social equity would be premature according to Washington's theory.

Du Bois felt that it was essential for Blacks to seek equality early on and obtain education in professions like law, medicine and public administration so that the black community would not be dependent on whites for leadership. He advocated the creation of a "Talented Tenth", a group of African Americans who would lead others into social and economic prosperity (Olson 305).

THE ART OF META VAUX WARRICK FULLER

Making A Living: Commissions and Portraiture

During the years immediately following her return to the United States, Fuller remained in contact with the Bing Gallery, which had exhibited and sold her work in Paris. She continued to create figurines that were similar in style to the pieces that had been so well received Paris, but was unsuccessful in persuading local galleries to purchase her work.

In 1907, upon the recommendation of Thomas Calloway, Meta Fuller received her first commission. The Jamestown Tercentenial Exposition requested that she create an exhibit illustrating the progress of the Negro. Fuller created a 15-scene installation, known as the Warrick Tableaux. The tableaux depicted the progress of the African American people from the time of the Jamestown settlement to 1900 and included a number of painted and dressed figurines. The tableaux was well received and Meta was awarded the gold medal for her efforts. The Jamestown Exposition brought Fuller national recognition and should have set the stage for an extremely successful career in the visual arts (Dannett 36). Unfortunately, Meta's success at the Exposition did not translate into lucrative commissions and requests for her work from local galleries.

While race played an important part in Fuller's lack of success with local galleries, other factors also affected the acceptance of her work. By the end of the nineteenth century, the monumental pubic statuary of Beaux-Arts

sculptors like Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Daniel Chester French and Frederick MacMonnies dominated American sculpture:

> Consequently, because the public had been conditioned to visualize sculpture only on a grandiose scale, it no longer wanted small, home pieces. And, because it had been conditioned to think sculpture should only reflect lofty and heroic ideals, it now considered realistic genre statuary, particularly if it were based on social observation, to be ugly and uninspiring. (Kerr 154)

The diminishing demand for the kind of work that Fuller was creating coupled with the discrimination she experienced at the hands of American gallery owners had a devastating effect on Fuller's creativity.

After experiencing rejection by various galleries her in the United States, Fuller resolved to succeed in the quest for respect and recognition as a professional artist. She worked diligently to improve her skills, taking an occasional class at her Alma Mater the Pennsylvania Museum and School for Industrial Art. There, Fuller continued to do award-winning work, winning the Battle Prize for pottery in 1904 and where she was asked to join the Board of Control (Kerr 143).

She waged her own private war against the prejudice and discrimination that she encountered in the art market. By entering national art competitions, competing for commissions, seeking portrait work and participating in public

and private exhibitions she fought for the right of every African American artist to earn a living through their artwork.

The work of securing paid commissions was rigorous. In the early years following her return from Paris, she answered as many calls for proposals as she could manage. In an effort to generate more work, she wrote government agencies and private foundations with project proposals for public statuary (Kerr 231). Many of these proposals were denied, but Fuller was able to keep her work in the public eye by contributing memorial pieces and commemorative works to private and public agencies.

Additionally, she successfully gained membership into a few prestigious organizations like the Boston Art Club, the Wellesley Society of Artists, the Women's Club, and the Civic League, organizations that had never before admitted people of color (Campbell 177). Obtaining membership and acceptance into these organizations was a double victory for Fuller: a blow for integration, breaking through the color line of segregated organizations, and gaining access to a network of people who could influence the demand for her work in Boston and the surrounding community.

Despite attempts to expand her scope, Fuller's greatest following was within the Black community. She focused on producing works that were positive representations of African Americans. Some of the sculptures were commissions and some were done out of passion for the work and sense of responsibility to the race.

Portraiture can be an important art and useful art form. Arna Bontemps makes this observation in the 1980 publication Forever Free: Art By African American Women 1862-198:

> Portraiture, after all, was the most direct means available to those black artist who wanted to respond to the demeaning and distorted images of black life and character that white America had nourished so carefully for nearly four centuries, a racist tradition that gathered renewed intensity in the quarter of a century preceding the first world war." (Bontemps 21)

Fuller was most certainly interested in creating positive images of African Americans, and though she insisted that she would not like to confine her work to producing only "Negro types" as Du Bois had once suggested, she was clearly affected by the rhetoric of the Pan-African Movement (Kennedy 4).

An Afrocentric Aesthetic

The Spirit Of Emancipation

In 1913 W. E. B. Du Bois, a personal friend of Fuller since Paris, requested that she render a sculpture for a celebration to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in New York. Though Meta had been busy with home and family and had not sculpted for a time, she cleared a workspace in the cellar and produced a powerful work called

The Spirit of Emancipation (or Humanity Freeing the Slaves Youth and Maiden) (Hine158).

Emancipation (figure 1 and 2) is a pivotal work in the career of Meta Warrick Fuller. Heretofore, she had resisted suggestions from Du Bois that she should make a specialty of "Negro-types" (Kennedy 4). Standing eight feet tall, the sculpture consists of three full figures; the "youth," the maiden," and "humanity." The figures are not the tortured, crouching figures present in Fuller's earlier works, but are strong stoic figures in frontal presentation with heads raised, shoulders square, and feet planted firmly on the ground, their backs are against a sturdy tree trunk, upon which the figure of "Humanity" leans her head as she weeps. A caption under a photograph of the work, which appeared in Crisis Magazine reads, "Humanity weeping over her suddenly freed children, who beneath the gnarled fingers of fate, step into the world unafraid" (1914). The texture of this piece is smooth and refined and more romantic in style, a departure from the impressionism of earlier pieces, and there is great detail in the facial features and physical characteristics of each figure.

Emancipation signifies a change in the perspective reflected in Fuller's art. Fuller made a conscious choice to portray ethnic pride and dignity rather that the pain and suffering endured by African Americans. After the production of The Spirit of Emancipation, Fuller's work became more sophisticated and stately in appearance. It was as if she herself had been

freed of the oppression that inspired her to create the tortured and constricted figures in her earlier work (Kennedy 3).

