“Heroic Souls”: Representations of the Black Female Heroism of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth

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Abstract

This thesis is the first research project to provide a thorough examination of the memory of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, exploring portrayals of their heroism and considering how such depictions impact our understandings of Black female heroism. Tubman and Truth frequently appear together in representations, but scholars are yet to analyse how these Black women have become heroes, with no thorough examination of how depictions of their heroism interact and impact upon one another. In providing the first comprehensive analysis and comparison of Tubman and Truth's memory from the late 1930s to present day, this thesis highlights how current understandings of Black female heroism are defined by prevailing ideas of white and Black male heroism. Through analysis of a variety of representations, such as artwork (including murals and sculptures), theatre productions, poems, and film, this thesis argues for a re-evaluation of Black female heroism and presents a new model that centres around Black women's experiences, with recognition of their triple oppression and the different forms of resistance they employed, including those performed by "ordinary" Black women. By exploring how Tubman and Truth's memory struggles against hegemonic ideas of heroism, I examine alternative heroic behaviours that centre around Black women's resistance, such as anti-lynching activism and trade union organising, to expand our understandings of who is deemed heroic. Moreover, in analysing Tubman and Truth's persistent role as Black female heroes, I offer vital insight into the limitations of existing depictions, with representations often shaped and limited by concepts of exceptionality and acceptability. Throughout the following chapters, I examine how portrayals of Tubman and Truth as "superwomen" who overcome overwhelming oppression maintain ideas of exceptionalism, noting how their depiction as Moses and a religious preacher further supports this limiting framework. In analysing depictions of Tubman and Truth's militancy, this research also considers how ideas of

acceptability narrow our understandings of their heroism, thus noting how exceptionalism and acceptability can obscure features of Tubman and Truth's lives and memories, whilst also contributing to the erasure of "ordinary" Black women and their heroic behaviours. Through this research, I also examine the instances in which artists and writers challenge the confines of exceptionality and acceptability, arguing that these portrayals create an alternative heroic lineage that positions Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, while also highlighting the latter's malleability as a Black female hero. Indeed, in prioritising Black women's experiences and recognising their triple oppression, I argue that these artists and writers broaden our understandings of Black female heroism. Thus, in examining the different ways in which Tubman and Truth are portrayed as heroes across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this thesis develops a model of Black female heroism that allows for better understanding of the ways in which Black women are remembered.

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Introduction

"The twin mountain peaks of the heroic tradition of Black women"

Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth

In 1985, the Black magazine *Ebony* published an article by Lerone Bennett Jr. praising the long history of Black women's activism, stating that "to understand what the Black woman has become and what she is becoming one must walk with her a little while."[1] Bennett highlighted the histories of notable Black women from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Madame C.J. Walker, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Lillie M. Jackson, and Shirley Chisholm, celebrating their activism and honouring the struggles they faced. The author also included Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, remarking that these two Black women "created the twin mountain peaks of the heroic tradition of Black women."[2] Bennett's article illustrates how Tubman and Truth have been celebrated as Black heroes and as *the* figures who embody Black female heroism. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists and writers created representations to praise Tubman and Truth's antislavery and women's rights activism, using them as symbols to honour the legacy of Black women's resistance. Through artworks, including murals and sculptures, poems, theatre productions, and countless other portrayals, Tubman and Truth are remembered for their contributions to Black history and celebrated as *the* founding Black female heroes. While there has been much biographical research on Tubman and Truth, scholars have yet to provide an in-depth analysis of their memory and their heroism. Hence, this thesis is the first research project to provide a thorough examination of

[1] Lerone Bennett Jr., "No Crystal Stair: The Black Woman in History," *Ebony,* November, 1985, 242.
[2] Bennett, "No Crystal Stair," 244.

representations of Tubman and Truth, exploring portrayals of their heroism and considering how such depictions impact our understandings of Black female heroism. This thesis analyses a wealth of Tubman and Truth representations from the late 1930s to the present day to consider how these Black women became the "twin mountain peaks" of Black female heroism. I provide the first in-depth analysis of their frequent depictions together in representations that celebrate Black history, such as Elizabeth Catlett's 1947 artwork series, John Biggers's mural from 1953, and Faith Ringgold's quilt from 1991, with thorough examination of how portrayals of their heroism interact and impact upon one another.

Through such analysis, I argue for the re-evaluation of Black female heroism that has long been defined by the features of white heroism and Black male heroism, both of which downplay or disregard Black women's experiences and fail to recognise their triple oppression. Tubman and Truth became iconic Black female heroes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with artists and writers adapting the stories and images from their nineteenth-century biographies and photographs to create celebrations of their activism. By producing established images of Tubman and Truth, Black artists ensured the dissemination of their heroism in Black communities, with their images and words used as inspiration in the fight for civil rights and to celebrate the history of Black resistance. However, this thesis demonstrates how their memory constantly struggled against hegemonic ideas of heroism that largely prioritise white, middle-class people. Indeed, the April 2016 announcement that Tubman would replace Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill highlights how prevailing ideas of memorialisation fail to consider enslaved Black people's experiences.[3] While some scholars, including Tubman

[3] Tubman's appearance on the twenty-dollar bill in 2020 was delayed by the Trump administration, with the President stating that "it's not a decision that is likely to come until way past my term." During his campaign, Trump called the decision "pure political correctness" and suggested placing Tubman on a lower-denomination bill instead, remaking that "Andrew Jackson had a great history, and I think it's very rough when you take somebody off the bill." Erin Durkin, "Outrage as Trump delays putting Harriet Tubman on $20 bill until 2026," *Guardian*, May 23, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/23/trump-delays-putting-harriet-tubman-on-20-bill-outrage.

biographers Kate Clifford Larson and Janell Hobson, praised this act of memorialisation, several Black women condemned the decision, with Feminista Jones and Zoe Samudzi noting the irony of an enslaved Black woman, who spent her life challenging a system that supported American capitalism, being commemorated on a twenty-dollar bill.[4] This erasure of Black women's experiences in memorialisations is further evidenced in the 2020 *Women's Rights Pioneers Monument,* which only included Truth after drawing criticism for ignoring women of colour and recapitulating "the marginalisation black women experienced during the suffrage movement."[5] Indeed, by failing to honour women of colour, Meredith Bergmann's initial design prioritised the heroic behaviours of white, middle-class women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and excluded Black women from the realm of heroism.[6]

In exploring further examples of how Tubman and Truth's memory struggled against hegemonic ideas of heroism, this thesis highlights the complexities of hero-making and emphasises the multifaceted roles that heroes play in society, with these figures often affirming hegemonic ideas of race, gender, and class. Throughout this thesis, I use the gender-neutral term "hero" because of the criticism that surrounds the term "heroine," with Cale Richard Hellyer arguing that traditional understandings denote "heroines" to be inherently different and

[4] Larson and Hobson argued that putting Tubman on the bill is "the highest expression of genuine American ideals," and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Clara Small highlight how this decision is a positive development for women's rights. Kate Clifford Larson and Janell Hobson, "The $20 is where Harriet Tubman Belongs: Rebutting Donald Trump's ridiculous charge that removing Andrew Jackson is "politically correct," *New York Daily News,* April 22, 2016, http://m.nydailynews.com/opinion/hobson-larson-20-harriet-tubman-belongs-article-1.2610524. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Clara Small in Daniella Paquette, "The Irony of Putting Harriet Tubman on the $20 Bill," *The Washington Post,* April 20, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/20/the-irony-of-putting-harriet-tubman-on-the-20-bill/. Zoe Samudzi in Paquette, "The Irony." Feminista Jones, "Keep Harriet Tubman – and all women – off the $20 bill," *The Washington Post,* May 14, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/05/14/keep-harriet-tubman-and-all-women-off-the-20-bill/?tid=sm_fb.

[5] Criticisms led the Public Design Commission to request Meredith Bergmann adapt her initial design, which focused on two white women, namely Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. When asked about the monument, Gloria Steinem said "I do think we cannot have a statue of two white women representing the vote for all women." Ginia Bellafante, "Is a Planned Monument to Women's Rights Racist?," *New York Times,* January 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/nyregion/is-a-planned-monument-to-womens-rights-racist.html.

[6] The original design depicted Anthony and Stanton only alluded to the activism of women of colour through an unfolding scroll with the names of twenty-two women's rights activists, including Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell. Bellafante, "Is a Planned Monument to Women's Rights Racist?"

thus less significant than "heroes."[7] Indeed, Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope argue that the diminutive term "heroine" maintains patriarchal societal views that women are essentially supporting characters who preserve social order rather than explore, disrupt, and change it.[8] In Chapter One, I analyse hero-making and heroic attributes to present an alternative model of Black female heroism that prioritises Black women's experiences and allows for better understanding of how they are remembered. I examine alternative heroic behaviours that are grounded in Black women's experiences, arguing that any exploration of Black female heroism must recognise their triple oppression and the varying spheres of resistance they used, such as trade union organising and anti-lynching activism. Such analysis is crucial, as it challenges prevailing understandings of heroic attributes that centre around whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class expectations. Moreover, by analysing portrayals of Tubman and Truth, I broaden understandings of Black women's heroism, noting the importance of alternative behaviours, such as consciousness-raising, which are crucial in broadening who is deemed heroic and in establishing a multi-faceted heroic lineage. Indeed, in expanding heroic behaviours, I argue that examinations of Black female heroism should consider the attributes of "ordinary" and "everyday" Black women, who have been neglected and forgotten by history, alongside those of exceptional figures, such as Tubman and Truth.

Exploring the survival of Tubman and Truth as *the* figures who embody Black female heroism provides crucial insights by exposing the limitations of their existing depictions and demonstrating how representations can obscure as much as they reveal. Indeed, analysing the different ways in which Tubman and Truth have been portrayed by artists and writers offers greater understanding of how representations of their heroism have been shaped and limited by

[7] Cale Richard Hellyer, "*Harper's Island:* Negotiating a Masculine World to Become a Female Hero," *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture* 2, no. 2 (2017): 205.
[8] Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (New York: Bowker, 1981) vii – viii. See also Pearson and Pope, "Toward a Typology of Female Portraits in Literature," *Special Issue: Women in Literature and Criticism* 37, no. 4 (1975): 11.

ideas of exceptionality and acceptability. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how a focus on exceptionality and acceptability causes some race, class, and gendered behaviours to be downplayed or elevated, such as Tubman and Truth's inordinate strength as "superwomen." Indeed, Chapter Two highlights the problematic ways in which Tubman and Truth are portrayed as lone "superwomen" who endured unimaginable suffering, while Chapter Three analyses how artists use religious imagery to emphasise their exceptionalism. Moreover, Chapter Four considers "acceptable" forms of militancy by examining the various sanitisations and criticisms of portrayals of Tubman's armed resistance, contrasting this to depictions of Truth's militancy as a Black feminist public speaker. Through such analysis, I demonstrate how ideas of exceptionalism and acceptability can obscure elements of Tubman and Truth's lives, histories, and memories, alongside contributing to the erasure of "ordinary" Black women, who have largely been remembered through certain individuals, with their activism and heroism subsequently side-lined.

Moreover, this thesis provides greater insight into Black female heroism by exploring the ways in which Tubman and Truth's memory interacts. By analysing their differing portrayals in separate and joint representations, I demonstrate Truth's malleability as a Black female hero, with her heroic portrayals less constrained by prevailing notions of heroism than Tubman's. Indeed, in exploring how artists and writers emphasise Truth as a Black female hero, I highlight the ways in which Truth embodies alternative forms of heroic behaviours that are not defined by dominant understandings of heroism, with great emphasise on her use of orality and consciousness-raising. Such portrayals contrast to dominant representations of Tubman, which largely confine her heroism to the masculine framework of Moses and "police" her militancy to within the boundaries of respectability. Nevertheless, while recognising Truth as the more malleable Black female hero, I highlight the instances in which artists and writers reject these masculine confines and "acceptable" militancy that surround Tubman's heroism to

present important challenges to prevailing ideas of heroism. Indeed, this thesis illustrates how several Black artists and writers, such as Catlett and Ringgold, create an alternative heroic lineage that positions Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, rather than white people and Black men, to expand our understandings of heroic behaviours, which signals an important shift away from exceptionalism. Indeed, by positioning Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, artists and writers create an independent Black women's heroic pantheon that prioritises Black women's experiences and thus, broadens our understandings of Black women's heroic behaviour. This is crucial to the establishment of more productive models of Black female heroism that recognise Black women's triple oppression, honour their varying resistance, such as political reform and anti-lynching activism, and celebrate "ordinary" behaviours alongside the "exceptional." Hence, this thesis provides vital analysis of Tubman and Truth's memory, alongside offering crucial insights into Black female heroism.

Who were Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman?

While this thesis is not a biographical account of Tubman and Truth, it is important to provide an overview of the lives of these Black women who played vital yet different roles in the nineteenth century antislavery and women's rights movements. Truth was born enslaved in c.1797 as Isabella Baumfree in Esopus, New York, where she worked as a field-hand and domestic labourer until she was emancipated under the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1817, which stated that Black enslaved people in the state of New York would become free on 4th July 1827.[9] One year prior to this official emancipation, Truth fled her enslaver John Dumont's home after a dispute over his failure to keep his promise to emancipate her in 1826.[10] After

[9] The Gradual Emancipation Law stipulated that enslaved people born before 4 July 1799 would be freed on 4 July 1827. This law built on the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery from 1799, which stated that any Black person born to an enslaved mother after 4 July 1799 would be freed, with men liberated at twenty-eight years of age and women freed at twenty-five.

[10] John Dumont promised to free Truth in 1826 if "she would do well, and be faithful." However, when the time came, Dumont changed his mind, claiming that Truth's "badly diseased hand, which greatly diminished her

leaving in the middle of the night with only a few provisions and her youngest child Sophia, Truth sought help from her friend Levi Rowe, who introduced her to Isaac and Maria Van Wagenen (or Wagner) in Ulster County.

Figure 1.1. *Sojourner Truth*, c.1864, photographic print on carte de visite mount, 10cm x 6cm, Library of Congress.

When Dumont came looking for Truth and Sophia, the Van Wagenens, who were against slavery, paid him around thirty dollars to allow Truth and her daughter to stay with them for a year until her official emancipation.[11] Truth lived and worked for the Van Wagenens until she

usefulness" had meant he had lost much labour and so, he decided to keep her enslaved for the extra year to make up for this lost labour. With Dumont refusing to change his mind, Gilbert wrote how Truth "determined that she would remain quietly with him only until she had spun his wool – about one hundred pounds – and then she would leave him." Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

[11] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 25.

learned of her son Peter's sale to a man in Alabama, which was illegal because he was also soon to be freed under New York's gradual emancipation laws.[12] After travelling to Alabama and proving that Peter was her son, and hence that he was eligible for freedom in New York, the judge ruled that Peter "be delivered into the hands of the mother – having no other master, no other controller, no other conductor, but his mother."[13]

After this incident, Truth and Peter moved to New York City in 1828 where she earned a living as a domestic servant and developed her role as a public preacher on the Methodist circuit. She became a popular preacher and developed her relationship with several religious organisations before moving to Northampton in 1843, where she changed her name from Isabella to Sojourner Truth as part of her rebirth out of slavery. Truth became a prominent public speaker within antislavery and women's rights circles, with her popularity bolstered by the publication of her biography *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* in 1850. As Truth was illiterate, she dictated her life story to white abolitionist Olive Gilbert, with the hope that doing so would aid "the cause of human rights" and that "by its sale she may be kept from want in these her last days."[14] Truth met Gilbert in the 1840s through the Northampton Association for Education and Industry, and the two created the narrative between 1846 and 1850, with the author's staunch views on the "cruelties of slavery" shining through.[15] This biography, which was reprinted in 1875, raised Truth's public profile and she went on to make many speeches across the country, including her famous "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech on Black women's oppression at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Truth's activism persisted

[12] After the passing of the aforementioned emancipation laws, several slave-owners in New York sold or transported enslaved people to slave states in order to avoid losing money. Although state laws made it illegal to remove enslaved people that would soon be freed, many slaveholders and traders regularly performed this act. Christina Accomando, "Demanding a Voice among the Pettifoggers: Sojourner Truth as Legal Actor," *MELUS* 28, no. 1 (2003) 65 – 66.
[13] Gilbert, *Narrative*, 53.
[14] Gilbert, *Narrative*, vii – viii.
[15] John Ernest, "The Floating Icon and the Fluid Text: Rereading the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*," *American Literature* 78, no. 3 (2006): 462. Naomi Greyser, "Affective Geographies: Sojourner Truth's *Narrative*, Feminism and the Ethical Bind of Sentimentalism," *American Literature* 79, no. 2 (2007): 279. Gilbert, *Narrative*, 84.

into the Civil War, when she helped recruit Black soldiers for the Union Army, and her civil rights activism continued into her later years, when she, albeit unsuccessfully, fought to secure land from the federal government for formerly enslaved people. Towards the end of her life, Truth settled in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she continued to speak on Black civil rights, women's rights, and desegregation until her death on 26th November 1883.[16]

Tubman was born into slavery on a plantation in Maryland in c.1822 to parents Harriet and Ben Tubman. As a young child, she was hired out as a nursemaid before returning to the plantation to work as a field-hand, which involved "following the oxen, loading and unloading wood, and carrying heavy burdens."[17]

Figure 1.2. Benjamin F. Powelson, *Portrait of Harriet Tubman*, c. 1868, photographic print on carte de visite mount, 10cm x 6cm, Library of Congress.

[16] Truth is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan.
[17] Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W. J. Moses, 1869) 9.

After the death of her enslaver Edward Brodess in 1849 and amid the looming threat of sale away from her family due to his poor finances, Tubman decided to flee her plantation and journey North to the free states. Tubman described the joy of crossing the state line, recalling that "there was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."[18] However, it was in this moment that Tubman realised "I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom" and she made the decision to return to Maryland to help her family and friends escape slavery.[19] Henceforth, Tubman became a conductor on the Underground Railroad, bringing around seventy enslaved people to freedom over twelve to fourteen trips. Tubman initially took enslaved people to free states in the North, but after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, which stipulated that enslaved people in free states must be returned to their enslavers, she settled these people in Canada. Her ability to free enslaved people, traverse treacherous landscapes, and avoid slavecatchers without losing a single passenger led many contemporaries to call her the "Moses" of her people. After freeing her parents from slavery and settling them in Canada, Tubman sought to move them back to the United States, with the harsh Canadian winters severely impacting their health. Her chance came in 1859 when William H. Seward, a prominent member of the new Republican Party who was President Lincoln's Secretary of State from 1961 to 1969 and a strong supporter of the Underground Railroad, offered to sell Tubman a small property in Auburn, New York.[20] Although moving back to the U.S. was risky, Tubman felt secure in her small circle of antislavery friends, both Black and white, and the move allowed her to be in closer contact with fellow abolitionists. Indeed, whilst in New York, Tubman

[18] Bradford, *Scenes*, 19.
[19] Bradford, *Scenes*, 20.
[20] Seward provided shelter to those escaping slavery via the Underground Railroad and he strongly admired Tubman, writing that "I have known her long, and a nobler, higher spirit, or a truer, seldom dwells in the human form." He sold the property, which included a house, barn, several outbuildings, and land, to Tubman in 1858 for $1,200 with a mortgage agreement whereby Tubman paid Seward a deposit of $25 and quarterly payments of $10 with interest. Seward in Bradford, *Scenes*, 65. Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 163 – 164.

became a key component of the antislavery scene and made money by presenting lectures among abolitionist circles.