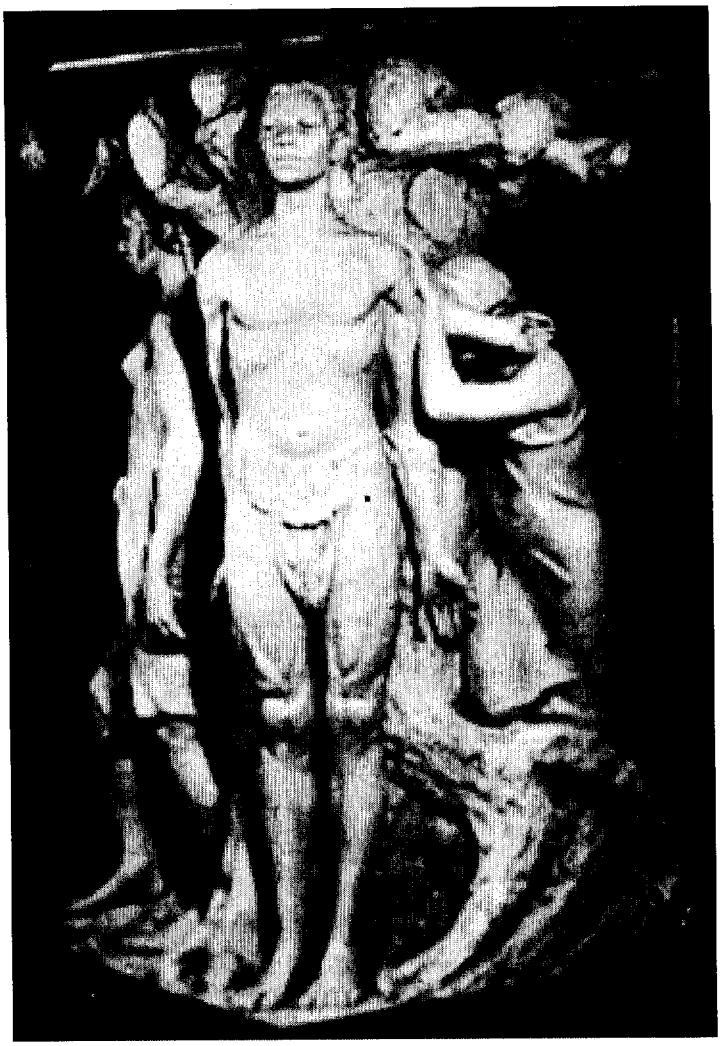

Figure 1.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Emancipation, 1919

freed of the oppression that inspired her to create the tortured and constricted figures in her earlier work (Kennedy 3).

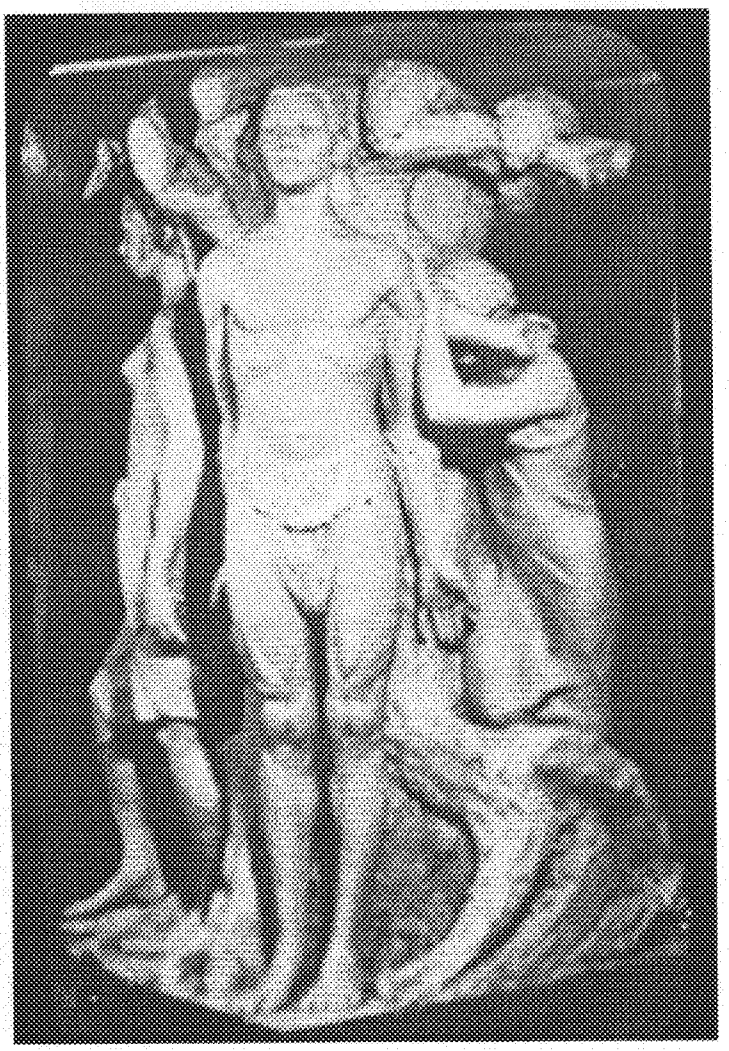

Figure 1.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Emancipation, 1919

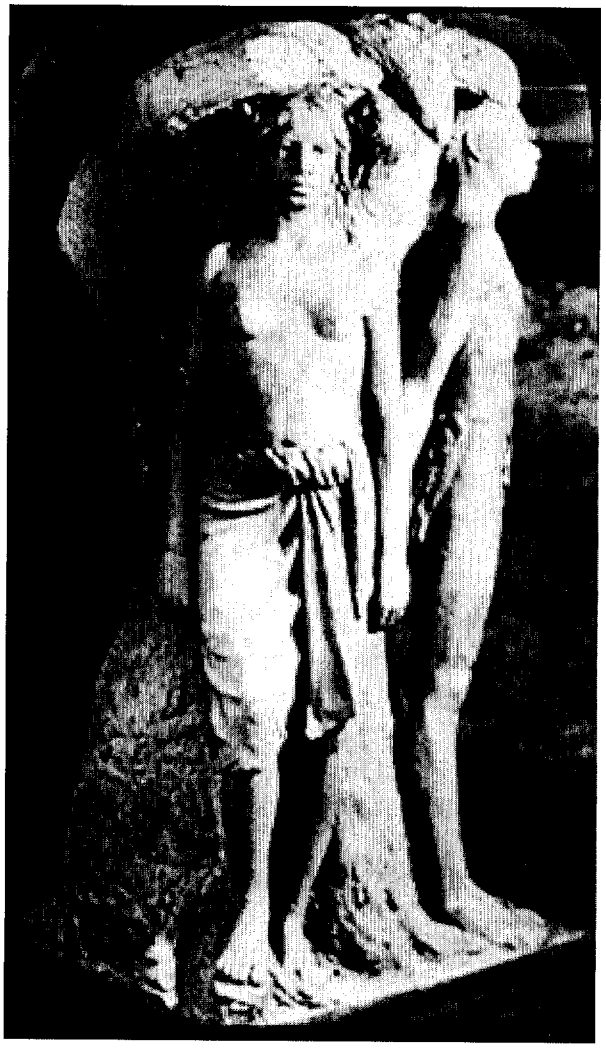

Figure 2.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Emancipation, 1919

The Spirit of Emancipation was included in an exhibit of Fuller's work held at the Boston Public Library in 1914. This first public exhibit of her work since 1909 also included Menelik II of Abyssinia and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, two sculptures created to memorialize men who were important to the African American community.

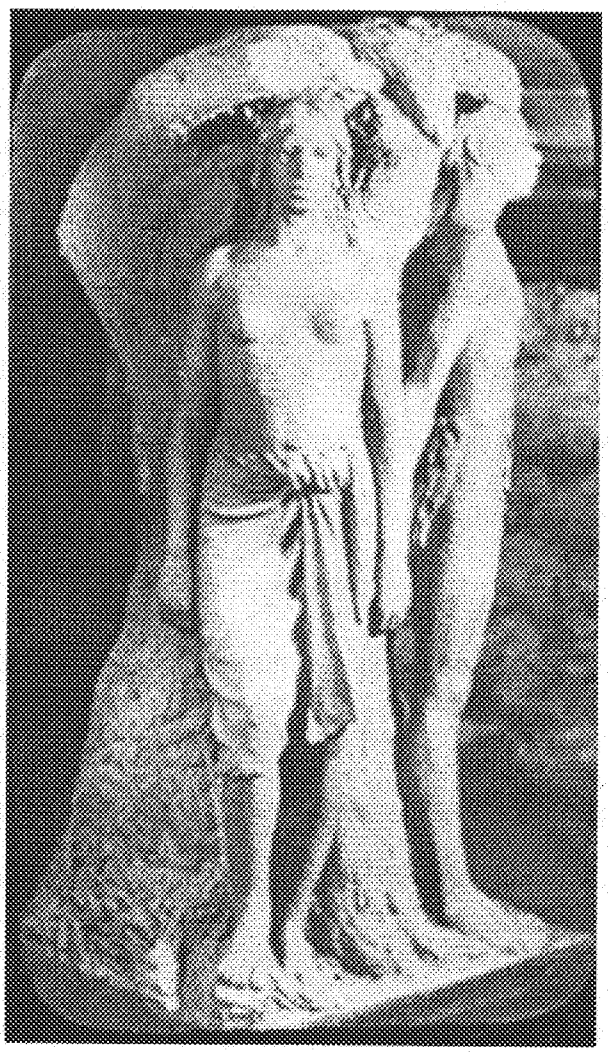

Figure 2.
Mela Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Emancipation, 1919

The Spirit of Emancipation was included in an exhibit of Fuller's work held at the Boston Public Library in 1914. This first public exhibit of her work since 1909 also included Menelik II of Abyssinia and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, two sculptures created to memorialize men who were important to the African American community.

Menelik II, who died in 1913, was the Emperor who united Ethiopia and led the defeated of the Italian army in 1896. After securing recognition of Ethiopia's independence from European powers, he founded the city of Addis Ababa. The success of the Ethiopian Empire was a point of pride throughout the African Diaspora, especially in America, where the struggle for civil rights was on going. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who died the year before, was of English and African parentage, and was the first black composer to receive international acclaim as a classical composer. African American's felt a sense of pride in his accomplishments. His music was widely popular and his pre-mature death at the age of thirty-seven saddened many (Kerr 204-211). These two sculptures demonstrate Fuller's deep involvement with issues that concerned the African American community and her continued commitment to create positive images of African Americans in her art.

Ethiopia Awakening

Ethiopia Awakening (figure 3) is the visual realization of the profound prophecy, *"princes shall come out of Egypt". Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto god."* quoted from the book of Psalms. Created by Fuller in 1914, Ethiopia symbolizes the beginning of a new era in African American consciousness. The sculpture stands sixty-seven inches high; the stately image of a graceful Black queen, regal and elegant. The presentation of this piece is frontal, giving it power and directness. The face of the queen is turned to the left, adding a distinctly feminine quality and accentuation the flow of the Egyptian headdress she wears. The right hand of the figure is

placed over her heart, in a patriotic manner, and her eyes are open, not closed, indicating that she is fully conscious and aware. The torso of the figure is soft, with gracefully draped garments about the head and shoulders, and though very erect, she is relaxed and tension free. The lower portion of the figure is bound, with feet together, in a mummy-like fashion. The freedom of the upper appendages implies an impending total freedom.

Though Ethiopia was created in the neo-classic style, the image that Fuller presents is unlike any work produced by Black artists prior to its creation. In an era when most Black artists avoided ethnic themes, Fuller embraced the African American figure, and used it's image to make a political statement. W. E. B. Du Bois' Pan-Africanist philosophies may have inspired Fuller to create this powerful sculpture. Du Bois felt that Black art should be more than just "art for arts' sake." According to Du Bois, art should be propaganda, promoting positive images of the "Afro-American." Pan-Africanist ideals added another dimension to this work. The awakening of the Black queen also symbolized Fuller's own awakening; an awakening she desired to communicate to the entire Black community. It was time for a new awareness of the strength and beauty of Black people. Fuller felt that once America allowed Blacks to grow in social and political awareness social change would come quickly (Hoover 691).