Tubman continued speaking publicly about her experience as an enslaved woman until the start of the Civil War, when she joined the Union Army in the fight against slavery. Tubman became a nurse, spy, and scout and played a pivotal role in the successful liberation of 750 enslaved people in the 1863 Combahee River raid, earning her the nickname "General Tubman." During the war, Tubman kept in close contact with the abolitionist networks in the North and in August 1864, she met Truth in Boston whilst the preacher was travelling to Washington. This appears to be the only time that the two women met, and Carleton Mabee highlights how they disagreed on Abraham Lincoln, with Truth trying to persuade Tubman that he was a friend to Black people, but Tubman insisting he could not be considering the pay differential between Black and white soldiers.[21] After the war, Tubman moved back to Auburn to care for her aging parents and began formulating ideas of how to help other elderly and impoverished Black people, especially those previously enslaved. However, with limited finances, Tubman struggled greatly during this period and so her friends encouraged her to publish a biography. In the late 1860s, Tubman, who was also illiterate, dictated her story to white abolitionist Sarah Hopkins Bradford, who wrote and published her biography in 1869 as *The Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman.* Bradford met Tubman through "relations and friends in Auburn […] who have for many years known and esteemed this wonderful woman."[22] The biography, which was re-published in 1886 and 1901, raised Tubman's public profile and brought her some financial relief, not only through sales of the text but also through more offers

[21] Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 118.
[22] Bradford specifically mentions her and Tubman's mutual friends "Mrs. Commodore Swift of Geneva, and her sisters." Bradford, *Scenes,* 2.

to speak at public events.[23] In her later years, Tubman's determination to provide help to previously enslaved Black people prevailed, and in 1896 she purchased twenty-five acres of land adjacent to her home in Auburn. However, with the substantial debt of the property meaning she lacked the funds to run this home as she had planned, Tubman donated the property to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of which she was a member, in 1903.[24] Despite conflict between Tubman and the Church, the latter helped her establish the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged and Infirm Negroes, which officially opened in 1908 not long before Tubman's death at her Auburn home on 10th March 1913.[25]

Scholarly Interventions

Much of the scholarship on Tubman and Truth is biographical, with scholars using contemporaries' accounts, such as Bradford's *Scenes* and Gilbert's *Narrative,* to provide accounts on the lives of these two Black women. Nell Irvin Painter's *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (1996) and Margaret Washington's *Sojourner Truth's America* (2009) offer great insight into Truth's life and experiences, with Painter using contextual information to deliver a well-rounded image of Truth and Washington providing extensive details on the evolution of Truth's piety throughout her life. Both scholars attempt to recover Truth's voice, with Washington offering a spiritual biography that highlights the preacher's voice through "the concepts she considered most important," such as religion, her cultural background and "a womanist perspective."[26] Painter provides a greater examination of Truth's role as a symbol of

[23] Bradford renamed the revised editions of the biography *Harriet: The Moses of Her People.* The 1886 edition was published in New York by Geo R. Lockwood & Son and the 1901 edition was published by J. J. Little & Co., also in New York.
[24] Tubman was unable to pay the taxes on the property and donated it to the AME Church with the condition that they would continue to work towards opening the Harriet Tubman home for the elderly and impoverished. Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 279 – 280.
[25] Tubman disagreed with the AME's administration of the home, with Tubman condemning their rule that those using the home could only do so if they had $100 and stating, "I wanted to make a rule that nobody should come in unless they didn't have no money at all." Tubman is buried at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York. Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 285.
[26] Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 5.

American history, stating that Truth "rather than a person in history, she works as a symbol," namely the "Strong Black Woman," who has become a symbol for all the nineteenth century Black women who spoke out against slavery.[27] Nevertheless, while Painter attempts to separate the symbol from the person, her analysis of Truth's portrayal as a "Strong Black Woman" is limited, with little examination of twentieth century representations beyond mentioning the "T-shirts, postcards, lapel buttons, a 1986 postage stamp, [and] one-woman shows" that "made her visually and verbally omnipresent."[28] This thesis delves into twentieth and twenty-first century representations, such as the 1983 one-woman show *Ain't I A Woman* by Shirlene Holmes, to interrogate how Truth has been moulded into a Black female hero across time. I expand Painter's analysis beyond the biographical to consider how representations position Truth as an exceptionally "Strong Black Woman," whilst also uncovering how Black artists and writers across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries challenge this stereotype in their depictions of Truth as a Black hero.

Several biographies also explore Tubman's life and the stories that surround her, including Jean Humez's *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories* (2003), Catherine Clinton's *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (2004) and Kate Clifford Larson's *Bound for the Promised Land* (2004). Clinton's biography has been criticised for its shallow research, with Milton Sernett stating that the biography "needs to be read with Larson's better-researched volume" and Jean Thompson commenting that Clinton "falls back on assumptions about Tubman that Humez and Larson take pains to flesh out or debunk."[29] Indeed, Humez and Larson present detailed research that illuminates several aspects of Tubman's life, such as her upbringing, her life after the Civil War, and most notably the number of people she saved on

[27] Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 4 – 5.
[28] Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 273.
[29] Milton Sernett, *Harriet Tubman; Myth, Memory and History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 304. Jean Thompson, "Harriet Tubman's 3 Biographies," *Baltimore Sun*, February 1, 2004, https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2004-02-01-0402010383-story.html+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk.

the Underground Railroad. Through extensive research of nineteenth century documents, Humez and Larson revise Bradford's statement that Tubman saved 300 people in nineteen trips, with Humez arguing that Tubman took around ten or eleven trips with fifty-nine to seventy-seven people saved, and Larson contending it was approximately thirteen trips with around seventy to eighty people.[30]

While this research is largely biographical, these scholars begin to examine the myths that surround Tubman and her memory. Humez presents Tubman's life stories to allow readers to "create for themselves the closest possible approximation of her own storytelling voice" and Larson attempts to "rediscover Harriet Tubman […] and to reconstruct a richer and far more accurate historical account of her life."[31] Nevertheless, their focus on the biographical limits their analysis of Tubman's memory and her portrayal as a Black female hero, meaning these scholars do not probe the multi-faceted ways in which she is remembered. In moving away from the biographical approach, this thesis provides an in-depth examination of the intricacies of Tubman's memory, including analysis of how positioning Tubman as Moses frames her heroism through a masculine lens. Indeed, I discuss those artists and writers who move away from the Moses stereotype to ensure recognition of Tubman's womanhood and the multiple layers of oppression that she faced.

While some scholars have shifted away from biographical accounts to provide examinations of Tubman and Truth's representations, they tend to focus on nineteenth century portrayals. This thesis extends this scope by analysing a range of visual culture and literary

[30] Humez details her research on the number of Tubman's trips and the people she saved in Appendix B, see 349 – 352. Jean Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 349 – 352. Larson also notes that Tubman gave instructions to around fifty enslaved people who found their way to freedom independently. Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, xvii and 100. In his appendix, Sernett also provides a detailed table of Tubman's rescue missions with a comparison between Humez and Larson's research. Sernett, *Harriet Tubman*, 321 – 323.

[31] Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 266. Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 7. Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, xvi. See also Kate Clifford Larson, "From the Nature of Things": The Influence of Racial, Class and Gender Proscriptions on the Collective Memory of Harriet Tubman," in *Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery and Memory*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton and Maria I. Diedrich (London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 45 – 52.

representations from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to provide a full overview of Tubman and Truth's memorialisation as Black heroes. Scholars examining Truth's memory largely focus on Gilbert's *Narrative* and Frances Gage's report of Truth's Akron speech, the latter of which coined the iconic phrase "Ar'n't I A Woman." Gage, a white abolitionist, published her account of Truth's speech in *The Independent* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1863, twelve years after Truth delivered her address in Akron. Several scholars, including Painter, Washington, and Mabee, criticise Gage's report and question its accuracy by comparing it to earlier accounts, including that of Marius Robinson, which was published in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* three weeks after the convention.[32] Washington argues that Gage's "minstrelising" of Truth's speech "was anything but sisterly," maintaining that it demonstrates her whiteness and class privilege, while Painter contends that the anti-Black setting in Gage's report is entirely the authors' invention.[33] While Mabee claims to offer the first in-depth examination of Gage's account, his analysis is limited and his summation that Gage perhaps invented the term "Ar'n't I A Woman" out of some poetic desire is problematic.[34] Indeed, several scholars criticise Mabee's evaluation of the report, with Washington stating that contemporary accounts contradict his analysis and Kimberly Rae Connor stating that his assessment of Gage is sometimes sexist.[35] Other scholars provide stronger considerations of the ways in which contemporary accounts construct an image of Truth. Roseann Mandziuk and Suzanne Pullon Fitch attempt to separate fact from myth, with Mandziuk arguing that such

[32] Gage and Robinson's accounts are similar, with the former writing "look at my arm, I have plowed and planted and gathered into barn, and no man could head me" and the latter stating "I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?" However, Robinson's report contains no mention of the phrase "Ar'n't I A Woman" and does not contain the word "nigger" or the minstrelised language that Gage uses. Sojourner Truth in Frances Gage, "Sojourner Truth," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* May 2, 1863, 4. Sojourner Truth in Marius Robinson, "Women's Rights Convention," *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* June 21, 1851, 160.
[33] Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 228. Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 169.
[34] Mabee, *Sojourner Truth,* 68 – 80.
[35] Washington argues that Mabee's statement that Truth's speech did not cause a stir cannot be true considering the most progressive college in Ohio was still uneasy about antislavery in the 1850s. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 225. Kimberly Rae Connor, review of *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend*, by Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *African American Review* 30, no. 2 (1996): 296.

analysis is crucial considering "every impression of Truth's rhetoric is mediated through the eyes of white observers."[36] While Chapter Three similarly considers how Gilbert's *Narrative* shaped religious portrayals of Truth, I examine how Black artists and writers, such as June Jordan and Tina Allen, use such religious imagery to emphasise the importance of orality to Truth's activism and highlight her as a malleable Black female hero who embodies varying types of heroic behaviours.

Alongside analysing nineteenth century sources, Mandziuk also discusses the rhetorical processes of Truth's public memory through three occasions, namely demands for the installation of a bust of Truth in the U.S. Capitol in 1997, the development of Tina Allen's sculpture *Sojourner Truth* (1999) in Battle Creek and the establishment of Thomas Jay Warren's *Sojourner Truth Memorial Statue* (2002) in Northampton. Mandziuk evaluates how these instances of public memorialisation demonstrate the ideological battles over race, class, and gender, highlighting how such memorials are sites of struggle over the past and its meaning for the present.[37] This thesis expands Mandziuk's research by demonstrating the complexities of remembering Black women as heroes through public sites of memorialisation and considering how Truth's public memory struggles against and challenge hegemonic portrayals of heroism. In doing so, I highlight how artists, such as Tina Allen, use sculptures to emphasise alternative heroic behaviours, such as consciousness-raising, and demonstrate how such portrayals stress her malleability. Moreover, this thesis builds on Mandziuk's analysis to provide a more comprehensive overview of the collective memory of Truth, with public memorialisations given consideration alongside public art, popular culture, and literature. As

[36] Roseann Mandziuk and Suzanne Pullon Fitch, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 3. Roseann Mandziuk and Suzanne Pullon Fitch, "The Rhetorical Construction of Sojourner Truth," *Southern Communication Journal* 66, no. 2 (2001) 120 – 121. Roseann Mandziuk, "Grotesque and Ludicrous, but Yet Inspiring": Depictions of Sojourner Truth and Rhetorics of Domination," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 4 (2014): 467.
[37] Roseann Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the Politics of Race and Gender in the Spaces of public Memory," *Western Journal of Communication* 67, no. 3 (2003): 271 – 273.

Marita Sturken demonstrates, such an approach allows examination of the memory that is not officially sanctioned and is often entrenched with race, gender, and class bias.[38] By analysing public memorialisations alongside artworks, theatre productions, and poems, this thesis develops Mandziuk's research to offer a fuller examination of the ways in which Truth's heroism has been shaped and moulded.

Scholars also provide limited considerations of representations of Tubman's heroism. Milton Sernett goes beyond the biographical approach to explore the collective memory of Tubman, focusing on why her story has captured the imagination of the American public in an attempt to "sort out the 'legend' from the 'lady'" and "recover the 'historical' Tubman."[39] Sernett provides insight into Tubman's memory through an exhaustive list of representations, including children's literature, murals, TV shows, films, and sculptures, which demonstrate the breadth of Tubman's influence on popular culture and national memory.[40] However, Sernett offers limited analysis of these representations, with little consideration of how the context of the time and the background of the artists and writers influenced the ways in which such representations depicted Tubman as a Black hero. While this thesis examines similar representations, such as William H. Johnson's *Harriet Tubman* (1945) and Jacob Lawrence's numerous artworks, I offer more detailed examinations of the background, context, and visual content of these representations to fully uncover the intricacies of Tubman's memory. Indeed, while Sernett argues that a focus on Tubman's role as Moses obscures her role in the Civil War,

[38] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 3 – 4.
[39] Sernett, *Harriet Tubman,* 2 – 3. It is important to note that Sernett published a chapter about Tubman in 2002, in which he accepts many of the myths that Humez and Larson go on to reject. It appears that Sernett was inspired to interrogate the myths surrounding Tubman's memory that he previously accepted, especially the number of people she saved, after the publication of Humez and Larson's biographies. See the chapter "Moses and Her People" in Milton Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002).
[40] He states that "my principal focus is on those individuals who have "gone public," as it were, and thereby contributed to a treasury of memories that is accessible to all who care to consider her significance." Sernett, *Harriet Tubman,* 9.

he does not examine how this image narrows Tubman's heroism.[41] In considering how Tubman's portrayal as Moses evolved across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I argue that the masculine framing of this image fails to recognise Black women's oppression and resistance, and demonstrate how such a portrayal supports Tubman's depiction as a lone "superwoman" who can overcome inordinate suffering.

Furthermore, this thesis expands the research of Vivian May, who published an article in a special issue of *Meridians* that focused on Tubman. Through an analysis of feminist scholarship, May demonstrates that "Tubman's contributions have gone more or less unchecked" and argues that Tubman's "narrative and political curtailment has been under-theorised," meaning she "is more often remembered in ways that misrecognise, distort, or flatten."[42] She contends that Tubman has been sanitised through stereotypes, such as the mammy or the "maternal saviour," maintaining that her insurgency has been "tamed" and "made over into a life defined by selflessness and caregiving."[43] Although May contends that Tubman is portrayed in ways that "misrecognise, distort, or flatten," she does not analyse representations that do precisely this.[44] Building on May's calls for greater analysis of the manipulation of Tubman's legacy, this thesis examines a variety of representations across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to fully consider how representations have misrecognised, distorted, or flattened Tubman's memory. Indeed, I analyse how representations, such as Johnson's painting *Harriet Tubman* (1945), Lawrence's artwork *Forward* (1967), and Mike Alewitz's mural *Move or Die* (2000), countered the taming of Tubman's militancy, while also revealing how ideas of respectability and notions of acceptable Black women's militancy elicited criticism and sanitisation.

[41] Sernett, *Harriet Tubman,* 72.
[42] Vivian May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught: Re-examining Harriet Tubman's Place in Women's Studies," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 2 (2014): 30 – 31.
[43] May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught," 37.
[44] May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught," 28.

Moreover, this thesis expands on Janell Hobson's claim that Tubman was "considered a 'superwoman' of considerable strength."[45] Hobson's research analyses how representations of Tubman from twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture "flatten the historical while hyperbolising the fantastical elements of Tubman," arguing for the reconfiguration of her memory to refute "the national myths perpetuated in popular American history."[46] While this thesis includes representations examined by Hobson, my analysis demonstrates how artists, such as Catlett and Ringgold, move away from the "superwoman" stereotype and present Tubman not as a lone woman with inordinate strength, but as one of many Black women who overcame oppression. Indeed, I highlight how Black artists and writers created an alternative heroic lineage that depicts Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, both "ordinary" and known. Through such analysis, I demonstrate how artists and writers, such as Alice Childress, Tina Allen, and Mahogany Browne, highlight other Black women alongside Tubman and Truth to expand the white and male-dominated heroic pantheon and include alternative heroic behaviours, such as networking and consciousness-raising, that are vital to Black women's heroism. Hence, this thesis expands Hobson and May's research by not only offering greater analysis of Tubman's memory, but also by highlighting the nuances of Tubman's hero making and providing greater insights into the complexities of Black female heroism.

This thesis makes important interventions in the scholarship of Tubman and Truth not only by providing greater analysis of their heroism, but also by examining their representations together. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Tubman and Truth have been repeatedly remembered together as the "twin mountain peaks" of Black women's heroism, with artists and writers celebrating these two figures as *the* Black female heroes. However, while scholars often reference or recognise one when analysing the other, there has been little

[45] Janell Hobson, "Harriet Tubman: A Legacy of Resistance," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 2 (2014): 1.
[46] Janell Hobson, "Between History and Fantasy: Harriet Tubman in the Artistic and Popular Imaginary," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 2 (2014): 50.

interrogation of their memory together. The one exception is Celeste Marie Bernier's *Characters of Blood* (2012), which analyses visual and textual representations of six Black antislavery figures, namely Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Sengbe Pieh, Tubman, and Truth. Bernier considers representations created by these individuals, such as biographies and photographs, alongside those created by others in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Through an interdisciplinary framework, Bernier counters "mainstream and marginal tendencies toward fragmentation and obfuscation" to analyse their Black heroic representations and examine how these figures are reimagined across diverse social and political contexts in a variety of forms.[47] In doing so, Bernier remedies a failure in scholarship to analyse these six figures from a transatlantic context over an extensive historical period and within a comparative perspective. However, Bernier offers separate analysis of Tubman and Truth's representations, with little consideration of how their memories are intertwined. This thesis builds on Bernier's research by analysing representations of Tubman and Truth together and discussing the ways in which their memory influences and impacts upon one another. Examining the similar and different ways in which they are portrayed, both in separate and joint representations, is crucial for understanding how these Black women have become the "twin mountain peaks" of Black women's heroism. Indeed, such research is vital, as analysis of depictions of Tubman and Truth's militancy demonstrates that different forms of militant activism are deemed more "acceptable" for Black women to perform than others, while also highlighting Truth's role as a malleable Black female hero.

Moreover, this thesis builds on Bernier's argument that to understand and fully recognise Black female heroism, we must construct an alternative model of heroism that is distinct from Black male heroism, white heroism, and romanticised versions of Black women's

[47] Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in The Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia press, 2012), 4 – 5.

heroism, such as the "superwoman." Traditionally, models of heroism largely centre around whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class expectations, which largely excludes Black female heroism and fails to consider the memorialisation of Black women, such as Tubman and Truth. In the nineteenth century, scholars failed to consider anyone but the white man as the hero, with Thomas Carlyle determining that heroism had one sole definition that revolved around white masculinity.[48] Such views about the inherent masculinity of heroism continued into the twentieth century, with Roger Abrahams contending in 1966 that "a hero is a man whose deeds epitomise the masculine attributes most highly valued within such a society" and John Lash stating in 1995 that "the hero is undeniably *he*, the male of the human species."[49] In the 1990s, scholarship began to consider Black heroism, with Jerry Bryant, David Lambert, and John W. Roberts exploring different forms of Black heroes, including folk and national heroes, from varying perspectives. Much of this scholarship explores the importance of shifting contexts in the creation of heroes, with Roberts noting that figures and actions dubbed heroic in one context by one group may be viewed as ordinary or even criminal by another group, or by the same group at a different time.[50]

This research is significant for highlighting the complexities in constructing Black heroes, with Lambert emphasising the importance of collective identities in the creation of national heroes and Bryant noting that "to speak of a black 'hero' is a contradiction in terms."[51] However, while these studies are important in advancing our understandings of Black heroism, they largely centre on Black male heroism and fail to fully consider how Black women's

[48] Carlyle laid out six all white, all male heroic types, namely Divinity, Prophet, Poet, Priest, Man of Letters and King, who he argues were at the core of the world's history. Hence, under Carlyle's definition of heroism, Tubman and Truth would not qualify as heroes. Thomas Carlyle in Cora Kaplan, "Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L"Ouverture and the Literary Imagination," *History Workshop Journal* 46 (1998): 52.
[49] Roger D. Abrahams, "Some Varieties of Heroes in America," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3, no. 3 (1966): 341. John Lash, *The Hero: Manhood and Power* (New York: Thomas and Hudson, 1995), 5.
[50] John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (1989), 1.
[51] Jerry Bryant, *Victims and Heroes: Racial Violence in the African American Novel* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 3. David Lambert, "Part of the Blood and Dream": Surrogation, Memory and the National Hero in the Postcolonial Caribbean," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41, no. 3 – 4 (2007): 345 and 351 – 353.

experiences influence their heroism or how hegemonic ideas of race, gender, and class impact portrayals of such heroism. Indeed, this thesis rectifies this by demonstrating how processes of Black memorialisation are still affected by the hegemonic pull of white supremacist and patriarchal norms. Although Roberts's insistence on the importance of social, political, and historical contexts in refocusing the lens through which we reconstruct heroism is significant, there has been limited study of Black female heroes and the complicated process by which they are created.[52] Hence, this thesis analyses representations of Tubman and Truth to develop our understanding of their memory, expand Black heroism scholarship, and create a nuanced model of Black female heroism that prioritises Black women's experiences.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

In this thesis, I examine the ways in which Tubman and Truth have been moulded into Black female heroes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I explore the evolution of their memory over time in response to social and political changes, considering how instances such as the fight for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, and the 1970s Black feminist movement impacted portrayals of Tubman and Truth. In this analysis of Black female heroism, I am largely concerned with analysing the collective memory of Tubman and Truth. Memory is a complicated yet important process, with scholars such as Paul Connerton and David Thelen discussing the ways in which memories are created, conveyed, and sustained, and analysing the relationship between history and memory.[53] Indeed, in analysing the "confluence of history and memory," David Blight notes that memory "is often treated as a sacred set of potentially absolute meanings and stories; possessed as the heritage of a community. Memory is often owned […] is passed down through generations […and] often coalesces in objects, sacred sites,

[52] Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 1 – 2.
[53] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1. David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1117 – 1118.

and monuments."[54] Collective memory, as understood by Maurice Halbwachs, describes how social groups remember the past and is a socially constructed remembering of the past informed by shared experiences and public narratives.[55] Such a framework of collective memory is important in this analysis of Tubman and Truth, as it allows for recognition of the fact that past events and people can be interpreted differently in varying contexts, with current interests, needs, and beliefs shaping views of the past. In discussing representations of Tubman and Truth's memory from the 1930s to present day, this thesis analyses how contemporary interests mould portrayals of their heroism. For example, the importance of the Exodus narrative to the Black freedom struggle led many to emphasise Tubman's role as the Moses of her people from the 1940s to the 1960s, while the proliferation of Black feminist thought in the 1970s and 1980s led Truth to become a militant Black feminist icon during this period.

Following Halbwachs's assertion that memory is a collective process that is affected by group dynamics and societies' interests and concerns, scholars delved into the complexities of collective memory.[56] Pierre Nora's research argues that "there are as many memories as there are groups" and highlights the importance of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) to collective memory, maintaining that geographical sites alongside monuments, shrines, sculptures, portraits, paintings, and holidays, are crucial in the composition of collective memories.[57] Nora's argument on the importance of these *lieux de mémoire* is highlighted in Chapter One through a discussion of the transmissions and sites of Tubman and Truth's memory. Following Nora's argument that a will to remember is essential in the creation of memory, I highlight the complexities around the creation of public memorials of Tubman and Truth, with examples

[54] David Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 9.
[55] Maurice Halbwachs originally published *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (*Social Frameworks of Memory*) in 1925, with *La Mémoire Collective* (*On Collective* Memory) published posthumously in 1950. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).
[56] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.
[57] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989): 8 – 9.

such as Alewitz's 2000 mural highlighting how prevailing views of heroism can lead to censorship and sanitisation, thus emphasising the race, gender, and class dynamics that present challenges to the memorialisation of Black women. Moreover, this thesis builds on Barry Schwartz's research on collective memory and his argument that "remembered" events of the past are not stored in the mind, but in monuments, statues, paintings, museums, and history books.[58] He argues that collective memory is based on two sources of belief about the past, namely history and commemoration.[59] Thus, analysing the collective memory of Tubman and Truth allows for consideration of how they have been remembered through history and commemorative symbolism, which according to Schwartz, awaken ideas and feelings about the past. This framework enables an exploration of how Tubman and Truth's memory is transmitted and accumulated across generations, thereby transcending individual memories, with collective memory embracing events that occurred before an individual was born.

In analysing the collective memory of Tubman and Truth, this thesis recognises the complexities of remembering Black people, whose history has routinely been overlooked and silenced. Several scholars' examination of Civil War memory reveals the "resubjugation" of Black people, with Blight arguing that the human reconciliation in the antebellum period came at a terrible cost.[60] Kirk Savage contends that public monuments were at the centre of the nation's efforts to shed its tradition of slavery, noting that "the impulse behind the public monument was an impulse to mould history to its rightful pattern."[61] Indeed, he maintains that monuments "attempt to mould a landscape of collective memory," conserving what is worth remembering and discarding the rest.[62] Jeanne Theoharis also notes the difficulties surrounding

[58] Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9 – 10.
[59] Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge National Memory,* 9.
[60] Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield,* 3.
[61] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3 – 4.
[62] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves,* 4.

the memorialisation of Black people, arguing that the process of what is revealed or obscured is often a function of power.[63] Noting how contemporary memorials whitewash opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, Theoharis contends that popular histories of the movement are a distortion produced out of a desire for reconciliation.[64] Nevertheless, Leigh Raiford highlights the importance of Black memory in challenging "official" stories and giving voice to historical silences, maintaining that this memory is "critical to identity-formation and self-creation."[65] Indeed, in exploring Tubman and Truth's portrayal as Black female heroes, this thesis emphasises the important role that these Black women play in celebrating Black history, whilst also recognising that their continued veneration inevitably perpetuates silences, with few other Black women looked to as heroes.

While exploring Tubman and Truth's representations involves visual analysis, this thesis is less concerned with issues of formal analysis that are characteristic of art history but rather situates itself within the interdisciplinary field of visual culture and its ability to make memory visible. In 1995, W. J. T. Mitchell's coined the term "pictorial turn," with his research characterising visual culture as "the study of the social construction of visual experience."[66] While scholars such as William Innes Homer and Susanne von Falkenhausen note that visual culture is "a slippery concept," John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin broadly define this approach as including "material artefacts, buildings, and images, plus time-based media and performances, […] which serve aesthetic, symbolic, ritualistic, or ideological-political ends, and/or practical functions, and which address the sense of sight to a significant extent."[67] Hence,

[63] Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 8.
[64] Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, 16. Jeanne Theoharis, "Accidental Matriarchs and Beautiful Helpmates," in *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up*, ed. Emilye Crosby (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 405 – 407.
[65] Leigh Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009): 120.
[66] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture," *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 540 – 541.
[67] John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 2.

while this thesis includes analysis of some literary material (such as poems), I am mainly concerned with visual culture representations, which range from murals and artwork to theatre productions and, albeit to a lesser extent, films.

Analysing these portrayals with a visual culture approach allows greater insight into Tubman and Truth's memory, with discussion of what is made visible and what remains hidden, alongside consideration of who sees what, how depictions are seen by different people, and the power structures that influence these dynamics. Indeed, this approach brings hidden histories to the fore, especially those that have not been written down in traditional archives, with Chapter One highlighting how Black voices, and especially Black women's voices, were and are routinely overlooked and ignored. Hence, visual culture provides an important alternative literacy and is a useful vehicle given the nature of memory, with Eilean Hooper-Greenhill arguing that it examines "the act of seeing as a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes."[68] Employing a visual culture approach strengthens our understandings of the importance of context in the creation of Tubman and Truth as Black heroes. Malcolm Barnard highlights how visual culture is "one of the means by which social order, the hierarchy of different groups, practices, beliefs and so on, is challenged and contested," with Chris Jenks noting that what we see is inherently linked with how society has "arranged its forms of knowledge, its strategies of power and its systems of desire."[69] This thesis discusses these issues of power in the memorialisation of Black women, alongside noting what is made visible in these portrayals and what is left behind.

[68] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14.
[69] Malcolm Barnard, *Art, Design, and Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 1998), 195. Chris Jenks, *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), i.

A Variety of Representations

In my research of the memory of Tubman and Truth, I collated the first comprehensive database of their representations from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through archival and online research, I collected over 190 artworks, murals, sculptures, busts, quilts, theatre productions, poems, TV shows, and films into a database, which is available online.[70] While this database contains an abundance of sources that demonstrate the importance of Tubman and Truth's memory, to include every representation would be impossible. Hence, from this wealth of primary materials, I selected several representations that provide rich source analysis and strong background information on the artist, writer, and the context in which the portrayal was created. Several of these representations appear across chapters, providing a rich and sustained discussion that highlights the breadth of sources yet allows in-depth analysis of these portrayals. I examine a variety of cultural forms that were created in the U.S., such as murals, artwork, sculptures, theatre productions, poetry, and films, to demonstrate the broad impact of Tubman and Truth's heroism across different forms of memorialisation, which is crucial considering the fleeting and often incomplete nature of memory.

This analysis is important as it allows for consideration of how different representations portray Tubman and Truth's heroism, with this research noting the fluctuations in particular forms across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, when analysing representations from 1930s to the 1960s, I largely focus on visual representations, noting the importance of creating recognisable images of Black heroes, like Tubman and Truth, to ensure the dissemination of their activism and heroism throughout Black communities. In creating and disseminating established images of Black heroes that included famous characteristics, such as

[70] My full database is available online at https://uniofnottm-my.sharepoint.com/:x:/g/personal/charlotte_james1_nottingham_ac_uk/EQyVYUdR_xpJgRUthhJ0jqwBKcOeOfPwANc-5LpN2PWk_g?e=nqmHx1 with the password TubmanTruth2021. My archive containing images of artworks, busts, murals, and sculptures is available at https://uniofnottm-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/charlotte_james1_nottingham_ac_uk/ElUWTJ1RmPBFsULwhkeH_sUB2wjiemVyc-GxX237WHrZoQ?e=r0ZdVd with the password TubmanTruth2021.

Tubman's rifle and Truth's glasses or bonnet, artists ensured that Black communities could easily recognise the subject of their images. This was partly due to low literary rates among Black people, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, and because of the lack of information about Black figures in textbooks and the shortage of such textbooks in Black schools.[71] While visual representations remain an important part of Tubman and Truth's memory, literary and performance material proliferated from the 1970s onwards. This was partly influenced by the Black Arts Movement, which established new cultural institutions that promoted Black pride, and the increase in Black-owned publishing venues in the 1960s and 1970s, with Kinohi Nishikawa contending that this meant Black writers need not appeal to white-owned presses and their white-dominated audiences.[72] The proliferation of literary and performance material was also influenced by the abundance of Black feminist cultural production in this period, with Robert J. Patterson arguing that there was a literary and cultural renaissance in the 1970s with a wealth of Black women producing Black art, such as plays and poetry, that explored Black women's experiences.[73] The following chapters highlight how this increase in literary and performance material at this time was crucial in positioning Truth as a militant Black feminist public speaker, with theatre productions and poetry capturing the importance of orality and performance to Truth's activism. Hence, this thesis provides wide-ranging examinations of the moulding of Tubman and Truth's memory across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, whilst also emphasising the breadth of their representations.

[71] In 1952, the illiteracy rate for Black people aged 14 years and older was 10.2%, which was five times that of white people at 1.8%. Howard Fuller, "The Struggle Continues," *Education Next,* June 30, 2006, https://www.educationnext.org/the-struggle-continues/#:~:text=In%201952%2C%20the%20illiteracy%20rate,see%20Figures%201%20%26%202.

[72] Kinohi Nishikawa, "From the Ground Up: Readers and Publishers in the Making of a Literary Public," in *Black Cultural Productions after Civil Rights,* ed. Robert J. Patterson (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 202 – 203.

[73] Robert J. Patterson, "Dreams Reimagined: Political Possibilities and the Black Cultural Imagination" in *Black Cultural Productions after Civil Rights,* ed. Robert J. Patterson (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 12 – 15.

Alongside collating the various representations of Tubman and Truth, where possible I also documented the race and gender of the artists and writers who were creating these portrayals. This research demonstrates that representations of these Black heroes were created by male and female artists and writers from a variety of racial backgrounds, with the majority created by Black men and Black women.[74] Until the 1970s, there were a limited number of white writers, such as Katherine Garrison Chapin, and artists, such as Winifred Milius Lubell and Ben Irvin, creating representations of Tubman and Truth.[75] It is only in the latter half of the twentieth century and especially at the start of the twenty-first century that we see a significant increase in portrayals by white artists and writers as Tubman and Truth's memory expands beyond Black communities into the mainstream white discourse. Nevertheless, this thesis largely focuses on Black artists and writers, especially when examining the earlier period, because they dominate in the creation of representations of Tubman and Truth. Indeed, many Black artists from the early to mid-twentieth century, such as Lawrence, Catlett, and Charles White, created numerous representations of Tubman and Truth across the century, and analysis of these portrayals provides important insight into how differing social and political contexts impacted their depictions of these Black heroes. Moreover, as the following chapters show, several artists from the later period, such as Alewitz, imitate and adapt depictions by earlier Black artists, such as Biggers, demonstrating the importance of these earlier representations in shaping portrayals of Tubman and Truth's heroism.

While representations of Tubman and Truth were created throughout their lifetimes and ever since their deaths, to provide an in-depth consideration of portrayals of their heroism,

[74] The representations I have collated in my database show that 76 Black people (35 Black women and 41 Black men) created portrayals of Tubman and Truth, compared to 60 white people (31 men and 29 women) across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These figures exclude the 5 female and 17 male artists/writers whose race I have not been able to confirm, and 6 individuals whose race and gender I cannot identify. There are also 7 representations that were created by collective groups, such as the Philadelphia Mural Project, where I have been unable to identify specific individuals who took part and therefore cannot specify their race and gender.
[75] Katherine Garrison Chapin wrote the play *Sojourner Truth* in 1948, Winifred Milius Lubell created the artwork *Harriet Tubman* in 1951 and Ben Irvin designed the tapestry *Harriet Tubman,* which was completed by Black women members of the Negro History Club of Marin City and Sausalito in 1951.

I focus my examination on representations created from the late 1930s to present day. Memorialisations of Tubman and Truth's heroism emerged in abundance during the 1930s, with Aaron Douglas' mural *Spirits Rising* in 1931, Lawrence's painting series *The Life of Harriet Tubman* in 1939, and White's mural *Five Great American Negroes* also in 1939.[76] The emergence of a wealth of representations was largely facilitated by President Roosevelt's New Deal and developing ideas about the need for "cultural democracy," whereby art was democratised and created by the people for the people. Under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists, writers, and musicians were hired to create a variety of cultural forms to stimulate economic recovery. WPA projects provided Black artists, such as White, Johnson, and Lawrence, with subsidies that afforded them the time, materials, and opportunities to create public art full-time. These projects also collected enslaved people's narratives, which not only commented on contemporary race relations, but also sparked a desire to learn more about Black history, with inter-generational memory becoming key in the transmission of the memory of slavery. In this context, Black artists used Tubman and Truth's images and words to educate Black communities about slavery and to comment on Black people's continued oppression, leading to the production of many representations in the 1930s and 1940s.

Moreover, just as many Mexican artists in the 1920s organised networks to support the government-funded muralist movement, many Black artists in the 1930s established organisations such as the Harlem Artists Guild and the Harlem Community Art Centre to support the development of young Black artists and led to an explosion of Black art.[77] Indeed,

[76] In the 1930s, Bernarda Bryson also created four artworks on Tubman in 1934, namely *Moses, Escape, Tubman Escapes as a Man 1* and *Tubman Escapes as a Man 2*. However, while these representations are interesting, there is very little information available on Bryson and the context in which she created these portrayals, hence my decision not to include them in my analysis.