Though many scholars point to Du Bois' philosophies as the major influence, recent scholarship suggests other possibilities. In Black Art and

Culture in the 20th Century, Richard J. Powell cites historian Judith Wilson's assertion that Ethiopia Unbound, a 1911 Pan-Africanist novel by J. E Casely Hayford as a possible source. He states:

> Both Casely Hayford and Fuller (who had ties to the Pan-Africanist movement) employed the metaphor of an enshrouded and awakening "Ethiopia" (synonymous with Africa and also with the greater black Diaspora). Physically restrained yet emotional and visually rich, *The Awakening of Ethiopia* [Ethiopia Awakening] served the representational needs not only of a disillusioned but hopeful black elite in the years 1914-17, but also of successive generations of "race" men and women.(36)

In the article Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller and Pan-Africanist Femininsm in *Ethiopia Awakening*, scholar Stacey Williams suggests that Meta Fuller's association with Adelaide Casely Hayford, ex-wife of J. E. Hayford may have had more to do with Fuller's inspiration than did Mr. Hayford's book. Adelaide Hayford, who Williams describes as a "Graveite feminist", planned to establish an all girls school in Sierra Leone and in 1920 convinced Meta Fuller to became involved:

> Hayford and Fuller wrote and produced a benefit staging of a Middle Passage drama, entitled "The Answer" to fundraise for the school, which was performed at black churches. In the

> drama, as well as in her own version *of Ethiopia Awakening*, Fuller promoted an assertion of womanhood and an outpouring of purposeful ambition. In the sculptor's words, the figure showed the process of "awakening, gradually unwinding the bandages of [her] past and looking out on life again, expectant but unafraid." Fuller's Ethiopia depicted the stripping away of old garments, as Hayford deemed necessary. This common denominator illustrated their belief in a proactive and aesthetic approach for the advancement of black women. (8)

Williams further suggests that since this play was given in Black churches and other "female spaces", Fuller and Hayford challenged the convention by promoting positive images of Black women (8).

Figure 3.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Ethiopia Awakening
1915

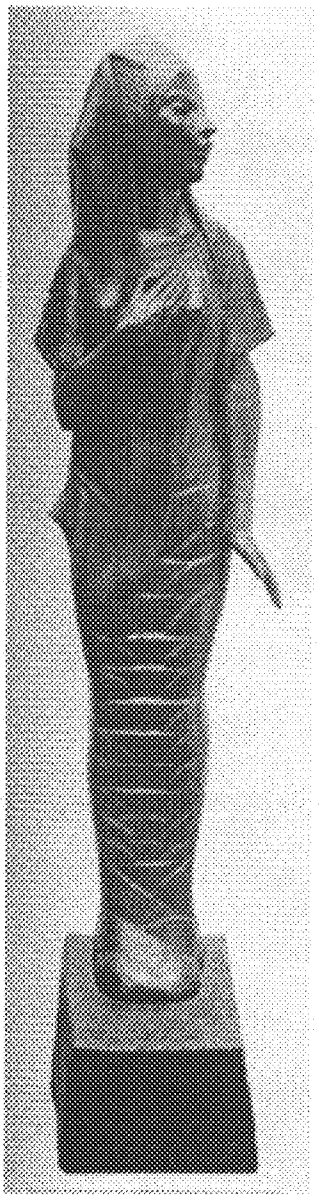

Figure 3.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Ethiopia Awakening
1915

Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence,

The Descent, And The Spirit of Inspiration

In 1919 Fuller produced the work Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence (figures 4 and 5), in response to the violent lynching of a young Black woman in Georgia in 1918. Mary Turner was attacked by a mob of angry white citizens, who hung her upside down, disemboweled her and murdered her unborn child in the process. Turner was murdered because she spoke out against the lynching of her husband and suggested that she would seek justice for his death. Mary Turner's murder enraged the Black community, but because of the violent reputation of organizations led by poor white racist, most was afraid to express their anger (Campbell 27).

In creating Mary Turner, Fuller chooses to focus on the courageous spirit of this woman. The work stands fifteen inches high, with Turner as the central figure; arms folded across her body, shielding her unborn child. At her feet, the faces and hands of her oppressors grasp at her skirt. Quiet dignity emanates from the small sculpture, which is empowered by its spirituality. Fuller is able to reach beyond the immediate suffering to the beauty and dignity of self-sacrifice. The posture of this figure indicates a certain courage and determination, even in the face of dearth. Though she attempted to protect her unborn child, she did not turn away from her attackers.

The treatment of this piece connotes maturation in the art of Meta Fuller. In the past, the pain of inhumanity was so overwhelming that it dominated her work, communicating the trauma of suffering to the viewer. The viewer, in turn, was often overwhelmed by the message that these works conveyed, thus, the development of the title "sculptor of the horrible." By concentrating on the positive spirit of Mary Turner, rather than the brutality imposed upon her, Fuller empowers the image of Turner, transforming her from victim to heroine. The influence of W. E. B. Du Bois' "Art as propaganda" is evident here. The plaque attached to the base of the work reads, "In memory of Mary Turner, as a silent protest against mob violence," indicating the socio-political agenda of the piece.

As with Ethiopia, Fuller worked with the non-western aesthetic. The abstract faces and groping hands at the base of the figure resemble the intricate work of West African wood carvers. This adds a spiritual quality to the piece. The figure of Mary Turner seems to be rising up, out of the mass of violent confusion created by the mob, lending to the idea of metamorphic empowerment.

Figure 4.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Mary Turner: A Protest Against Mob Violence, 1919

Figure 4.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Mary Turner: A Protest Against Mob Violence, 1919

Figure 5.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Mary Turner: A Protest Against Mob Violence, 1919

Figure 5.
Meta Warrick Fuller
Mary Turner: A Protest Against Mob Violence, 1919

Historian Judith Kerr suggests that Fuller's first attempt to articulate the suffering that the proliferation of lynching brought to the Black community may have been a sculpture called The Descent (figures 6 and 7), created in 1917. Kerr comments:

> The sculptor took a traditional theme in religious art—Mary and the Disciples removing Jesus' body from the Cross—and used it to depict grief in the aftermath of a lynching. In The Descent, the innocent victim's family is seen lowering him from the tree. His kneeling mother clings to his legs as his wife and father removes him from the limb. (251)

Fuller successfully articulates the humanity of the grieving family. Their dignity and grace is exhibited in the way that they shoulder their burden. The Descent communicates a clear image of a strong African American family that is courageous and able to withstand the atrocities perpetrated against them.