[77] The Mexican government provided funding to Mexican muralists in the 1920s to curate a shared history in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The Harlem Artists Guild was founded in 1935 by a group of Black artists, including Augusta Savage and Charles Alston. Its original aim was to pressurise the government to hire more Black artists for the federal projects, but it became an important forum for Black artists and led to the establishment of the Harlem Community Art Centre in 1936, which became vital for the development of many Black artists, including Charles White. Alison Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 354.

many Black artists were inspired by the Mexican muralists that were active between the 1920s and the 1960s, such as José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera, with many admiring their engagement with the social, economic, and political conditions of the common people, their commitment to fighting oppression and their celebration of cultural heritage. Lizetta LeFalle Collins argues that "this fully integrated political program undergirding the Mexican work became a model for African American artists," maintaining that these Mexican muralists were precisely what many politically engaged Black artists were looking for.[78] Alison Cameron supports this, commenting how the hardships brought by the Great Depression, which intensified inequality, radicalised many Black artists and led individuals such as White and Catlett to seek out Mexican muralists as mentors to acquire the means with which to "engage the public in those issues most pertinent to their struggle."[79] Hence, this thesis focuses on representations created from the 1930s onwards because of the abundance of portrayals created during this period and the prominent artists that emerged during this time.

While an ambitious timeframe, I continue my analysis to present day to provide an overview of how portrayals of Tubman and Truth's heroism changes over time. I demonstrate how Moses is an important part of Tubman's memory from the 1940s to the 1960s, yet reveal that this significantly decreases in the latter half of the twentieth century, before being picked up again in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, although Truth's position as an important public speaker and preacher is recognised throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, it is only from the 1970s onwards that artists and writers highlight her position as a militant Black feminist. Indeed, the following chapters demonstrate how Truth's words and image are used in the late twentieth and twenty-first century to draw comparison between nineteenth-century struggles and that of today, with artists and writers noting the continual oppression of Black

[78] Lizetta LeFalle Collins, *In the Spirit of Resistance: African-American Modernists and the Mexican Muralists School* (New York: The Studio Museum, 1997), 32 – 33.
[79] Alison Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 354.

women. Moreover, this thesis analyses representations until present day to highlight Tubman and Truth's continued importance in Black history and American public memory. As this thesis demonstrates, amidst current debates around the memorialisation of slavery's supporters, such as Confederate General Robert E. Lee, Tubman and Truth are frequently called upon and used to rectify a long tradition of memorialising white oppressors. Thus, exploring Tubman and Truth's memory from the late 1930s to present day is crucial in understanding how these two Black women came to represent the antithesis of these white men and in examining their strong, continued position as the twin mountain peaks of Black female heroism.

Ever-Changing Contexts

As previously mentioned, from the 1930s to the 1960s, artwork and murals are the most prominent form of Tubman and Truth's representations, with portrayals becoming more varied from the 1970s onwards and a significant increase in the number of Black writers creating theatre productions and poems to celebrate the heroism of Tubman and Truth. As previously mentioned, this flourish of varying cultural forms grew out of the Black Arts Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, whereby Black poets, musicians, artists, and writers were encouraged to create Black art for Black people to awaken Black consciousness and achieve liberation. Although artists such as Catlett and Lawrence continued creating visual representations of Tubman and Truth into the 1970s, Black writers, such as Ntozake Shangee and June Jordan, also began creating literary representations, including poems. This proliferation of Black art was accompanied by the expansion of Black feminist thought, with Black female scholars such as Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Barbara Smith disseminating ideas about the importance of recognising and rectifying Black women's oppression. Indeed, I demonstrate how in the 1970s and 1980s Black female writers, such as Shangee, Jordan, and Holmes, emphasised Truth as a militant Black feminist who used her public speaking to

challenge the white patriarchy and demand equality for Black women. Hence, this thesis not only demonstrates how social and political contexts led to the creation of different forms of representations, but also highlights how these changing contexts shaped the portrayals themselves, with greater recognition of Black women's oppression and rectifying the silencing of their voices.

Furthermore, I highlight how forms of representations evolve in the 1990s, with a significant increase in sculptures and statues of Tubman and Truth. While public sculptures honouring the Civil Rights Movement expanded in the last quarter of the twentieth century, especially after the designation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a national holiday in 1983, public sculptures of Tubman and Truth did not emerge until 1999 with Fern Cunningham's *Step on Board*, Catlett's *Sojourner*, and Allen's *Sojourner Truth*.[80] The creation of public sculptures of Tubman and Truth continued and flourished in the twenty-first century, with artists using this "official" form of memorialisation to celebrate and honour their heroism.[81] The proliferation of these "official" memorialisations in the twenty-first century, the gendered and racial complexities of which will be discussed in the following chapter, can be explained by a shift in the memorial landscape. Public spaces, including museums and urban landscapes, had long been undisputed realms of white supremacy that were devoted to memorialising white men over Black people, especially Black women. This was particularly worse in the American South, with Nathalie Dessens arguing that "slavery was nowhere to be seen or heard," and Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small determining that many Southern

[80] Ruth Inge Hardison created a small statue titled *Sojourner Truth* in 1968, yet this was not a public sculpture. Tubman is included in Ed Dwight's *Underground Railroad Memorial* from 1994, yet she is not the focus of this sculpture and is depicted alongside other activists.

[81] My research shows that between 2000 and 2020, eight sculptures dedicated to Tubman and seven dedicated to Truth were erected in the U.S. Ed Dwight also included Tubman and Truth in two sculptures celebrating the history of the Black freedom struggle: Tubman was included in *African American History Monument* (2001) and Truth in *Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Monument* (2002). A sculpture of Tubman by Opoku Biney titled *Nana Tubman Ross Tubman* was also erected in 2005 in Aburi, Ghana.

museums were practicing the "symbolic annihilation" of the enslaved.[82] However, over the past three decades, Dessens maintains that the U.S. started to consider its "memorial debt" to the descendants of millions of Black enslaved people, leading states and cities to exhume their slavery past and highlight their links to Black antislavery activists, like Tubman and Truth.[83] Indeed, Cunningham's sculpture emphasises Tubman's relationship with Boston, a city in which she gave several antislavery speeches, and Allen's sculpture highlights Truth's connection to Battle Creek, which is where she spent the latter part of her life and where she is buried.

Nevertheless, as the following chapters demonstrate, this is not to say that memorialisations of Black people and their history were unequivocally accepted and that the memorial landscape has become devoid of white supremacy. Chapter One highlights recent controversies surrounding Confederate monuments and notes how debates over Civil War memorials and memory were heightened in the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, with the images of Black activists, including Tubman, used to reclaim monuments that uphold white supremacy. Moreover, it is important to highlight that the emergence of sculptures occurs alongside a substantial increase in the creation of murals honouring Tubman and Truth, which was partly influenced by the wealth of murals that emerged out of the Black Lives Matter movement. Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi established this movement in the aftermath of George Zimmerman's 2013 acquittal for the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, with Garza's tweet that "Black Lives Matter" being used across social media and in demonstrations that demanded justice for

[82] Nathalie Dessens, "Remembering in Black and White: Memorialising Slavery in 21st Century Louisiana," in *Traces and Memories of Slavery in the Atlantic World*, ed. Lawrence Aje and Nicolas Gachon (New York: Routledge, 2020), 128. Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 2 – 4.
[83] Dessens, Remembering in Black and White," 130.

Martin's death.[84] Alongside the explosion of social media posts and protests, many artists used muralism as a public form of memorialisation to honour Martin and condemn the systematic racial violence that led to his death.[85] Amidst the Black Lives Matter protests of the 2010s, there has been a great increase in murals honouring Tubman and Truth, with artists, such as Mel Waters, Jetsonorama, and Jess X Chen using these historical Black heroes to highlight the long history of the Black freedom struggle and emphasise how the issues facing Black people, and especially Black women, in the nineteenth century persist today.[86]

Chapter Outline

This thesis contains four chapters, with Chapter One providing an overview of Black heroism and establishing the model of Black female heroism that will be used throughout this research. In this introductory chapter, I explore the complexities of the creation and function of heroes, with discussion of the important role heroes play in affirming identity, values, and ideological assumptions. I highlight how race, gender, and class dynamics shape our understandings of heroism, demonstrating how current models of Black heroism focus on masculinity and ideas of respectability. Alongside arguing for a shift away from such models, I highlight the importance of creating an alternative model of Black female heroism that recognises Black

[84] Martin was shot and killed by neighbourhood watchman Zimmerman when he felt the teenager was acting suspiciously in the Twin Lakes area of Florida. Zimmerman claimed self-defence and although he was charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter, he was cleared on these charges on 13 July 2013.
[85] Artists who completed murals of Trayvon Martin include Israel McCloud, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh and Miguel "Bounce" Perez with the Trust Your Struggle collective. This trend of using murals to memorialise victims of racial violence continued, with artists completing murals of Michael Brown (including Ashley Montague and Will Condry) and Sandra Bland (such as Thomas "Detour" Evans, Hiero Viega, Cya Jonae and Giovannie (aka "Just") and Allan Andre and Kalkidan Assefa).
[86] Indeed, scholars such as Frederick C. Harris and Hasan Kwame Jeffries note the connection between the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement and historic protests for Black equality, with Harris arguing that today's activists are picking up "the baton of civil rights activists before them." Although Harris and Jeffries highlight the differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and previous movements, including the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement, they both recognise a broader connection to the long history of the Black freedom struggle. Frederick C. Harris, "The Next Civil Rights Movement?," *Dissent* 63, no. 3 (2015) 34. Hasan Kwame Jeffries, "Black Lives Matter: A Legacy of Black Power Protest," *African American Intellectual History Society*, September 15, 2016, https://www.aaihs.org/black-lives-matter-a-legacy-of-black-power-protest/.

women's triple oppression and the ways they resisted white supremacy. In doing so, this chapter recognises alternative heroic behaviours and attributes, such as wisdom and consciousness-raising, that have long-been excluded from dominant understandings of heroism and develops a multifaceted model of Black female heroism that offers a nuanced understanding of the creation and function of Black women as heroes. This chapter also considers how Tubman and Truth have become *the* Black female heroes, highlighting issues of silences within traditional archives that often ignore and obscure Black women's voices. In doing so, I argue for the importance of considering different modes of transmissions and sites of memory, with such analysis crucial in the re-evaluation of heroic behaviours and attitudes, which shape who is considered heroic. By examining oral culture, family memory, and public "official" memorialisations, this chapter discusses how Tubman and Truth's representations are both underpinned by and challenge dominant ideas of heroism, noting how their memorials can become sites of resistance. Thus, this chapter develops a model of Black female heroism that centres around Black women's heroic behaviours and their experiences by recognising their oppression and their varying resistance, including the attributes of "ordinary" Black women, alongside the exceptional.

Having established this model of Black female heroism, I structure the remainder of my thesis around three key themes that emerge when analysing portrayals of Tubman and Truth's heroism, highlighting the importance of these themes in shaping ideas of Black female heroism. Chapter Two highlights how portrayals of Tubman and Truth interact with the myth of the "superwoman," with discussion of how artists and writers maintain or challenge this stereotype that depicts Black women as capable of enduring and overcoming inordinate suffering. In evaluating the artwork of Catlett and Biggers and the literature of Childress and Jordan, this chapter considers how representations support or undermine the model of Black female heroism presented in Chapter One. An important part of this analysis is discussing

Tubman's portrayal as Moses, with this chapter examining how artists that frame her heroism with this masculine lens are employing elements of the "superwoman." Throughout this chapter, I consider how representations of Tubman and Truth as exceptional "superwomen" have changed over time, with artists and writers generally moving away from this stereotype and employing more productive models of Black female heroism that recognise Black women's triple oppression and the resistance they used, including that by "ordinary" Black women who have often been side-lined. In noting that depictions of Tubman and Truth as "superwomen" decreased from the 1970s onwards, I argue that many artists and writers create an alternative heroic lineage that honours Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women and their various heroic behaviours, noting how this shift away from exceptionalism is crucial in the development of productive models of Black female heroism.

Chapter Three further explores exceptionalism by analysing the religious representations of Tubman and Truth, discussing the important role that religious imagery plays in cementing their roles as Black female heroes. Both Tubman and Truth were deeply religious, with the former crediting her success on the Underground Railroad to her faith and the latter becoming a preacher who used her religion in the fight against slavery and for women's rights. I examine how religious representations emphasise Tubman's exceptionalism and highlight the limitations of such a framework by noting how such portrayals perpetuate the myth of the "superwoman." By comparing the different ways in which Tubman and Truth's piety is highlighted, with the former portrayed as Moses and the latter as a preacher, I demonstrate how some artists, such as Charles White, prioritise Tubman's heroism over Truth's, which speaks to the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism. Through such analysis, this chapter considers how Tubman's depiction as Moses dominates from the 1940s to the 1960s yet notes how such portrayals decrease in the latter half of the twentieth century alongside the decline of the "superwoman." I also examine how representations of Truth as a preacher underwent

significant changes from the 1970s onwards, whereby artists and writers continued to use religious imagery yet shifted the focus away from exceptionalism, alongside emphasising her role as a Black feminist icon. Indeed, I argue that representations from Jordan, Holmes, and Allen are crucial in demonstrating Truth's malleability as a Black female hero, with artists and writers using their portrayals to highlight alterative heroic behaviours, such as consciousness-raising, that are based on Black women's experiences, rather than dominant understandings of heroism. Furthermore, in demonstrating how Tubman resurfaces as Moses in the twenty-first century, this chapter emphasises how the exceptionalism of Moses is inherently intertwined with Tubman's activism and thus, demonstrates how her heroism is largely confined to this masculine framing, making her a less malleable Black hero.

The final chapter continues this discussion by exploring depictions of Tubman and Truth's militancy, with a focus on the former's use of armed self-defence and the latter's public speaking. Through analysing the artwork of Johnson, Catlett, and Biggers, this chapter nuances the prevailing view in scholarship that contends Tubman's militancy has been sanitised, instead demonstrating the instances in which artists emphasise her use of armed self-defence. In complicating our understandings of Tubman's portrayal as a militant Black hero, I consider how race, gender, and class dynamics interact with depictions of Tubman, noting how ideas espoused by respectability politics led several people to criticise artists' portrayal of the conductor in the 1950s and 1960s. Through analysis of Biggers and Lawrence's representations, I explore how several Black women determined that these depictions of an armed Tubman contradicted traditional gender roles and thus, were "unacceptable" portrayals of Black female heroism. Moreover, while I consider how Lawrence challenges the prevailing view in the late 1960s that Black men were the sole armed protectors of Black women, I argue there are limitations to this challenge considering armed self-defence was largely unavailable to Black women. I argue that this, combined with the framing of Tubman's heroism through a masculine

lens, explains why Black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s highlight Truth as a militant Black female hero. In analysing literature from Jordan and Holmes, this chapter explores how Truth came to represent the activism of contemporary Black women, with an emphasis on the importance of orality and consciousness-raising as alternative heroic behaviours that centre on Black women's experiences. I examine how artists and writers continue to celebrate Truth as a militant Black female hero in the twenty-first century, arguing that these representations further highlight Truth's role as a malleable Black hero.

Conclusion

Analysing the memory of Tubman and Truth provides greater insight into the complexities of hero-creation and allows for better understanding of Black female heroism. Through examination of a variety of representations from the late 1930s to today, this thesis is the first thorough analysis of Tubman and Truth's memory, with crucial exploration of how their memory interacts and impacts upon one another. In extending beyond the biographical, this study of Tubman and Truth argues that ideas of Black female heroism must be re-evaluated, with Black women's experiences placed at the centre. With consideration of how Tubman and Truth's memory struggled against hegemonic notions of heroism, this thesis presents an alternative model of Black female heroism that acknowledges Black women's oppression and explores alternative types of heroic behaviours by recognising the varying ways in which they resisted their triple oppression. Indeed, by recognising the heroic attributes of "ordinary" Black women, this thesis challenges ideas of exceptionalism, noting the limiting nature of this framework with its prioritisation of the "superwoman," and demonstrates how ideas of acceptable Black female heroes elevate or downplay certain race, class, and gendered behaviours. Moreover, the following chapters explore Truth's malleability as a Black female hero who can embody differing heroic behaviours, whilst noting that Tubman is often restricted

by ideas of acceptable militancy and confined to the masculine lens of Moses. Crucially, I highlight the moments in which these confines are challenged by artists, such as Catlett and Ringgold, and emphasise how their representations create an alternative heroic lineage that shifts away from exceptionalism, with depictions of Tubman and Truth alongside other heroic Black women creating an independent Black female heroic pantheon that centres around Black women's experiences and broadens understandings of heroic behaviours outside of whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class expectations. Hence, this thesis greatly develops our understandings of Black female heroism and provides much insight into the complexities surrounding the memorialisation of Black female heroes.

Chapter One

"The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism"[1]

Models of Black Female Heroism

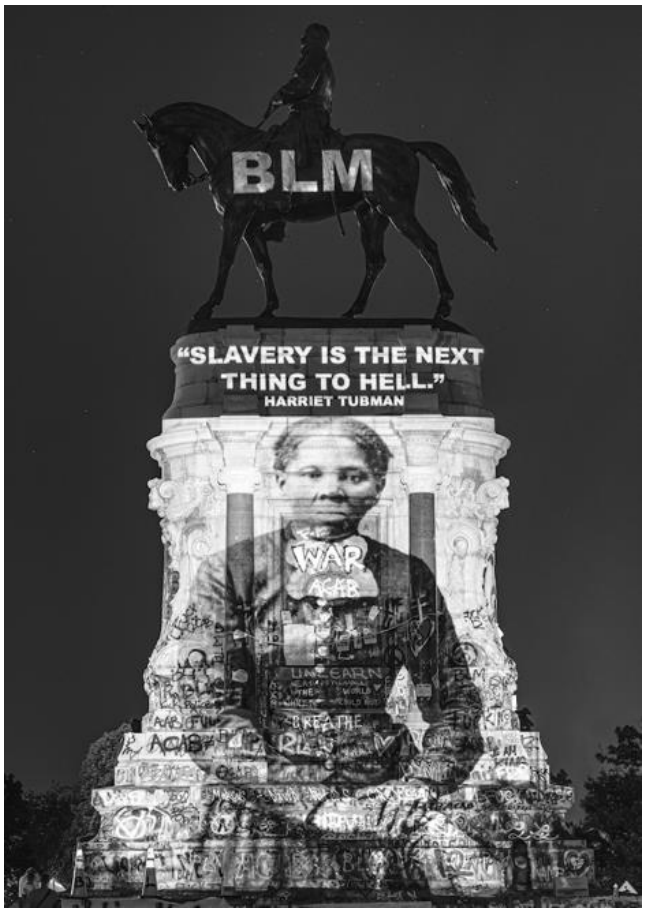

Figure 2.1. Dustin Klein and Alex Criqui, *Reclaiming the Monument: Harriet Tubman*, 2020, light projection onto Robert E. Lee Monument, Richmond, Virginia.