Figure 6.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Descent, 1919

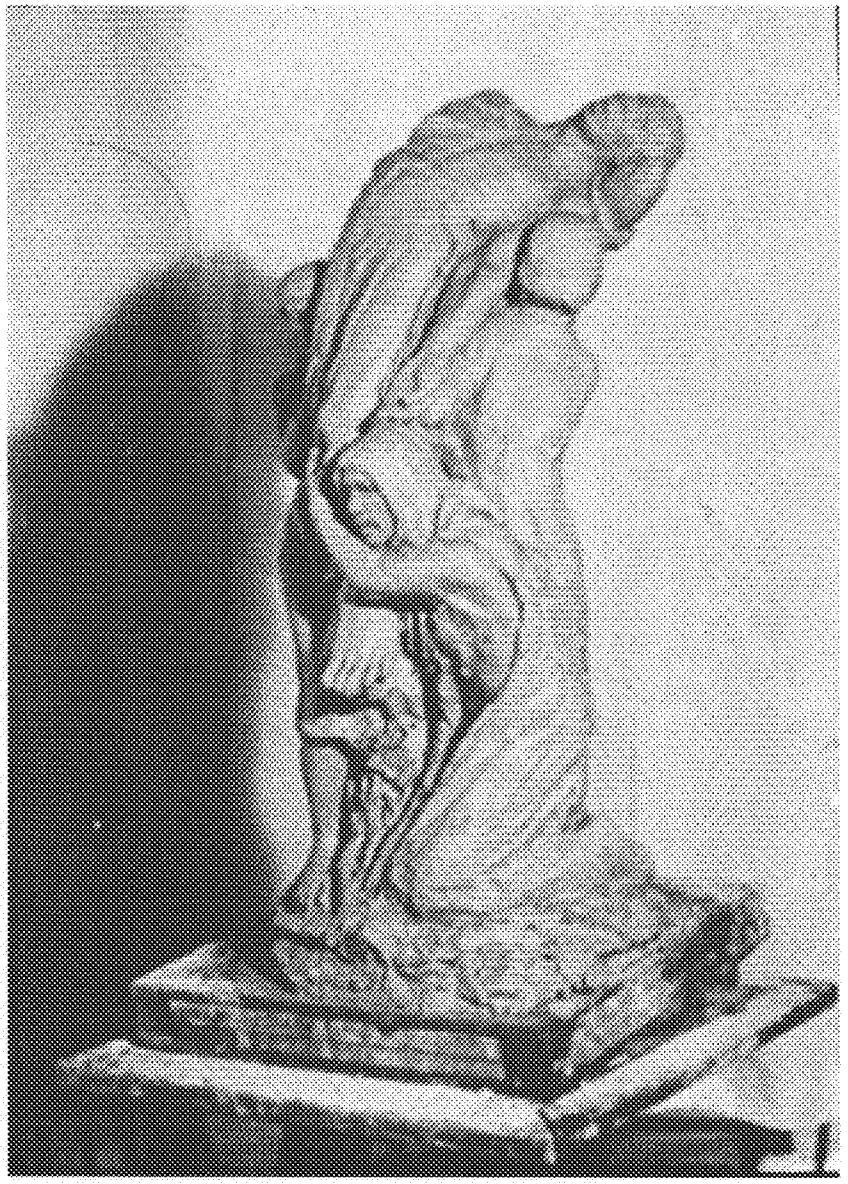

Figure 6.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Descent, 1919

Figure 7.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Descent, 1919

Figure 7.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Descent, 1919

The Spirit of Inspiration (figure 8), created in 1919 at the request of the Executive Secretary of Atlanta's Black YMCA demonstrated Fuller's ability to remain hopeful in the face of the kind of violence protested against in The Descent and Mary Turner. Judith Kerr describes the Frieze like this: "inspiration whispers into Black youth's ear, while pointing toward a brighter future. (Kerr 256)

Figure 8.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Inspiration, 1919

The Spirit of Inspiration (figure 8), created in 1919 at the request of the Executive Secretary of Atlanta's Black YMCA demonstrated Fuller's ability to remain hopeful in the face of the kind of violence protested against in The Descent and Mary Turner. Judith Kerr describes the Frieze like this: "inspiration whispers into Black youth's ear, while pointing toward a brighter future. (Kerr 256)

Figure 8.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Spirit of Inspiration, 1919

CONCLUSION

Fuller was a prolific artist who live to be 90 years old and who's oeuvre includes over 160 sculptures. In 1937, when Fuller was near sixty years of age, she produced The Talking Skull (figure 9), one of the most significant sculptures of her career. The image is that of a young African male, clad in a lion cloth, kneeling over a skull on the ground. The youth has a questioning look on his face, as he tenderly gazes upon the skull. This piece suggests the strong relationship between life and death. It also depicts the search for African heritage, a theme that became central to the art of future Black Americans. Fuller personified the desire of many Blacks to discover their true identity as African Americans, to define their place and purpose, and to reclaim their African roots.

The documentation supports my belief that the artistic viewpoints that became popular during the Harlem Renaissance developed greatly because of the efforts of people like Meta Warrick Fuller. Scholar Stacey Williams concludes that Fuller's work inspired philosophies of Harlem Renaissance and raised the consciousness of African American Women:

> *Ethiopia* actually prefigured [Alain] Locke's promotion of African-inspired modernism, which he termed the "African legacy." In fact, Locke could have responded to the new plasticity which Fuller modeled in the head, torso, and lower extremities. [. . .] Ethiopia's raised countenance connotes determination. [. . .] the work reflected major changes in the

> self-conception of women who designated the rise of black female agency during the early twentieth century. (10)

Alain Locke's concept of the "New Negro" evolved from the work produced by those who were searching for an authentic African American Aesthetic. By continuing to explore African and African American themes, Fuller helped to establish the afrocentric aesthetic that encouraged the art of the Harlem Renaissance.