In June 2020, white artists Dustin Klein and Alex Criqui projected a black and white photograph of Tubman from the 1870s onto the memorial of General Robert E. Lee in Richmond (figure 2.1), highlighting Tubman as a symbol of Black female heroism. Klein and Criqui's project *Reclaiming the Monument* was inspired by the graffiti that covered the memorial in the

[1] Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, ed. Sarah Hopkins Bradford (Auburn: W. J, Moses, 1869), 7.

aftermath of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, which erupted in the wake of George Floyd's murder on 25th May 2020.[2] In defacing this monument, protestors demonstrated their discontent with Confederates being heralded as American heroes who are worthy of remembrance and celebration. Klein and Criqui took this defacing one step further by literally covering the Confederate statue with images of Black figures who fought against the oppression and white supremacy that Lee and this monument symbolise. The project started with an image of George Floyd and, in the following months, various prominent historical and contemporary Black figures were projected onto the memorial, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, and Representative John Lewis, who died in July 2020.[3] While most of the figures are Black men, the artists did project several Black women after Tubman, including Rosa Parks, Maggie L. Walker, Ida B. Wells and Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police officers in March 2020.

Although this project was completed by white artists, Klein and Criqui ensured that they involved the Black community and listened to their view that Black people should be honoured in this reclaiming and repurposing of the monument. Indeed, in an interview, Klein remarked that "it's been awesome to learn about historical figures through suggestions from people in the community."[4] It is unclear if Tubman was chosen by the white artists or if the local community suggested she be included. Nevertheless, her selection as the first Black

[2] This was not an isolated incident, as Confederate statues across the U.S. were damaged and destroyed during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. The defacing of Lee's monument in June 2020 occurred alongside the damage and destruction of other Confederate memorials, including a statue of Confederate General J. E. B. Stuart in Richmond, Virginia, a sculpture of Charles Linn (a city founder who was in the Confederate navy) in Birmingham, Alabama, and the Jefferson Davis Memorial also in Richmond. Many more examples can be seen in the following article; Alan Taylor, "The Statue Brought Down Since the George Floyd Protests Began," *The Atlantic*, July 2, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2020/07/photos-statues-removed-george-floyd-protests-began/613774/.

[3] Other figures that were projected include Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Marcus David Peters, Black soldiers from the Civil War and Trayvon Martin. President Donald Trump's face was also projected onto the backside of the horse during King's installation. To see images of these projections, see Natalie Colarossi, "Photos show how the Robert E. Lee statue in Virginia has been reclaimed to support Black Lives Matter movement," *Insider*, July 21, 2020, https://www.insider.com/robert-e-lee-statue-repurposed-black-lives-matter-images-2020-7.

[4] Dustin Klein in "An Interview with Dustin Klein and Alex Criqui, The Duo behind the Amazing Projections at Marcus-David Peters Circle," *The Cheats Movement*, August 17, 2020, https://thecheatsmovement.com/an-interview-with-dustin-klein-alex-criqui-the-duo-behind-the-amazing-projections-at-marcus-david-peters-circle/.

woman to reclaim and repurpose this monument is significant. In doing so, Tubman is portrayed as an icon for Black women and as *the* symbol of Black women's anti-slavery activism, as she is the only Black female anti-slavery activist depicted. This projection also challenges the cultural hegemony that determines Confederates and the attributes they embody to be American heroes.[5] By covering this Confederate icon with the image of a Black female anti-slavery activist, Klein and Criqui challenge and repurpose this image of white supremacy, patriarchy, and slavery into a symbol of antislavery Black women's history, with Tubman's heroic attributes celebrated over Lee's white supremacist behaviour.

General Lee's monument and Tubman's inclusion in the *Reclaiming the Monument* project highlight the complexities of hero-making and the function of heroes. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, heroes play an important role in affirming identity, values, and ideological assumptions. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate that the public memory of Black women like Tubman and Truth struggled against hegemonic portrayals of heroism, with their representations shaped by race, gender, and class dynamics that change over time. In exploring the creation and function of heroes, this chapter argues that we need to move away from male-centred models of heroism and create an alternative model of Black female heroism that honours their racial, sexual, and class oppression, and the different forms of resistance they employed. Doing so allows recognition of Black women's heroic behaviours and attributes, such as orality and collective resistance, that have often been excluded from dominant understandings of heroism. Building on Celeste Marie Bernier's argument that Tubman and Truth are the "touchstones of black female heroism," this chapter analyses who heroes are and

[5] These monuments were erected after the Civil War to celebrate the Confederacy and honour these white men as heroes of the South. They became symbols of American heroism, and any suggestion of their removal was met with great criticism and even violence, with the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, which opposed the removal of another General Lee memorial, ending in three deaths and over thirty injuries. Those who supported this white supremacist rally (predominantly white men) were opposed to the removal of their Confederate heroes, viewing this as a challenge to their white supremacy. Yoni Appelbaum, "Take the Statues Down," *The Atlantic*, August 13, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/take-the-statues-down/536727/.

how they are created to develop a complex model of Black women's heroism that offers greater understanding of the ways in which Black women are honoured as heroes.[6] I demonstrate how traditional heroic behaviours centre around masculinity and are shaped by politics of respectability, which limit and exclude Black women's participation in heroism, and examine alternative behaviours that allow for greater exploration of Black female heroism. In doing so, I contend that any analysis of Black female heroes must celebrate different types of Black women's resistance, including those performed by "ordinary" figures, and recognise their racial, sexual, and class oppression, which moulded their resistance and thus their heroism, to develop a multi-faceted model of Black female heroism.

Moreover, this chapter analyses various modes of transmissions and sites of memory to discuss the differing contexts that shape hero-making and influence our ideas of Black female heroism. I evaluate the importance of oral culture, and family and inter-generational memory in the creation of Tubman and Truth as Black heroes, and comment on the complexities of "official" memorialisations, noting how Tubman and Truth's memorials can become sites of resistance to the dominant narrative. In doing so, this chapter considers how representations of Tubman and Truth are both underpinned by dominant values and challenge hegemonic attitudes of heroes. Through examination of the gendered, religious, and militant portrayals of Tubman and Truth, the following chapters highlight how some artists and writers regulate their depictions to fit within the white pantheon of heroes, while others challenge the dominant narrative directly. Indeed, Chapter Two argues there was a gradual shift away from the myth of the "superwoman," which fails to recognise Black women's oppression, yet Chapter Three analyses how artists use religious imagery to highlight Tubman's exceptionalism as Moses. By analysing how artists and writers shape their portrayals of Tubman and Truth, we can better

[6] Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in The Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia press, 2012), 5 – 6.

understand the creation and function of Black female heroes, with this chapter presenting a model of Black women's heroism that recognises the nuances of race, class, and gender dynamics in the creation of Black women as heroes.

Traditional Definitions of Black Heroism

In discussing Black female heroism, it is crucial to explore the varying behaviours, values, and attributes that signal the heroic. Traditionally, American heroism was reserved for white men, with heroism often shaped by and supporting white supremacy. Heroes play a crucial role in upholding identity, values, and ideological assumptions, with Geoffrey Cubitt noting that heroic reputations are cultural constructions that reflect the values and ideologies of the societies in which they are produced.[7] Hence, with heroes allowing societies to define and articulate their values and assumptions, the heroes that emerge from a white supremacist context often uphold white supremacist values. Indeed, Bernier argues that the processes of hero worship intersect with the persistence of white supremacist ideals, with dominant white models of heroism seeking to erase Black heroism.[8] Moreover, with heroism defined by contested values and social hierarchy that centre around the patriarchy, many determined that "a hero is a man whose deeds epitomise the masculine attributes most highly valued within such a society."[9] Heroism typically centred around masculinity, with risk-taking social roles, such as rescue missions, that are traditionally performed by men, being deemed as "more" heroic than other forms of activism or resistance. For example, Alice Eagly and Selwyn Becker's study of the Carnegie

[7] Geoffrey Cubitt, "Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives," in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives,* ed. Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1 – 26 (3).
[8] Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 22.
[9] Roger D. Abrahams, "Some Varieties of Heroes in America," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3, no. 3 (1966): 341.

Hero Fund Commission found that the medal was largely awarded to those who undertook prosocial risk-taking actions, such as rescue operations and military assignments.[10]

Recognising how heroism has traditionally been reserved for white men is important in this study of Black women's heroism, as it demonstrates the white, masculinist ideals that portrayals of Tubman and Truth's heroism fought against. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the assumed masculinity of heroism because of the problematic way in which Black women's heroism is often configured as male. As this research demonstrates, this gender bias is particularly evident when analysing Tubman's heroism, whose activism on the Underground Railroad is repeatedly viewed through the masculine framework of Moses. Indeed, the prioritisation of masculine attributes within heroism is further exhibited when comparing depictions of Tubman and Truth's heroism, with the former often favoured as "more" heroic than the latter. As demonstrated by the *Reclaiming the Monument* project, Tubman is often prioritised as *the* antislavery Black woman hero over Truth, with the former's activism on the Underground Railroad and in the Civil War being perceived as "more" heroic than Truth's preaching and public speaking. In reality, this is not the case, with Truth's militant public speeches, which disrupted white supremacy and the patriarchy, endangering her life in similar ways to Tubman's covert rescue missions and spying role in the Civil War. Nevertheless, as this thesis demonstrates, many perceive Tubman's activism to involve greater risk-taking (and so comprise masculine attributes) than Truth's, thus determining the former to be "more" heroic.

In considering dominant ideas of heroism and heroic behaviours, it is important to note that, while several scholars have questioned the whiteness of heroism and explored Black heroism, much of this analysis focuses on Black men. Indeed, Frances Smith Foster notes that

[10] Selwyn W. Becker and Alice H. Eagly, "The Heroism of Women and Men," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 3 (2004): 163 – 165.

Black men are viewed as *the* Black heroes of enslaved people and that once you mention the enslaved Black woman, "noble images fade."[11] Indeed, Bernier contends that Black female heroes have been "repeatedly subjugated and displaced, if not entirely annihilated" by gender biases towards Black male heroes, with Black female heroism "profoundly underresearched and widely misunderstood."[12] When considering enslaved Black heroes, research has focused on Black men such as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, and Frederick Douglass, with little attention given to Black women like Tubman and Truth. Cora Kaplan notes how L'Ouverture embodied "the contested figure of the modern black hero" and Henry Tragle asserts that Turner was "a folk-hero to several generations of black men and women."[13] While Douglass's activism differed greatly from L'Ouverture and Turner's, Waldo E. Martin Jr. states that he was a hero who became the "epitome of the American self-made man" and Bernier recognises Douglass as a "renowned icon and pioneering symbol of black male resistance."[14]

In the twentieth century, Black artists and writers created countless artworks, novels, and poems that positioned Douglass as a Black hero, including Jacob Lawrence's painting series *The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1938 – 1939), Charles White's artwork *Frederick Douglass lives again, the ghost of Frederick Douglass* (1949), Robert Hayden's sonnet "Frederick Douglass" (1962) and Leroy Foster's mural *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1973). As noted by Bernier, Zoe Trodd, and John Stauffer, many of these representations were influenced by Douglass's strategies of self-representation through his writings and photographs, leading artists and writers to resist Black stereotypes of Black male suffering.[15] Indeed, in discussing

[11] Frances Foster Smith, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), xxix.
[12] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 12.
[13] Cora Kaplan, "Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination," *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (1998): 35. Henry Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1971), 12.
[14] Waldo E. Martin Jr. in Frederick S. Voss, *Majestic in His Wrath: A Pictorial Life of Frederick Douglass* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), xiv. Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 252.
[15] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 296. John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), x – xiii.

Douglass's conception of the "heroic slave," Bernier contends that Douglass challenged the racist paradigms of historical discourse and the white mainstream memorialisations of Black men to create new narratives that did not focus on Black male suffering.[16] Nevertheless, Bernier states that Douglass's construction of Black heroic behaviours centred around masculinity, with his model of Black heroism endorsing "a problematic and exceptional masculinity as the normative default."[17] This is evident in twentieth century representations, with Jacob Lawrence's 1940 series presenting an overtly masculine portrayal of Douglass's use of self-defence by vividly depicting the violent confrontation between the enslaved man and the enslaver, including the former's triumph.[18]

Douglass's desire to celebrate a legendary tradition of Black male heroes and his framing of Black heroism through a masculine lens is evident in his comment that "excepting John Brown…I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than [Tubman] has."[19] This statement was included in a letter that was printed in Bradford's biography as affirmation of Tubman's life story and heroism, which in itself highlights the inequalities within Black heroism, with a Black man asked to authenticate the achievements of a Black woman to a predominantly white abolitionist readership. Through this comment, Douglass likened Tubman and her behaviours not only to that of a man, but to that of a white man, therein suggesting that her heroism is anything but that of a Black woman. Indeed, it indicates that Douglass could not understand or accept Tubman's heroism without this masculine framing. This carries further significance considering Douglass's letter noted how his heroism was performed in the public eye, while Tubman "laboured in a private way" with only the "midnight sky and the silent stars" as witnesses to her heroism.[20] Douglass's

[16] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 254 – 255.
[17] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 256.
[18] Lawrence created his series on Douglass's life between 1938 and 1940, with images depicting his life as an enslaved man, a fugitive and an activist.
[19] Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in Bradford, *Scenes*, 7.
[20] Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in Bradford, *Scenes*, 7.

comparison between his and Tubman's heroism highlights their different forms of activism, with Douglass stating that "I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen and women."[21] Douglass's comment not only highlights how Black women's heroism often goes unrecognised, but it also downplays the impact of Tubman's heroism. While Douglass stressed that he was applauded and approved by many, he stated that Tubman rescued only "a few" individuals, which suggests that he believed his activism in the public sphere, which sought to change the minds of white people, was more effective to the fight for freedom than Tubman's mission to free enslaved people.

Douglass's prioritisation of Black male heroism and masculine heroic behaviours is further evidenced by his disparaging comments of Truth as "a strange compound of wit and wisdom, of wild enthusiasm and flint-like common sense."[22] Although Douglass stated that it was a "great pleasure and a great privilege to bear testimony" to Tubman's character, he commented that Truth was "a genuine specimen of the uncultured negro" who "cared very little for elegance of speech or refinement of manners" and "seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms."[23] Douglass's use of the words "strange," "wild," "uncultured" and "oddest" demonstrates his belief that Truth's manner of public speaking was not acceptable, with Douglass unable to categorise Truth's behaviour as heroic because it did not align with his understandings of heroism. Indeed, these comments reveal Douglass's belief that for public speaking to be heroic, it needs to align with certain types of respectable behaviours and be performed in a certain way that is not strange, odd, or uncultured, with such words condemning Truth for failing to conform to cultured middle-class white society. As the following chapters show, several Black feminist artists and writers refute such understandings

[21] Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in Bradford, *Scenes*, 7.
[22] Frederick Douglass in Esther Terry, "Sojourner Truth: The Person behind the Libyan Sibyl," *Massachusetts Review* 26, no. 2 – 3 (1985): 442.
[23] Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in Bradford, *Scenes*, 8. Douglass in Terry, 442.

of heroic public speaking by highlighting the importance of Truth's orality and its nature to her heroism. Indeed, poet June Jordan, playwright Shirlene Holmes, and sculptor Tina Allen challenge Douglass's assumption that Truth's "wild," "strange," and "uncultured" manner of speaking was not heroic, with Jordan's 1978 poem "Sojourner Truth" depicting her supposedly "uncouth" language as vital in the fight against oppression, and Holmes's play and Allen's sculpture emphasising Truth's illiteracy to stress her position as a working-class Black woman.[24]

Douglass's disparaging comments likely stemmed from Truth's criticisms of him at their first meeting on 22nd August 1852, when she responded to his calls for an armed revolution against slavery with the question "Frederick, is God dead?"[25] Nevertheless, while his comments may have stemmed from some personal dislike of Truth, Douglass's differing comments about Tubman and Truth illustrate his clear favouring of one activist over the other, with the denoting of certain forms of behaviours as heroic and the denouncing of others as "strange." Discussing Douglass's opposing views of Tubman and Truth's heroism is important, as it highlights his determination that the former's "masculine" rescue missions are "more" important than the latter's "uncultured" public speaking, which does not conform to middle-class white society. Indeed, Douglass's condemnations of Truth as an "unacceptable" Black hero not only highlights the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism, but also reveals the class dynamics that are at play. Trodd highlights how Douglass strove to depict himself as an elder statesman through photographic portraits after Emancipation, maintaining that he published these images to argue for Black equality by positioning himself as "more dignified, elegant and

[24] The poem has also been referred to as "A Song of Sojourner Truth," but Jordan's archives title the poem 'Sojourner Truth." June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979, Box 65, Folder 38, Papers of June Jordan, 1936 – 2002 (inclusive, 1954 – 2002 (bulk). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/archival_objects/2558965.

[25] While Mabee and Newhouse purport that journalist Oliver Johnson wrote that Truth asked, "is God gone," Bernier notes that in Douglass's final autobiography *Life and Times*, he wrote that Truth asked "Frederick, is God dead." Carleton Mabee and Susan Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 85. Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 248 and 384.

frequently represented than any of the white citizens who tried to express and establish middle class identity via photographic portraits."[26] Douglass's belief that his portrayal as a respectable, middle-class Black public speaker would achieve racial equality demonstrates his favouring of respectability politics and offers greater insight into his condemnation of Truth, an illiterate working-class woman, as "odd" and "uncultured."