Producing commissions and portraiture is the way most professional artists generate income to support their work. Though she did not confine her work exclusively to ethnic themes, it was her afrocentric work, which gain attention. As her reputation for sculpting "the Negro-type" increased, opportunities for securing work outside that genre diminished. Soon it became apparent that she would not enjoy the fame and prosperity experienced by those who created art that appealed to a wider market. Fuller's work with ethnic themes garnered positive criticism from the Black community, but did not bring her critical acclaim in the greater art world. In A History of African American Art From 1792 to the Present, Bearden and Henderson note the financial dilemma of many Black artists of that day:

> African-American artists were continually confronted with the question: Who would buy their work? Directing their work to

Figure 9.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Talking Skull, 1937

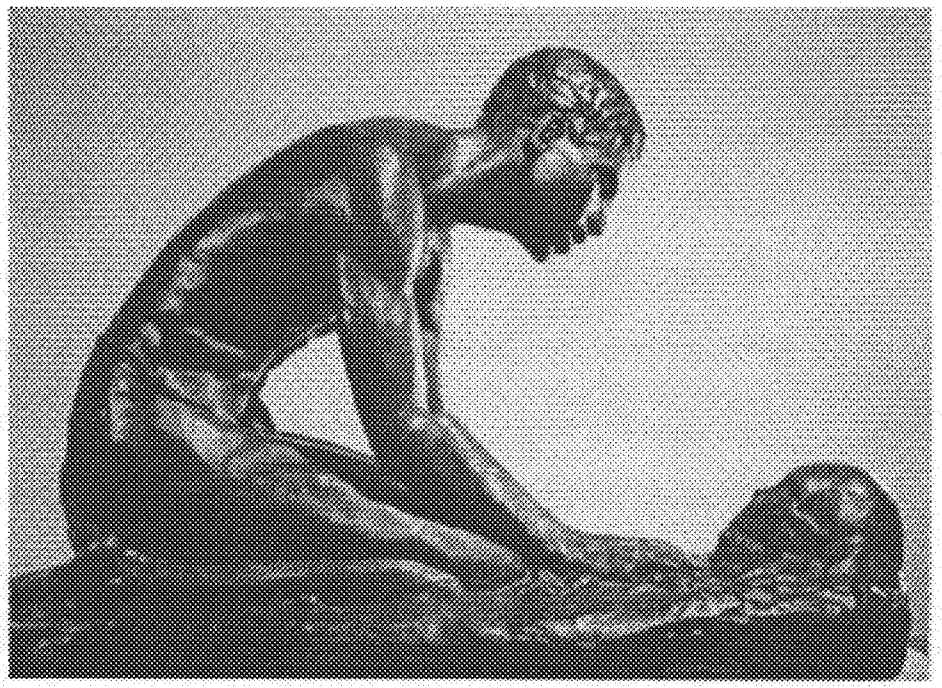

Figure 9.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Talking Skull, 1937

> either a black or a white audience carried severe limitations. In seeking appreciation from a white audience, they faced possible suppression of their inner feelings and convictions.
>
> On the other hand, the black audience had its own particular taboos about subject matter. It also offered considerably fewer opportunities for support. (123-124)

Obtaining funds to continue working was frustrating for Meta. With every commission came the inevitable struggle to convince the client to properly finance the production of the piece. Many clients refused to provide adequate funding. As a result, many of Fuller's sculptures were cast in plaster, a medium that was not meant for longevity. Of the 164 known works created by Meta Warrick Fuller, approximately 57 have been lost or destroyed (Kerr 423-433).

One of the most insightful discoveries made during my research was the reaction of Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr. to the article published by Velma J. Hoover. The article Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller: Her Life and Art." was published in The Negro History Bulletin in 1977, and has been widely quoted. In fact, it is referenced in nearly every biographical accounting of Fuller's life since its publication.

Mr. Fuller had strong objections to a number of comments written by about his mother. One of the issues he cited was Hoover's claim that as a

child Meta's exposure to the Black community was severely limited. Hoover states that because of this distance from the Black community, Fuller had a difficult time sorting out the issue of racism. Hoover further indicated that Fuller's affinity for gruesome themes was an attempt to work through that confusion.

Solomon Fuller, Jr. concedes that the Black elite class had little to do with Blacks outside their social class. His own upbringing afforded little opportunity to interact with Framingham Blacks:

> The Blacks in town, we didn't identify with them, because they were cleaning out our cellar and washing our clothes and doing all this sort of thing which we were much too proud to do. One very unfortunate part of this was that we didn't know any Blacks. (2)

Meta Fuller herself was raised in Philadelphia where her parents and grandparents were activists in the Black community. While their social interactions with Blacks outside their class were limited, they united with the greater black community in the fight for equality. Meta had a devotion to her heritage and even after moving to predominately white Framingham, maintained strong connections to the African American community in Boston.

Meta's love of sculpting never waned. She believed that sculpture was an important, but much neglected art form. In an undated speech found in her personal papers Meta wrote:

> [. . .] I believe that we are coming to realize that sculptor is gaining ground. People begin to feel that after all it can play some part in our everyday life.(M. Fuller 1)

In 1954, at the age of 77, she sculpted The Slave Ship (figure 10) after reading Du Bois' The Suppression of the African Slave Trade and in 1964 she created The Good Samaritan in support of the Civil Rights Movement (Kerr 339-354). Meta's own words best articulate the motivation for her art:

> Some critics hold that art is an interpretation of nature-another terms it significant form--to me it is more that this; it is the expression of the deeper feelings-the emotions. (M. Fuller 3)

Meta Fuller helped paved the way for the artist of the Harlem Renaissance. Her noble treatment of the Black American image set the criterion for African American art as we know it today.