Indeed, Douglass's views reflect the fact that ideas of respectability and class expectations of Black women shape notions of "appropriate" Black heroes and "acceptable" heroic behaviours. As noted by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, many Black people in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century adhered to the politics of respectability, whereby they followed white society's manners and morals, with civil rights activists and leaders advocating middle class values and traditional gender roles to achieve racial uplift.[27] There was great focus on propriety, temperance, cleanliness of person and property, politeness, hard-work, and sexual purity, with Black women encouraged to stay home and care for their families. While Katharina M. Fackler notes that Black people's performance of respectability functioned as a defence mechanism against the violence of white supremacy, she also maintains that it served "as a form of gatekeeping that skirted issues of patriarchy, class, colourism, and sexual difference within and beyond the movement," alongside reinforcing class distinctions within the Black community.[28] With Paisley Jane Harris arguing that Black women were particularly judged by respectability politics, it is important to highlight how respectability influenced ideas of acceptable Black women's behaviour and how this impacted Black female heroism.[29] Fackler's analysis of iconic photographs of Rosa Parks highlights how respectability

[26] Zoe Trodd, "The After-Image: Frederick Douglass in Visual Culture," in *Visualising Slavery: Art Across the African Diaspora,* ed. Celeste Marie Bernier and Hannah Durkin (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 130.
[27] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880 – 1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 183 – 185.
[28] Katharina M. Fackler, "Ambivalent Frames: Rosa Parks and the Visual Grammar of Respectability," *Souls* 18, no. 2 – 4 (2016): 272 – 273.
[29] Paisley Jane Harris, "African American Women's History and Black Feminism," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 213.

contributed to the sanitising of public memory that conceals Parks's political activism and erases other Black women activists. Indeed, Fackler reveals the selectivity of public memory when noting that Fannie Lou Hamer's breaching of the neat frame of respectability politics meant she was misconstrued as someone who simply "stumbled upon greatness," rather than as a Black female hero.[30] Hence, this chapter considers how race, gender, and class influence our understandings of Black female heroism and shape our perceptions of acceptable heroic behaviours.

Redefining Heroic Behaviours

Broadening our understandings beyond traditional heroic behaviours and recognising varying forms of activism is important when considering Black female heroism, especially considering definitions of heroism largely revolve around contest values and social hierarchy that centre around patriarchal structures. In the late twentieth and twenty-first century, amidst the Women's Liberation Movement, scholars moved away from Abrahams's notion that "a hero is a man," instead recognising that women could, in fact, be heroic and that heroism did not always centre around masculine behaviours and attributes.[31] As previously stated, when analysing Black women's heroism, we must re-evaluate the behaviours and forms of resistance that we define as heroic to encompass Black women, who have often been downplayed or ignored in favour of Black men's behaviours and activism. Historically, Black men such as Douglass, Nat Turner,

[30] Fackler, "Ambivalent Frames," 279.
[31] Abrahams, 341. Becker and Eagly, "The Heroism of Women and Men." Lindsay E. Rankin and Alice H. Eagly, "Is His Heroism Hailed and Hers Hidden? Women, Men and the Social Construction of Heroism," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32 (2008): 412 – 422. Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You: The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston: South End Press, 1983). Francine D"Amico and Laurie Weinstein, *Gender Camouflage: Women in the U.S. Military* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003). Siniša Malesevic, *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Rachel Woodward, "Warrior Heroes and Little Green Men: Soldiers, Military Training and the Construction of Rural Masculinities," *Rural Sociology* 65, no. 4 (2000): 640 – 657. Sarah Makeschin, "From Louboutins to Combat Boots"? The Negotiation of a Twenty-First Century Women's Warrior Image in American Popular Culture and Literature," in *Warring over Valour: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. Simon Wendt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 143 – 164.

W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X have been portrayed as instrumental leaders of the Black freedom struggle, with a prioritisation of their behaviours and resistance. While traditional scholarship concluded that "men led, but women organised," revisionist research demonstrates the vital role that Black women played in the freedom struggle and highlights the varied heroic behaviours and activisms they employed.[32] Minkah Makalani, Brittney Cooper, and Eboni Marshall Turman highlight the pursuit of knowledge as a heroic behaviour by emphasising Black women as intellectual architects of the Black freedom struggle, with Cooper situating Mary Church Terrell as a critical theorist of twentieth century Black activism.[33]

Moreover, in analysing the grassroots leadership of Japanese-American political activist Yuri Kochiyama, who supported Black activists during the Civil Rights Movement, Diane C. Fujino emphasises how nurturing was an important heroic behaviour and argues that Kochiyama "understood the need to nurture the individual in the process of creating societal change."[34] Employing Karen Sacks's concept of "centrewomen," whereby activists use social networks to build social movements, Fujino discusses Kochiyama's activism as a form of heroism and maintains that her ability to raise critical consciousness through personal conversations was vital to her role as a hero.[35] As the following chapters demonstrate, this is crucial considering several Black feminist writers, such as June Jordan and Shirlene Holmes,

[32] Charles Payne, "Men Led, But Women Organised: Movement participation of women in the Mississippi Delta," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1941 – 1965,* ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (New York: Carlson, 1990), 1 – 12.
[33] Minkah Makalani, "An Apparatus for Negro Women: Black Women's Organising, Communism and the Institutional Spaces of Radical Pan-African Thought," *Women, Gender and Families of Colour* 4, no. 2 (2016): 250 – 273. Brittney Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 57 – 58. Eboni Marshall Turman, "Of Men and [Mountain] Tops: Black Women, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Ethics and Aesthetics of Invisibility in the Movement for Black Lives," *Journal do the Society of Christian Ethics* 39, no. 1 (2019): 57 – 73.
[34] Yuri Kochiyama was an Asian-American political and civil rights activist who was closely associated with Malcolm X and joined his Africanist Organisation of Afro-American Unity. Diane C. Fujino, "Grassroots Leadership and Afro-Asian Solidarities: Yuri Kochiyama's Humanising Radicalism," in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black freedom Struggle,* ed. Dayo Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 301.
[35] Fujino, "Grassroots Leadership and Afro-Asian Solidarities," 300.

from the 1970s onwards highlight Truth's consciousness-raising as a vital heroic attribute. Moreover, Barbara Ransby's biographical research on Ella Baker shines light on the activist's political career and delves into "the unique political and intellectual contributions she made to the movement for radical democratic change."[36] Through her research, Ransby explores Baker's opinions on leadership within the freedom struggle, noting how Baker criticised the "unchecked egos" that prevailed under the charismatic leader model and often left her to function as an "outsider within."[37] Ransby highlights how Baker pushed the movement in a more inclusive, democratic direction and towards group-centred leadership, therein demonstrating how heroic behaviours need not centre around one sole leader. Indeed, in highlighting how Baker rejected the charismatic leader model that centred around Black men, Ransby illustrates that Baker expanded traditional understandings of heroic behaviours, whereby a hero does not need to be the loudest person in the room but rather could be the one who listened and appreciated others' points of view.

Similarly, Jenny Woodley explores Black women's heroic behaviours in her analysis of the 1974 memorial to Mary McLeod Bethune in Lincoln Park, Washington D.C., which was the first monument to an African American and the first to a woman on federal land. Woodley argues that the Bethune sculpture countered the Moynihan Report's assumption that "the race would only rise when its men did," contending that it portrayed a Black woman who heroically passed on her wisdom to the next generation.[38] Woodley emphasises how Bethune's wisdom became intertwined with her hero status, noting how she stressed the importance of Black heritage and of celebrating Black history, and emphasising how this was depicted in the

[36] Ransby highlights Baker's relationship with King and her founding of SNCC, alongside discussing her political role in the 1970s and 1980s, and outlining the activists" political philosophy, which offered "a living legacy to all of us who share her vision." Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 9 – 10.
[37] Ransby, *Ella Baker,* 4.
[38] Jenny Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park": Memory, Identity and the Bethune Memorial," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 2 (2018): 496.

sculpture of Bethune and several Black children.[39] While the memorial depicted Bethune as "a respectable, dignified, non-sexualised, and educated black woman," Woodley argues that the memorial's discourse stressed her impoverished background and allowed Bethune to be portrayed as an "everywoman" who represented both middle and working-class Black women.[40] Furthermore, Jeanne Theoharis analyses the memorialisation of Rosa Parks and expands traditional understandings of Black heroism by arguing that Parks's heroic activism went beyond her actions on a bus in Montgomery. Parks has been repeatedly memorialised as a respectable seamstress who one day decided to stay seated on a bus, with numerous representations, including the 2013 *Rosa Parks* statue in the Capitol building, depicting the activist seated in the role of the self-sacrificing mother of the movement.[41] Theoharis complicates this portrayal of Parks by highlighting her long career as a political activist, which disputes the notion that when the U.S. laid Parks to rest with a state funeral, it also laid to rest its own long history of racism.[42] She broadens traditional depictions of Parks by noting how Malcolm X was one of her personal heroes and highlighting her political commitments to self-defence, voter registration, desegregation, criminal justice, and Black empowerment. She not only broadens Parks's heroic behaviour beyond the quiet seamstress to include public speaking and political campaigning, but she also reveals the suffering that Parks and her family endured because of her actions in Montgomery, including financial difficulties and countless death

[39] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 499.
[40] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 494 and 500.
[41] *Rosa Parks* was unveiled in the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol on 27th February 2013 by President Barack Obama. The bronze sculpture was completed by Daub and Firmin Studios and depicts Parks seated with her hands in her lap and ankles crossed, wearing a respectable long skirt, smart coat, and hat.
[42] Jeanne Theoharis, "A Life History of Being Rebellious": The Radicalism of Rosa Parks" in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black freedom Struggle,* ed. Dayo Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 125. Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), viii – x and xv. See also Jeanne Theoharis, "Accidental Matriarchs and Beautiful Helpmates," in *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up,* ed. Emilye Crosby (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011): 385 – 418.

threats.[43] By uncovering Parks's protection of her loved ones, Theoharis highlights how the erasure of Parks's hardships stems from her depiction as a tired seamstress, not a long-time political activist, therein noting the race, gender, and especially class dynamics that influenced Parks's portrayal as a Black hero.[44]

Evaluating the alternative heroic behaviours of Black women is important in nuancing our understanding of Black female heroism. Not only does such an analysis broaden ideas beyond traditional heroic behaviours, such as rescue missions, that centre around masculine attributes, but it also allows recognition of "ordinary" Black women who were unable to perform these traditional acts of heroism. Indeed, acknowledging the "everyday" actions of these women, such as the passing down of wisdom and the protection of loved ones, is important in understanding the varying ways in which Black women survived oppression. Elizabeth Catlett's linocut series *The Negro Woman* from 1943, which is discussed throughout this thesis, not only highlights Tubman, Truth, and Phillis Wheatley as exemplary Black female heroes, but also recognises the "ordinary" Black women whose efforts have largely been overlooked or gone unnoticed. Through artworks and accompanying captions, Catlett emphasises the idea that Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley are just three examples of the many nameless Black women who fought oppression using a variety of heroic behaviours and activisms, including providing for their families, working with trade unions, gaining an education, and campaigning against Jim Crow. Moreover, through this celebration of various Black women's activisms, Catlett portrays Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley as inherently connected to "ordinary" Black women and elevates the latter's behaviour to a heroic status. In doing so, Catlett creates an alternative heroic lineage that positions Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women who exhibit other heroic

[43] Theoharis reveals that Parks and her husband lost their jobs following the Montgomery bus boycott and discusses the fact that the death threats she and her family received led them to leave Montgomery for Detroit in 1965. Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs Rosa Parks,* 116 – 164.
[44] Parks and her husband Raymond lost their jobs after Parks' refusal to give up her seat in Montgomery. Both then struggled to get new jobs and this, plus the numerous death threats they received, lead them to move to Detroit. Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs Rosa Park,* 117.

behaviours and attributes, which expands understandings of Black female heroism. Indeed, the following chapters demonstrate how Black artists and writers from the 1970s onwards, such as Faith Ringgold and June Jordan, continued this work and similarly produced representations of Tubman and Truth that highlight an alternative heroic lineage to broaden our perceptions of heroic behaviours and recognise the variety of Black women's activism, which is crucial in complicating our understandings of Black female heroism.

The Exceptional and The "Ordinary"

While recognising a variety of heroic behaviours is important in broadening our understandings of Black women's heroism, it is nevertheless crucial to recognise that Tubman and Truth are often *the* Black female heroes that artists and writers employ when celebrating Black women's history, especially regarding the antislavery movement. Some scholars take issue with this perpetuation of exceptionalism, with Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith contending that focusing on certain exceptional figures is "a direct outgrowth of centuries of concerted suppression and invisibility."[45] Indeed, although Cubitt argues that notions of exemplarity have "helped to shape the cultural uses of heroic figures," Bernier maintains that white supremacy meant Black heroic figures had to "fight for the right to a recognition of their exceptionalism."[46] She contends that Cubitt's notion that heroes are cultural constructs that reflect the values and ideologies of the societies in which they are produced is not the full story. Instead, she argues that, in the context of racial biases, Black people's "acts and arts of self-representation exist in slippery relation to dominant modes of representation as formerly enslaved men and women contest the accuracies of any mainstream attempts to extrapolate their "lives" as "lived"."[47] I agree with Bernier's

[45] Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith, "Introduction: The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in *But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, The Feminist Press, 1982), xvii.
[46] Cubitt, "Introduction," 2 – 3. Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 18.
[47] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 18.

argument that there are multiple systems of exemplarity at play in the creation of Black heroes and recognise the issues that Hull and Smith raise about a focus on exceptional individuals. However, I argue that exploring exceptional figures like Tubman and Truth is important in understanding the creation of Black female heroes, as such analysis provides great insight into the heroic behaviours and activisms that are highlighted and overlooked. Indeed, the analysis of religious representations in Chapter Three demonstrates the prioritisation of Tubman in the role as Moses over Truth as a preacher, which speaks to the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism.

Moreover, it is crucial to note that part of the reason why Tubman and Truth emerge as exceptional individuals is because of the silences within the archives of African American history and Black memory. Systematic white supremacy and racism mean that the voices of non-white people were (and are) ignored, downplayed, or eradicated, leaving traditional primary sources and archives devoid of their voices. Several Black feminist scholars highlight these issues and explore silences within the archives, arguing that Black women have routinely been excluded from historical narratives because their lives were deemed irrelevant to those recording history. Saidiya Hartman's research emphasises the scarcity of enslaved Black people's narratives and, when analysing accounts of Black women in the archives, she argues that no one remembered Black women's names or recorded what they said, meaning that "hers is an untimely story told by a failed witness."[48] In *Lose Your Mother,* Hartman attempts to foreground the experience of the enslaved by tracing the disappearance of their voices. She analyses the story of an enslaved girl who was murdered on the Middle Passage by the ship's captain, determining that the girl does not exist outside of the crew's account of her murder. In

[48] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 1 – 2.

quoting Michael Foucault, she contends that "the girl 'will never have any existence outside the precarious domicile of words' that allowed her to be murdered."[49]

Christina Sharpe also examines these silences by plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday deaths of Black people. She argues that those who teach, write, and think about slavery and its afterlives encounter a myriad of silences and ruptures in time, space, history, ethics, research, and method. She contends that Black scholars of slavery get stuck between the partial truths of the archives while trying to make sense of the silences, absences, and modes of dis/appearance.[50] Indeed, Sharpe argues that Black scholars must find new modes and methods of research and teaching to undo the "racial calculus and […] political arithmetic that were entrenched years ago."[51] Tina Campt attempts to do so in her analysis of identification photography of Black individuals across the Black diaspora, including nineteenth century ethnographic images of rural African women, early twentieth century photographs of Cape Town prisoners, post-war passport photographs in Birmingham, England, and mugshots of U.S. Freedom Riders in the 1960s. She engages with the images as "conduits of an interplay" between the vernacular and the state by contextualising the images within social and political history, which allows her to better understand the dehumanising forces that produced the images, alongside revealing the forgotten histories and suppressed forms of diasporic memory.[52] She argues that assessing the ability of the photographs to rupture the sovereign gaze of the state builds a radical visual archive with interpretive possibilities that help bring Black voices back into the archive.[53]

[49] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006), 137.
[50] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.
[51] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 13.
[52] For example, Campt analyses the Birmingham passport photographs alongside a contemporary photo-essay of a post-war Afro-Caribbean neighbourhood in the city, arguing that they reveal a desire to "move and dwell" and "create new forms of home and belonging." Tina Campt, *Listening to Images: An Exercise in Counterintuition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5 and 75.
[53] Campt, *Listening to Images,* 5.

The Oppression of Black Women

Recognising these silences is important in analysing Tubman and Truth's heroism, as it allows us to better understand why they are such prevailing and persistent Black female heroes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While Tubman and Truth were fortunate enough to be associated with individuals who facilitated the publication of their biographies, which laid the foundation for their establishment as Black female heroes, many enslaved Black women did not have such an opportunity to record their history, resulting in their heroism being overlooked and forgotten. Furthermore, the silences in the archives are important to recognise when discussing Black female heroism because they illustrate the oppression of Black women. Indeed, since heroic actions are often defined by a group as the most beneficial in a threatening situation, recognising Black women's oppression is crucial when considering Black women's heroism. By acknowledging the different ways in which Black women were oppressed, we can better understand the actions that Black women perceived as advantageous in dealing with their oppression. Research on the experience of Black women proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, with several Black feminist scholars highlighting the specific oppression of Black women. In the introduction to *But Some of US Are Brave* (1982), Hull and Smith highlight the importance of recognising Black women's oppression when researching the lives of Black women and criticise contemporary research for overlooking the complexities of Black women's position.[54] They argue that Black women's credibility as autonomous thinkers is constantly questioned by the "white-male run intellectual establishment" and call for research into Black women to have a "feminist, pro-woman perspective" that acknowledges sexual, race, and class oppression.[55] Indeed, Hull and Smith contend that recognising the sexual, racial, and class oppression in Black women's lives is vital for the success of Black women's studies as a field of research.

[54] Hull and Smith, "Introduction," xvii – xxxi.
[55] Hull and Smith, "Introduction," xxi – xxiv.

Hence, the model of Black female heroism that is presented in this thesis acknowledges these arguments about the importance of recognising the specific oppression of Black women. By considering Black women's oppression, this model goes beyond the "white-male run intellectual establishment" to develop a "feminist, pro-woman" model of Black women's heroism.