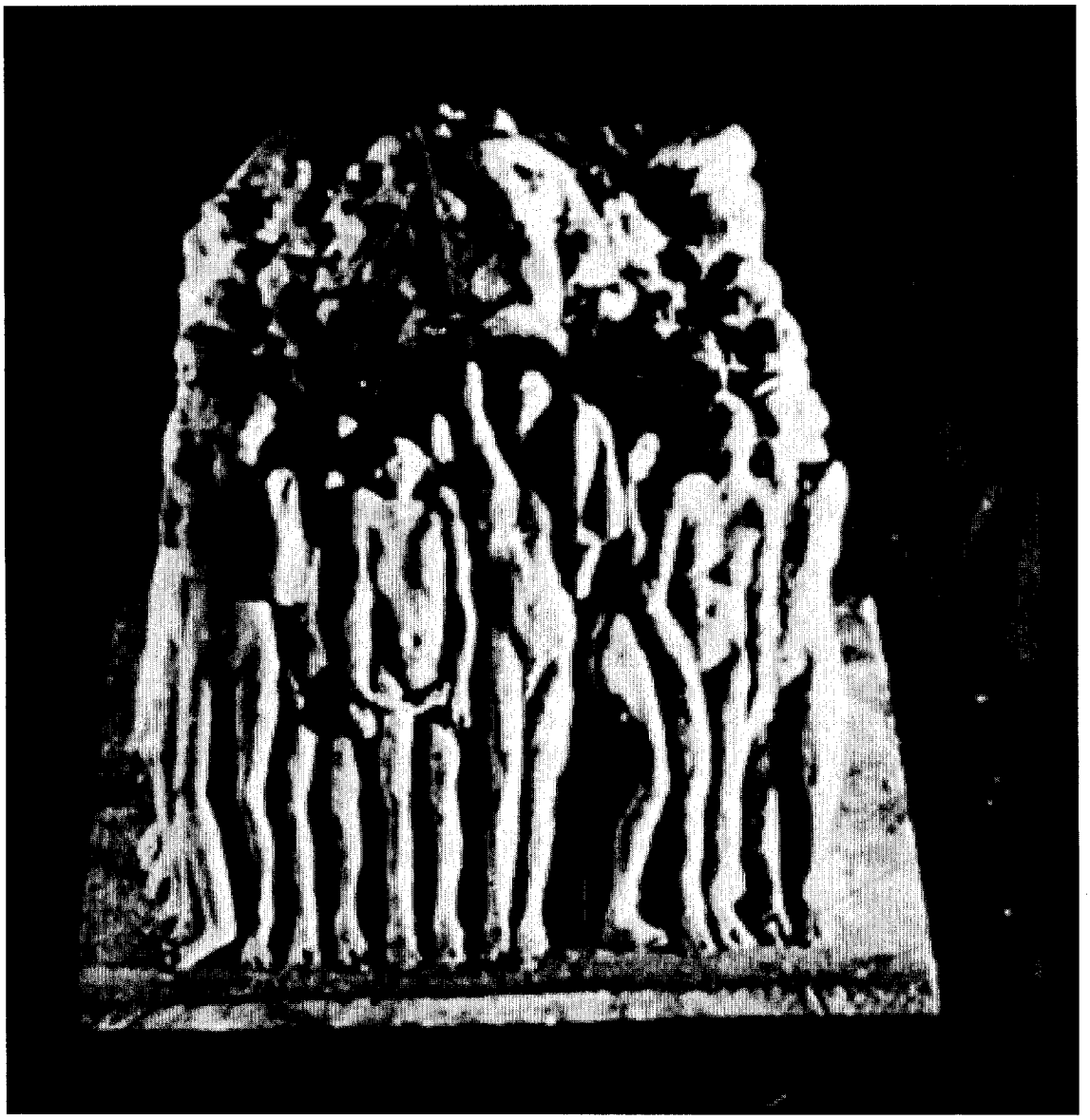

Figure 10.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Slave Ship, 1954

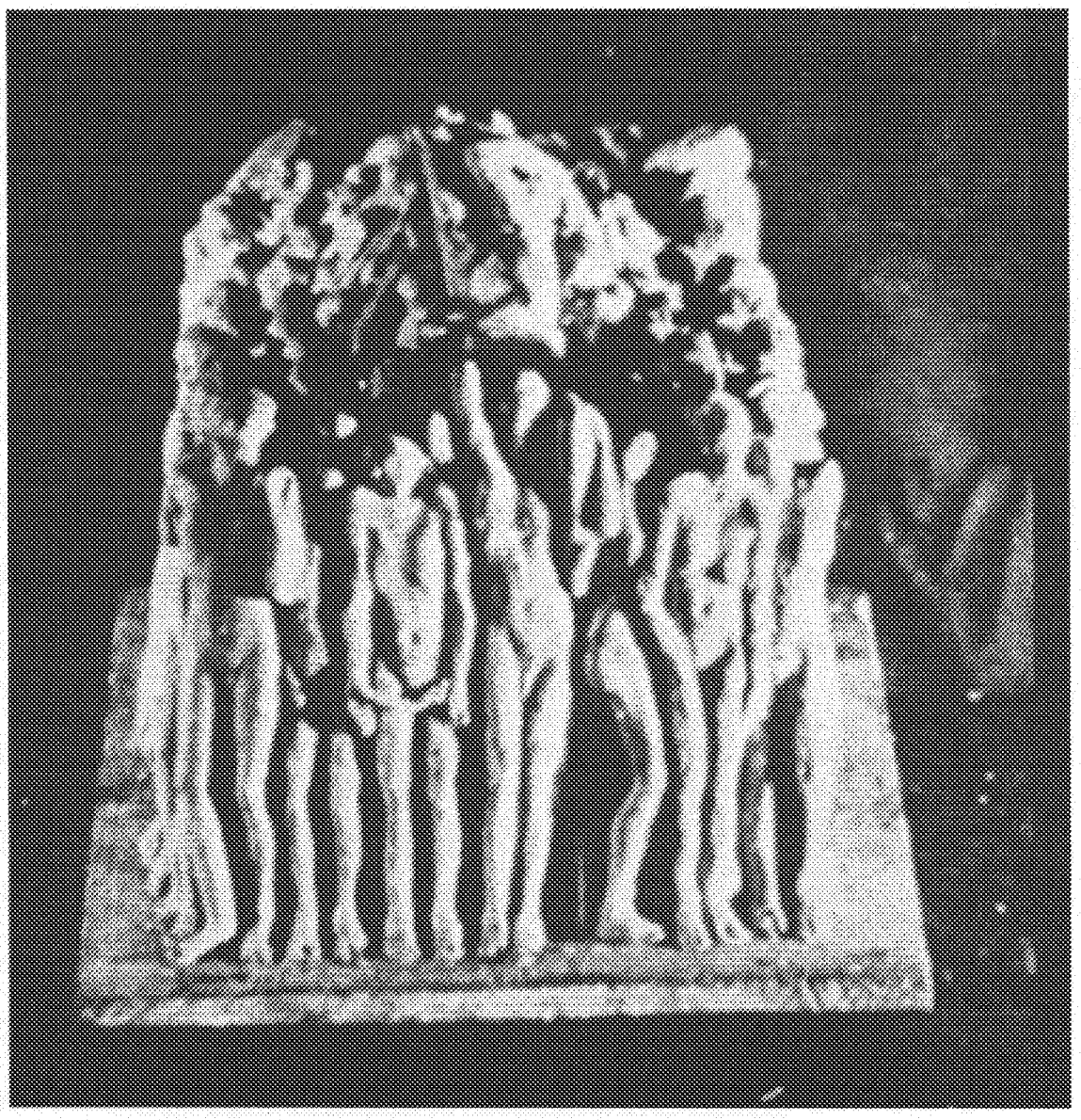

Figure 10.
Meta Warrick Fuller
The Slave Ship, 1954

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APPENDIX I

LIST OF FIGURES

Photo images used in this document were prepared from the slide from the collection contributed by Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr.