Black feminist scholars from the 1970s and 1980s also highlighted how the oppression of Black women can be traced back to their enslavement. In *Ain't I A Woman* (1981), bell hooks argues that racism and sexism played an important role in the suffering of Black enslaved women, maintaining that these intersections of their identity "intensified and magnified" their oppression.[56] hooks explains this specific oppression by arguing that slavery did not emasculate Black men, as they were not forced to perform traditionally female roles, but it did masculinise Black women. Black enslaved men mostly worked in the fields as labourers, with a select few working in domestic households as "servants" and "butlers." While some enslaved women worked in domestic households and were forced to breed for their oppressors, the majority, including Tubman and Truth, worked as manual labourers alongside Black men, leading to the masculinisation of Black women. hooks also highlights how class dynamics worked on plantations, with only enslaved Black men promoted to the position of driver or overseer, even when Black women were often better workers.[57] She contends that this, alongside the masculinisation of Black women, confirms that white people viewed Black women as inferior to Black men, therein demonstrating racism, sexism, and classism at work. Angela Davis also notes the specific oppression of Black women during slavery, highlighting how "compulsory labour overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence."[58] Although some Black women worked within white households in the private sphere, she argues that "the alleged

[56] bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 22.
[57] hooks, *Ain't I A Woman,* 23.
[58] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 9.

benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to her."[59] Black women like Tubman and Truth were not protected or sheltered from the struggle to survive outside the private sphere, as they also worked in the fields alongside Black men. Davis maintains that to function as an enslaved person, the Black woman was no longer considered a woman, someone who "needed" to be sheltered and protected by men.[60]

Since the publication of this research, scholars continued to embrace an intersectional approach to Black women's history and note the various ways in which Black women have been oppressed and how they fought this oppression. Ashley D. Farmer analyses the Black Women's United Front (BWUF) collective to demonstrate how Black women debated Black women's oppression within the era of Black Power, noting how its members theorised and organised around varying aspects of Black women's oppression, such as their sexual identity and expression.[61] Farmer's analysis highlights how imperialism and capitalism intersected with gender to intensify Black women's triple oppression of race, class, and sex.[62] Farmer further highlights how class was an important intersection of oppression in her analysis of Black feminists like Claudia Jones, whose leftist politics played a crucial role in her fight against Black women's triple oppression. Indeed, this is demonstrated through Jones's 1949 article "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman," which portrayed the domestic worker as a radical political actor who was mobilised by her intersectional oppression.[63] Other scholars also highlight the importance of class in the triple oppression of Black women, with Eric McDuffie arguing that communism appealed to Black women because it recognised that their

[59] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1 – 2 (1972): 87.
[60] Davis, "Reflections," 87.
[61] Ashley D. Farmer, "Abolition of Every Possibility of Oppression": Black Women, Black Power, and the Black Women's United Front, 1970 – 1976," *Journal of Women's History* 32, no. 3 (2020): 105 – 106.
[62] Farmer, "Abolition of Every Possibility of Oppression," 99 – 100.
[63] Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 31.

oppression was central to the global class struggle.[64] Building on McDuffie's analysis, Denise Lynn explores the ways in which Black women Communists "articulated an ideology more integrative of diverse racial and class identities" and highlights how class was a crucial dimension of oppression, noting how Jones believed that working-class Black women like Tubman and Truth were a class more oppressed than any other.[65]

Patricia Hill Collins further emphasises the importance of class in the oppression of Black women in her analysis of Black feminist thought, exploring how the labour of Black women such as Tubman and Truth was, and continues to be, exploited for the benefit of U.S. capitalism.[66] Indeed, while she recognises that all Black women encounter institutionalised racism, Collins argues that social class differences will influence patterns of racism in housing, education, and employment, maintaining that the struggle experienced by working-class Black women has a distinctive character from that experienced by middle-class Black women.[67] This was certainly true for Tubman and Truth, whose position as previously enslaved working-class women meant that they constantly struggled financially. Furthermore, in highlighting other dimensions of Black women's oppression, Collins contends that Black women were and continue to be exploited politically, with their rights and privileges routinely denied, and ideologically, with controlling images and negative stereotypes used to justify their oppression.[68] Collins argues that this web of oppression is "a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place."[69] In highlighting how the maintenance of Black women's invisibility has been crucial in the conservation of social inequalities, Collins also explores how Black women's survival is a form

[64] Eric McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3 – 5.
[65] Denise Lynn, "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 6 – 7.
[66] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4 – 5.
[67] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 26 – 27.
[68] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 4 – 5.
[69] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 5.

of resistance.[70] Indeed, she notes how activist Sara Brooks's caring for her children and rejection of the mammy stereotype "represent the unacknowledged yet essential actions taken by countless U.S. Black women to ensure this group survival," such as Truth's battle to save her son Peter from the South.[71] Hence, Collins maintains that traditional definitions of political activism and resistance must be reconsidered in the context of Black women's activism, as they are often excluded from positions of formal authority and public roles.[72] Thus, Collins's argument that prevailing definitions of resistance revolve around middle-class whiteness and masculinity relates to my contention that heroic behaviours must be broadened when it comes to Black women's heroism to consider values and modes of activism that do not centre around these hegemonic ideas.

Recognising the multiple oppressions of Black women and understanding how their experiences differed to that of Black men is crucial when analysing Black women's heroism. Indeed, the multi-faceted nature of Black women's oppression is explored in Chapter Two by analysing representations of Truth's 1851 speech. In examining a mural from 2015, I reveal how two Black women poets used Gage's report of Truth's speech, which coined the phrase "Ar'n't I A Woman," and hooks's powerful statement *Ain't I A Woman* to highlight the continued oppression of Black women. Truth's speech highlights the exploitation of Black enslaved women and emphasises how their work as forced labourers stripped them of their womanhood. While reports of Truth's exact wording differ, Frances Gage wrote how Truth challenged sexism when she exclaimed "I could work as much and eat as much as a man…and bear the lash as well," and Marius Robinson stated that Truth said: "I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and

[70] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 3.
[71] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 201 – 202.
[72] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 201 – 202.

chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?"[73] Gage also stated that Truth highlighted the role that Black enslaved women played as breeders for white oppressors, writing that Truth confronted racism and sexism when she proclaimed "I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ar'n't I a woman?"[74] In writing this quote, Gage highlighted the horror that Black enslaved women endured when their children were enslaved and sold away from them.

Moreover, in using Truth's speech as inspiration for her book on Black women's oppression, hooks honours Truth as "one of the first feminists to call their attention to the lot of the black slave woman" and as someone who was living proof that "women could be the work-equals of men."[75] hooks also posits Truth as one of the earliest Black female heroes who used her own experiences to discuss the specific oppression of Black women. She praises Truth and Tubman as "courageous Black women leaders" and "exceptional individuals who dared to challenge the male vanguard to struggle for freedom," arguing that sexism throughout the nineteenth century meant that Black men dominated leadership roles in the early Black liberation movement.[76] Indeed, hooks's comment underscores how certain behaviours and modes of activism are defined as heroic, and hints at the ways in which Tubman and Truth's heroism challenged these traditional behaviours that centre around masculinity. Collins argues that domination over Black women is organised and operated via intersecting oppressions and hence "resistance must show comparable complexity."[77] Thus, any discussion of Black female heroism must consider the multi-faceted dimensions of oppression, alongside the various modes of activism and behaviours that have been and continue to be employed by Black women.

[73] Sojourner Truth in Frances Gage, "Sojourner Truth," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* May 2, 1863, 4. Sojourner Truth in Marius Robinson, "Women's Rights Convention," *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* June 21, 1851, 160.
[74] Truth in Gage, "Sojourner Truth," 4.
[75] hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 159 – 160.
[76] hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 89.
[77] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 203.

Transmissions of Heroic Memory

Alongside discussing an alternative model of heroism, this chapter also examines how heroic narratives are passed down and persist across time. This is important to analyse considering transmissions and sites of memory are crucial in re-evaluating heroic behaviours and attitudes, as they shape who is deemed heroic. Indeed, when recognising the oppression of Black women and the silences this created within traditional archives, it is important to consider how Black female heroes are created and how their memories are transmitted. One important transmission of Black history and Black women's memory is oral culture, with Luisa Del Giudice arguing that oral histories and testimonies can empower socially, politically, and economically marginalised groups, allowing us to determine orality to be a "democratising force."[78] Indeed, she contends that oral testimonies, including autobiographies, can produce new voices and create a historic record where none previously existed.[79] hooks asserts that Black women's use of the oral tradition is oppositional, self-affirming, and celebratory, arguing that speaking is "an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless."[80] DoVeanna S. Fulton Minor agrees, contending that Black feminist orality is a method of resistance and empowerment.[81] She argues that Black women used African American oral traditions to relate not only their oppression, but to celebrate the subversions, struggles, and triumphs of the Black experience, both during slavery and afterwards.[82] Minor maintains that Black women use oral traditions to "write" history and become "sister griot-historians" whose narratives employ literary and oral traditions to "resist

[78] Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (London: W. W. Norton, 2nd edition, 1983), 117. Luisa Del Giudice, "Speaking Memory: Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italians in America," in *Oral History, Oral Culture and Italian Americans,* ed. Luisa Del Giudice (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 5 – 6.
[79] Del Giudice, "Speaking Memory," 5 – 6.
[80] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 8.
[81] Minor highlights the importance of oral culture in the lives of Black women in her analysis of Black women's slave narratives and explores different forms of oral traditions in Black women's narratives, which she terms "Black feminist orality." DoVeanna S. Fulton Minor, *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery* (New York: University of New York Press, 2006), 2 and 123.
[82] Minor, *Speaking Power,* 3.

and confront the silences" and the "dehumanised representation of Black women in the master narrative."[83]

For both Tubman and Truth, oral culture was an important way in which their memories as Black heroes were created and disseminated. Orality was a crucial part of Tubman and Truth's activism, with both women using speeches and sermons to condemn slavery and fight Black women's oppression. Indeed, oral culture played an important role in enslaved communities, with the tradition of griots (namely storytellers, musicians, praise singers, and oral historians) travelling from Africa to the U.S. and prevailing in the face of white oppressors' anti-literacy policies. While it adapted as African legacies were influenced in the U.S. context, oral tradition became an important part of many Africans' and then African Americans' lives. Indeed, Babatunde Lawal argues that syncretic cultural productions were the result of habitual and collective memories held by Africans and taken to the U.S.[84] Through these two forms of memory, Black people, such as Tubman and Truth, propagated the passing of history through the oral tradition.

Both women also employed oral culture in the creation of their biographies, with their illiteracy meaning that they communicated their stories through interviews with Bradford and Gilbert, rather than writing their stories themselves. Throughout their respective biographies, the oral tradition is present in Bradford and Gilbert's quoting of Tubman and Truth and the authors' comments on the way in which these Black women portrayed a story. It is important to note that these biographies are mediated by white women, with Jean Humez arguing that Bradford changed significant details of Tubman's stories to make them more literary and Nell

[83] Minor, *Speaking Power,* 123.
[84] Babatunde Lawal, "The African Heritage of African American Art and Performance," in *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora,* ed. Paul C. Harrison, Victor L. Walker and Gus Edwards (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 43.

Irvin Painter maintaining that Gilbert is sometimes "at odds with Truth the autobiographer."[85] Nevertheless, Humez and Painter also recognise that Tubman and Truth maintained agency within their biographies, with Humez commenting that it was Tubman who decided which stories were appropriate for the text and Painter noting how *Narrative* was Truth's "first step into deliberate representation of self."[86] Although these are mediated literary texts, it is crucial to recognise the importance of oral culture in their creation, especially considering the ways in which artists and writers used these biographies as inspiration for their representations. Indeed, as demonstrated in the following chapters, artists such as Charles White and Jacob Lawrence read contemporary accounts, including Bradford and Gilbert's biographies, when creating their portrayals of Tubman and Truth.[87]

Moreover, the use of oral culture is important regarding the creation of representations of Tubman and Truth, with several Black artists learning about these Black heroes through stories and tales that they heard from people within Black communities. In an interview from 1992, Lawrence recalled that when he was living in Harlem in the 1930s, Black school teachers and librarians would educate him and other children about great Black heroes, such as Tubman and Truth.[88] Lawrence describes these people as "street-corner orators" and comments that their stories were so impressive that they inspired him to create multiple series of paintings on Black heroes, including *The Life of Harriet Tubman* (1940), because he felt that one mural or painting

[85] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 106. Jean Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Life Stories*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 147 – 151.
[86] Humez, *Harriet Tubman*, 148. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 110.
[87] In an interview, White recalls how he would go to his local library to read books about Black people, including Tubman and Truth. Patricia Hills writes how Lawrence conducted research at the Schomburg centre on Tubman, where he read Bradford's biographies alongside Hildegard Swift's *Railroad to Freedom: A Story of the Civil War* (1932). Lawrence adapted several quotations from these texts in his 1940 series *The Life of Harriet Tubman*. Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965, transcript. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-charles-w-white-11484#transcript. Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence as Pictorial Griot: The "Harriet Tubman" Series," *American Art* 7, no. 1 (1993): 45.
[88] Xavier Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," *Callaloo* 36, no. 2 (2013): 261.

would not suffice.[89] White also recalls that after learning about Black individuals like Tubman and Truth through their biographies, he took this knowledge to school to tell his fellow students about these Black heroes, therein becoming a storyteller himself.[90] Furthermore, when Ben Irvin and the History Quilt Club created a tapestry of Tubman in 1949, one Black woman commented that "when we're quilting […] we talk about Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, too, and that's the way you really get to know about our history."[91] Another woman said that "I scarcely knew anything about Harriet Tubman before, but now we all call her 'Sister Harriet' and she's a friend."[92] Thus, oral culture and storytelling played a crucial role in the transmission of Tubman and Truth's memory as heroes.

Another important transmission of Tubman and Truth's memory that relates to oral culture is family history and inter-generational memory. The passing down of family histories is important considering the context of slavery, which often disrupted and destroyed Black familial ties, with both Tubman and Truth experiencing this during their lives. After the death of her enslaver Brodess in 1849, Tubman fled Maryland to escape the threat of sale to the South and she returned in 1850 and 1851 to prevent other family members from being sold.[93] As a child, Truth witnessed the sale of her siblings and, as an adult, she not only experienced the sale of several of her child, but she also successfully sued against the illegal sale of her son Peter to the South.[94] Despite this disruption, Truth's family used oral tradition to pass down family

[89] Nicholas, "Interview with Jacob Lawrence," 261.
[90] Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965.
[91] "Women Portray History in Artistic Needlework," *Freedom*, February 1953, 7.
[92] "Women Portray History in Artistic Needlework," 7.
[93] Research from Kate Clifford Larson, Jean Humez and Milton Sernett estimates that Tubman returned to Maryland in December 1850 to save her niece Kessiah Bowley and two children, and a few months later returned to save her brother and two other men. See Milton Sernett, *Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory, and History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 321.
[94] The Gradual Emancipation Act in New York freed Truth and her children, but only when the latter reached the age of twenty-five for women and twenty-eight for men. Several white owners tried to circumvent this law and make a profit by illegally selling enslaved people to the South before they reached this age. This happened to Truth's son Peter, but Truth sued the white man who illegally sold Peter to court and won his freedom back. Christina Accomando, "Demanding a Voice among the Pettifoggers: Sojourner Truth as Legal Actor," *MELUS* 28, no. 1 (2003): 65 – 67.

histories, with Truth recalling that her parents "would sit for hours, recalling and recounting…the histories of those dear departed ones, of whom they had been robbed, and for whom their hearts still bled."[95] Truth went on to name some of her children after these lost family members, which Minor argues is an act of resistance against the destruction of familial ties.[96] With Babatunde Lawal arguing that memory is a "catalyst in the construction and negotiation of new identities," Minor contends that Truth's naming reconstructs history and facilitates the construction of her children's identities.[97]

In analysing various Black women's slave narratives, including Truth's *Narrative*, Minor highlights how orality and inter-generational memory are intertwined for Black families and their history. She argues that Black feminist orality is a method of resistance and empowerment that Black women "learn from our foremothers and practice daily."[98] She notes the importance of oral traditions in the passing down of Black family histories and focuses on Black women, especially grandmothers, because they are "often the gatekeepers of African American families."[99] Minor asserts that passing on family history orally is a form of historiography that contests the dominant white culture's efforts to negate Black identity.[100] Indeed, through oral traditions such as storytelling and call-and-response, Black women seek to rectify the silences that fill traditional archives and bring their voices to light, maintaining that such actions are resistance to voicelessness.[101] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen also

[95] Sojourner Truth in Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16.
[96] Minor argues that Truth uses oral tradition to affect autonomy and agency. She maintains that Truth's storytelling in *Narrative* establishes the foundation of her resistance and contends that, despite the biography's white author, Truth is the authority of the text. Minor argues that in naming her children after her family members, Truth resisted the destruction of familial relationships and the obliteration of identity that slavery exerted. Minor, *Speaking Power,* 4 – 5.
[97] Lawal, "The African Heritage," 43. Minor, *Speaking Power,* 4 – 5.
[98] Minor, *Speaking Power,* 123.
[99] With high unemployment, incarceration and mortality rates among Black men, Minor contends that Black women have struggled to maintain the integrity of Black families and often combated disruption by retelling family stories. Minor, *Speaking Power,* 2 – 3.
[100] Minor, *Speaking Power,* 2 – 3.
[101] Minor, *Speaking Power,* 19.

note the importance of family history in their 1994 study of Americans' view of "the past."[102] They found that Black respondents recalled transmitting "wisdom" at family gatherings from one generation to the next, highlighting the importance of collective and inter-generational memory. One respondent explained that "my family is part of me and my grandmother and great-grandmother are part of the past. I might not have lived then but I am part of it."[103] They also emphasise the significance of oral culture as a reliable source of information, noting many Black people's general distrust of "official" history that was presented in schools, books, and museums.[104] Hence, with distrust surrounding "official" histories, family history and oral culture were important sources that Black people often turned to when learning about Black history.

While several representations analysed in this thesis are public memorialisations, family and inter-generational memory are important in the creation of Tubman and Truth's memory. One example of an artist who highlights the importance of family memory and oral culture is Faith Ringgold, who created artworks of Tubman and Truth in the 1990s and 2000s. The Black women in Ringgold's family played an important role in shaping the artist's career and artwork, as she came from a long line of sewers and quilters: her great-great grandmother Susan Shannon was enslaved and became a quilter, dressmaker, and weaver. Shannon then passed on her skills to her daughter Betsy Bingham, who taught her daughter Ida Matilda Posey and her granddaughter Willi Posey, the latter of whom taught her daughter Ringgold.[105] Indeed,

[102] In 1994, Rosenzweig and Thelen conducted a random-sample survey of 808 adults through trained telephone interviews. The study sought to gather comparative data about how people engage with and use "the past". In 1995, three additional surveys were conducted to develop samples of African Americans, Mexican Americans, and American Indians, leaving a total of 2,100 people interviewed. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 147

[103] Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 148.

[104] Black Americans noted that they felt more connected to the past than white Americans when gathering with their families, and less so when visiting museums, reading books, or studying history at school. Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, 147 and 156.