Figures 1 and 2, The Spirit of Emancipation (or Humanity Freeing the Slaves Youth and Maiden), 1913. Collection Boston Museum of Afro-American Art and Artists.

Figure 3. Ethiopia Awakening, 1915. Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.

Figures 4 and 5, Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence, 1919, Collection of the Museum of Afro-American History. Boston, Mass.

Figures 6 and 7, The Descent, 1917. Whereabouts unknown.

Figure 8, The Spirit of Inspiration, 1919. Whereabouts unknown.

Figure 9, The Talking Skull, 1937. Collection of the Museum of Afro-American History. Boston, Mass.

Figure 10, The Slave Ship, 1954. Whereabouts unknown.

APPENDIX II

Speech Written by Meta Warrick Fuller
Private Collection of Solomon Carter Fuller, Jr.
Undated

From the time your president invited me to talk to you on sculpture, I deemed it an opportunity to bring about a higher appreciation of that branch of art so much slighted and misunderstood-most neglected. Oh, if I could only help you to understand that sculpture is not an art far beyond the [average], I would feel that I had done something worth while. Here to for, exhibitions of art have given but little space to sculpture particularly in this country some have excluded it altogether, and there is no reason for it, for all the arts are allied and it is rarely that one can even follow some other branch of art. As I look back on my student days, painters, sculptors, musicians, student of Grande opera, actors, engravers, architects-all mingled and exchanged ideas and ideals, so that little soirees given from studio to studio to studio were much beyond the ordinary in their [musical] attempts.

But now I believe that we are coming to realize that sculptor is gaining ground. People begin to feel that after all it can play some part in our everyday life, and so I shall try to show you what a strong appeal sculpture should have particularly to those of musical tastes.

I think that a great deal of the lack of appreciation is due to a failure to understand sculpture and I also think that most of us do not make an, attempt to understand. We look upon it as beautiful or not, and pass it by, seeking only the superficial beauty.

I have often noted that in [the] construction of sculpture there is much to consider that would also be observed in the production of music.

For example-theme-the very first [issue] with which we have to deal in sculpture-that is to say we find our ideal, our subject. Looking back again on our student days-when we entered the composition classes, the master would announce a given subject – sorrow, joy, poverty, poetry, sometimes a single word, sometimes a phrase "war" a "Who" biblical or historical passage, we were called upon to work out an idea depicting the subject at hand-and oh, the many varied ideas that a single subject could bring forth in class of a dozen or more students.

Out of the theme or idea is developed the composition in which we observe the general construction of the subject, the arrangement of masses of light and of shadow exactly as they would be dealt with in the drawing or the painting of a picture or as one would observe the gradation of time in a picture or as one would observe the gradation of time in musical composition.

As regards composition – I should like to make it clear that sculpture as it exists today is constructive work and not many are in the habit of thinking distinctive. It is built up mass upon mass and is not the remains of what exists after part of the mass is hewn away. It is true that prehistoric sculpture was executed in that way and we had great monoliths of the early Egyptians handed down to us today and in which we as a race may take great satisfaction but we also hear of the great molten images which could not have been made without some previous model of pattern from which to

produce. Then too we know that the most primitive form of art was the potter's art in which he utilized clay for his purposes and there is but a step from potter to sculptor. And so we find that even the most primitive sculptor built up his work. It may be disappointing to those who are in the habit of thinking of the sculptor as a hewer of stone or marble but after all very few sculptors execute their own work in stone, but turn to the stone cutter who reproduces it by a mechanical device.

But to return to the subject, in short composition in sculpture is therefore in the harmonious arrangement of masses of light and shadow in such a manner as to render it more agreeable to the ear as in music, they are to the ear. Again we have line which would no doubt correspond to continuity in music. Rhythm in sculpture is suggested in the apparent action of the subject. Technique is determined in the selection of subject: for instance, we have at hand a variety of methods in technique or style of treatment. . . A great many sculptors affect a certain style of technique and do not deviate from it regardless of what their subject may be. On the other hand, there are those who suit their technique to the to the theme – let us suppose "war" to be their subject. They therefore affect a bold vigorous finish full of strength and abandon, whereas if the subject be "youth" there would be all the delicacy of touch, gentle rounded curves and all that suggest that sweetness and beauty of youth, etc.

One of the greatest obstacles on the way of a true appreciation of sculpture is the failure to understand its purpose and its purpose whatever it may be is neither to copy nor to reproduce nature.

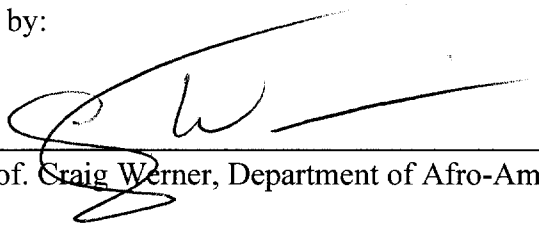
Can you imagine what music would be if it was merely the copying or reproducing [of] the sounds of nature? Suppose a musical composition entitled spring consisted of an exact reproduction of birds singing, water flowing and bees and flies humming. And yet Grieg has thrilled us with the suggestion of all this in his "Prihtenps" and again in his Dawn from Purghynt-he come a step nearer to nature but no nearer than would merely suggest the awakening of day. Why then if music is formulated to so evade realism. Why should other arts be bound down to it? Some critics hold that art is an interpretation of nature-another terms it significant form-to me it is more that this it is the expression of the deeper feelings-the emotions. I believe that to every normal individual is given the tendency to self-expression and to man alone is given the power to express and the medium is art-music, drama, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and their allied branches.

The tragedy and horror war may be expressed poetically we recall in Flander's fields. It may swell forth in some terrific musical outburst. It may be expressed in stone or bronze-but in any of these it must react on the emotions of the observer otherwise it has failed in its purpose.

Religious devotion may be expressed in any of these and how perfect the devotion when all the arts all are united in the cathedral with its sculpture its mural decoration, its choir and organ. There is even the drama of the pulpit

and the glorious pageantry of clergy-what more perfect ensemble can one conceive? We do not look for realism.

Approved by:



Title: _____
Prof. Craig Werner, Department of Afro-American Studies

Date: 12/11/02