[105] Betsy Bingham was born in 1850 and so also enslaved but was freed alongside her mother after the Civil War. Osei Bonsu, "50 Years of Celebrating Black beauty and Culture: Faith Ringgold," *Frieze*, April 19, 2018, https://www.frieze.com/article/50-years-celebrating-black-beauty-and-culture-faith-ringgold.

Willi was a New York fashion designer and introduced her daughter to different artistic skills in their home in Harlem, with the two artists collaborating on several designs, including Ringgold's first tanka paintings in 1972.[106] After her mother died in 1981, Ringgold paid homage to Willi in her artwork by creating the fictional character Willia Marie Simone, who is an amalgam of Willi and Ringgold.[107] Simone is featured in Ringgold's *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* from 1996, which highlights Black women's collective activism by depicting Tubman and Truth alongside six other Black women activists in an alternative heroic lineage. Through this quilt, Ringgold recognises her mother's important role not only in her artwork, but also in educating her on these important Black women from across the Black freedom struggle.

Moreover, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, the women in Ringgold's artwork are depicted as quilting, which often involved orality and storytelling, as the aforementioned example from the History Quilt Club demonstrates. Indeed, bell hooks recalls that her grandmother Baba was their "family historian, [and] storyteller" and that, because she could not read or write, the quilts that she created were "charting the course of our lives. They were history as life lived."[108] Hence, Ringgold's artwork emphasises the importance of oral culture, family and inter-generational memory in transmitting memories of Black female heroes. Indeed, analysing varying forms of transmissions is crucial in the creation of an alternative model of Black female heroism, as it allows for consideration of different forms of heroic behaviours and attributes, such as orality, which is a vital form of Black women's resistance. In the following chapters, I discuss how Ringgold's artwork disrupts the myth of the "superwoman" and comment on the ways in which the quilt builds on the research of Michelle

[106] Tanya Sheehan, "Faith Ringgold: Forging Freedom and Declaring Independence," in *Declaration of Independence: Fifty Years of Art by Faith Ringgold,* ed. Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin (Rutgers: Institute for Women and Art, The State University of New Jersey, 2009), 5.
[107] Grace Glueck, "Art Review: Colourful Patchwork Tales of Black and White, Life and Death," *New York Times*, October 2, 1998.
[108] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 116 and 121.

Wallace, who is Ringgold's daughter. Indeed, Wallace attributes Ringgold with influencing her views on visual art and Black feminism, commenting that her mother's "vision is part of what made me the black woman that I am and what gave me the strength that I have."[109] Melanee Harvey argues that it was Wallace's experience of being Ringgold's daughter and Posey's granddaughter that sowed the seeds of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979).[110]

Oral culture also played an important role in the creation, establishment, and transmission of several Black folk heroes during slavery, such as the trickster and spiritual heroes. Enslaved Black people adapted trickster stories and spiritual tales from Africa and moulded them into heroic tales as a response to slavery. The trickster, who was usually an animal who acted as a human, used their guile to outwit white oppressors, while religious heroes provided hope and strength to enslaved people during their oppression and exploitation. John W. Roberts argues that enslaved people created heroic figures through their trickster tales, which provided Black people with behaviours that were viewed as advantageous in negotiating slavery.[111] He also contends that enslaved Black people created religious heroes through spiritual songs, adapting Biblical stories and using Old Testament stories of redemption and the Promised Land to offer hope that salvation would come.[112] The notion that spirituals are an important source in the transmission of memory has also been noted by Diana Taylor, whose research on Latin American performance traditions highlights the importance of sources outside of the traditional archive. Taylor contends that examining cultural expressions outside of texts and narratives (the "archive") allows us to consider other lines of transmission, and encourages the analysis of alternative sources, such as speeches, sermons, songs, dance, rituals, and cooking

[109] Michelle Wallace in Melanee Harvey, "Faith Ringgold, Who I Am and Why: A Multi-Generational History of Artistic Creation," *The International Review of African American Art,* December 23, 2013, http://iraaa.museum.hamptonu.edu/page/Faith-Ringgold%2C-Who-I-Am-and-Why.
[110] Harvey, "Faith Ringgold, Who I Am and Why."
[111] John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 61.
[112] Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 165.

(the "repertoire").[113] Although Taylor states that these sources are usually "thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge," she argues that examining them allows scholars to trace traditions and influences, thus enabling alternative perspectives on historical processes.[114]

One of the most popular religious tales among Black people was that of Moses, whose story appears in numerous spiritual songs that reconstruct his life and actions as an adventure and mould him into a religious hero for many enslaved people. Moses continued to be an important figure for Black people beyond slavery, which is evident in the numerous representations that depict Tubman as Moses. Chapter Three delves into these religious representations of Tubman as Moses, evaluating the importance of this portrayal for Tubman's memory, while Chapter Two considers the masculine framing of this representation. These chapters also discuss how the centrality of Moses to Tubman's memory and her hero-making is indicative of the importance of religion, and specifically, Christianity and Biblical Evangelicalism, to the abolitionist movement. During the nineteenth century, Tubman and Truth's memory was largely transmitted through their biographies that followed conversion and redemption narratives that were espoused by abolitionists. Several scholars note the importance of African influences on the religion of enslaved people, with Lawrence Levine arguing that enslaved people created a "sacred universe" that allowed them to produce a serious alternative to the societal system created by white people.[115] He contends that this "sacred universe" was not confined to Christianity but was a network of beliefs and practices that were independent of and yet related to Christianity.[116] Brenda Stevenson agrees, arguing that the centrality of religion was part of a long tradition derived from enslaved people's African past.[117]

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[113] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.
[114] Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire*, 20.
[115] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54.
[116] Levine, *Black Culture*, 55.
[117] Brenda Stevenson, "Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca down": Enslaved Women, Religion and Social Power in the Antebellum South," *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (2005): 347 – 348.

Nevertheless, when analysing the importance of religion to Tubman and Truth's representations, it is crucial to consider the abolitionist circles in which they moved. This is especially important considering Bradford and Gilbert moved within such circles and their biographies were crucial in establishing Tubman and Truth as heroes. With Taylor noting that "religion proved a vital conduit of social (as well as religious) behaviour," it is important to consider religion as a transmission of memory.[118] By analysing religious representations that depict Tubman as Moses and Truth as a preacher, this thesis delves into the importance of religion in creating and cementing these women as Black heroes.

Sites of Heroic Memory

Alongside considering transmissions of memory, it is important to consider where heroes are memorialised and the challenges that different representations face because of their location. Representations of Tubman and Truth vary from public to private and "official" to "unofficial." The following chapters analyse public murals and sculptures, private pieces of artwork, federally and state sanctioned memorialisations, and independent representations that defy "official" approval, such as Klein and Criqui's *Reclaiming the Monument* project. On the one hand, consideration of public, "official" monuments of these Black women is important, as these portrayals disrupt the dominant white, male narrative of America's memory. Indeed, Artis Lane's bust of Truth from 2009 disrupted the white masculinity of the statuary in the U.S. Capitol building, as it was the first sculpture to honour a Black woman in this federal building. Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman note the importance of such public spaces, arguing that they are potent sites for transmitting notions of what is right and true because they are authorised by the local authorities or government on behalf of the public.[119] However, the inherently

[118] Taylor, *The Archive and Repertoire*, 44.
[119] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials, and the Geography of Memory* (Chicago: The Centre for American Places at Columbia College, 2008), viii.

political nature of public memorialisations means that they are susceptible to manipulation to ensure that they align with certain needs and narratives, such as acceptable militancy. Kirk Savage emphasises the fact that memorials do not arise by natural law but are built by people with sufficient power to marshal or impose public consent for their creation.[120] Joseph Tilden Rhea supports this notion, arguing that the trend of celebrating Black history was not spontaneous or inevitable, but involved a host of political, social, and economic dimensions, making memorials the result of concerted political efforts.[121] Moreover, Dwyer and Alderman contend that certain factors are at play that make memorials inherently political, such as political photo opportunities, the heritage tourism industry, urban redevelopment, gentrification, real estate valuation, and state and corporate funding.[122] Hence, public memorialisations are at risk of being regulated and manipulated, therein influencing our perceptions of Black women and therefore Black female heroes.

Further issues arise when we consider that public monuments often affirm national identity, as Black people are generally excluded from the definition of what it means to be American. Throughout America's history, Black people have struggled to become an accepted part of the American nation, with ideas of what it means to be American centring around white masculinity. Gary Gerstle analyses why certain racial groups overcame allegations of racial inferiority while others did not, and examines how struggles for inclusion challenged and reinforced American racial nationalism.[123] He demonstrates that America's inherent whiteness

[120] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 135.
[121] Joseph Tilden Rhea, *Race Pride and American Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 113.
[122] Dwyer and Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials*, 12.
[123] Gerstle also analyses the history of civic nationalism, considering how all citizens are promised economic opportunity and political freedom, yet this is only granted to the white majority. He argues that racial and civic nationalism were complex traditions that were altered to address new economic and political problems. Gerstle maintains that these two traditions created what he terms the "Rooseveltian nation", whereby advocates espoused political and social equality and a regulated economy. However, many supporters believed that America should benefit those who are racially superior and limit the opportunities of racial minorities. They were also willing to discipline those who threatened the nation's welfare, either through marginalisation and punishment, or through "Americanisation". Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7 – 9.

was inscribed in the Constitution, with non-white people, especially Black people, excluded from the definition of "American."[124] Gerstle argues that this led many racial minorities to believe that America will "never accept them as the equals of whites."[125] Indeed, while some Eastern and Southern Europeans came to be recognised as white Americans, this did not undermine the tradition of racial nationalism, as other racial groups remained on the outside looking in.[126] With Savage arguing that hero monuments "gave the abstract idea of national consciousness, or national 'memory,' a concrete public form," the exclusion of Black people from the nation becomes pertinent.[127] Hence, when analysing the memorialisation of Tubman and Truth, it is important to consider the location of representations and the context in which they are created to ensure that we can understand both their possibilities and their limitations. Indeed, we need to examine a variety of memorial landscapes to understand how Tubman and Truth have been represented.

Tensions around public, "official" representations are highlighted through Mike Alewitz's mural of an armed Tubman, which is fully analysed in the following chapters. In 2000, Alewitz designed a mural for the Associated Black Charities Inc. building in Baltimore, but when the organisations' officials saw his image of an armed Tubman, they asked him to remove the rifle. Executive director Donna Jones Stanley said that ABC felt "it is inappropriate for a piece of artwork depicting guns and violence to be displayed on our wall in Baltimore, which had more than 300 murders last year," arguing that "I'm not sure this depiction helps us as a [African American] community to strength ourselves."[128] Although Stanley stated that she opposed censorship, she maintained that ABC Inc. must be careful about what they place on

[124] The Constitution endorsed enslavement and limited naturalisation to free white people through a 1790 law. Gerstle highlights that, although this law was modified in 1870, it remained in force until 1952, demonstrating America's yearning to remain a white republic long after emancipation. Gerstle, *American Crucible,* 4 – 5.
[125] Gerstle, *American Crucible,* 5.
[126] Gerstle, *American Crucible,* 7.
[127] Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (2009), 111.
[128] Donna Jones Stanley in John Yocca, "Abolitionist's Rifle engulfs N. J. Artist in Fray," *Baltimore Sun,* June 13, 2000, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/305.html.

their high-profile building in the context of increasing gun violence. However, Alewitz refused to censor his design. In a public statement, he said that "there are those who would like to transform Harriet Tubman into a safe and acceptable icon for corporate America. They wish to disarm her both physically and politically. I will not help them. I will not disarm Harriet Tubman."[129] Ultimately, neither the ABC officials nor the artist could come to an agreement and instead, Alewitz produced the mural *Move or Die* on a painted canvas that he toured around the U.S. as part of his project *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman*. This controversy not only highlights the tensions surrounding public "official" representations, but also the issues around what is considered an acceptable heroic behaviour, with the artist wanting to portray his vision and the organisation striving to protect their image. Hence, when analysing the Black female heroism of Tubman and Truth, it is important to consider where representations are positioned and how this affects the transmission of their heroism.

Fackler and Theoharis's research on Rosa Parks, and Woodley's examination of Mary McLeod Bethune further reveals the conflicts within the memorialisation of Black women. Woodley highlights the racial, gendered and class tensions of memorialisation through analysis of the National Council of Negro Women's (NCNW) successful campaign to erect a sculpture of Bethune in 1974 in Lincoln Park, Washington D.C.[130] Although she argues that the memorial represented both middle and working-class Black women, the high number of Black people leaving the neighbourhood amidst rising house prices highlights the class tensions within memorialisation, with Woodley questioning the relevance of this memorial for a rapidly declining working-class Black community.[131] Nevertheless, Woodley maintains that the memorial revealed to white Americans that "black people had a history which was part of America's" and showed Black people that "they had a history of which they should be

[129] Mike Alewitz, "Statement by Mike Alewitz: For Immediate Release," *Hartford Web Publishing*, June 14, 2000, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/308.html.
[130] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 474 – 476.
[131] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 489 – 491.

proud."[132] Analysing the sculpture and its context, Woodley argues that the NCNW's campaign for Bethune's commemoration was a political act, with the memorial being "a celebration and a defence of Black women."[133] She contends that this monument "disrupted the otherwise white masculine memorial landscape of Washington" and challenged the dominant historical narrative by demanding a place for Black women in America's memory.[134]

Conversely, Fackler emphasises how Parks's hypervisibility as a respectable icon for the Civil Rights Movement rendered other Black women activists invisible, with her iconic photographs that were shaped by respectability politics restraining and erasing her political activism.[135] Moreover, Theoharis highlights how public, "official" memorialisations in the late twentieth and twenty-first century robbed Parks of her long years of militant activism and moulded her into a demure Black woman who was an acceptable Black person to honour.[136] She argues that in portraying Parks as "the nonthreatening heroine of a movement that had run its course," memorialisations played a crucial role in "constructing a view of America as a postracial society."[137] She maintains that "Parks' public memorial exposed the saliency of this narrow, gendered vision of movement history in American public life," with the myth of the "non-angry" Parks placing the Black freedom struggle firmly in the past.[138] Indeed, Theoharis argues that as Parks became a hero and a symbol of civil rights activism, she became less a real woman who needed assistance, with her financial insecurities disregarded. She maintains that Parks's position as a working-class Black woman who faced a segregated and discriminatory job market is frequently ignored, with the failure to recognise this triple oppression further

[132] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 488.
[133] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 502.
[134] Woodley, "Ma Is in the Park," 474 – 475.
[135] Fackler, "Ambivalent Frames," 272 and 278.
[136] Such public memorialisations include the 1999 Congressional Gold Medal and Troy University's Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, which was dedicated in 2000. Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks,* 239 – 240.
[137] Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks,* 241.
[138] Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks,* 241 – 242.

moulding her memory into a nonthreatening Black hero.[139] Hence, as with Tubman and Truth's representations, Parks and Bethune's memorials became sites of resistance that highlight the crucial role of alternative memorial landscapes in the creation of Black female heroes.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I discuss the complex ways in which heroes are created, with evaluation of traditional heroic behaviours, and present an alternative model of Black female heroism. With Black heroism largely focusing on Black men, such as Frederick Douglass, masculine attributes and middle-class expectations of respectability, this chapter highlights the need to re-evaluate heroic behaviours when it comes to Black female heroism. Building on the research of scholars such as Fujino, Ransby, Woodley, and Theoharis, this chapter broadens understandings of Black women's heroic behaviours and activisms to include consciousness-raising, intelligence, and political activism. In considering these attributes, which often challenge patriarchal structures, this chapter develops an alternative model of Black female heroism that will be used throughout this thesis, one that recognises the triple oppression of Black women and centres around Black women's experiences. Indeed, understanding the multi-faceted ways in which Black women have been and are oppressed is crucial in developing a model of Black female heroism that is separate from the white male social order, which only perpetuates racial, sexual, and class exploitation. Moreover, this chapter evaluates how Tubman and Truth persist as *the* Black female heroes, highlighting the multiple systems of exemplarity at play in their portrayal as Black heroes. While there are issues with a focus on exceptionalism, with scholars noting how this occurs as an outgrowth of systematic suppression, I contend that analysing exceptional figures like Tubman and Truth is crucial in understanding how Black female heroes are created and in exploring the various heroic behaviours that have been

[139] Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, 116 – 117.

highlighted and overlooked. Indeed, one of the crucial reasons why Tubman and Truth emerge as exceptional Black women is because of the silences within the archives, with white supremacy ignoring, downplaying, and eradicating the voices of Black women. Acknowledging such silences is vital when exploring Tubman and Truth's heroism, as it explains their prevailing and persistent position as Black heroes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, this chapter argues that analysing alternative transmissions and sites of heroic memory is important in the context of such silences, as doing so allows for the re-evaluation of heroic behaviours, which is vital in shaping *who* is deemed heroic. I highlight the crucial role of orality and family memory in transmitting Tubman and Truth's memory, alongside noting the importance of alternative sites in disrupting and challenging traditional heroic behaviours, with Klein and Criqui's projection literally obscuring Lee's image with Tubman's heroism. Thus, this chapter provides a crucial framework for my analysis of Tubman and Truth's heroism, with the following chapter's discussion of the "superwoman" highlighting the importance of re-evaluating heroic attributes.

Chapter Two

"I bet Miss Tubman and Miss Truth would like us to remember and give some time to the many others"[1]

The Myth of the "Superwoman"

In 1952, Alice Childress published an article titled "The 'Many Others' In History" in *Freedom* magazine as part of her series "A Conversation from Life," which explored topics of race, gender, politics, culture, and society through the fictional character Mildred. In this article, Childress writes of Mildred attending a Black History meeting, at which "there was one pretty young colored girl who…gave a nice talk about Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and *many others* [emphasis in original]."[2] In recounting the evening to her friend Marge, Mildred recalls how she felt compelled to point out that "you folks kept talkin' about 'many others' but you didn't tell much about them."[3] Indeed, she states that "I bet Miss Tubman and Miss Truth would like us to remember and give some time to the *many others* [emphasis in original]."[4] Through this article, Childress highlights the challenges of honouring Black female heroes and recognises the issues of emphasising the exceptionalism of certain individuals over others. This chapter delves into these complexities by analysing how portrayals of Tubman and Truth interact with the myth of the "superwoman," which deems Black women exceptional and strong enough to singlehandedly endure and overcome inordinate suffering. Through an examination of artworks, including murals and sculptures, theatre productions and poems from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this chapter discusses how artists and writers portray

[1] Alice Childress, "The 'Many Others' In History," *Freedom*, February 1952, 8.
[2] Childress, "The 'Many Others' In History," 8.
[3] Childress, "The 'Many Others' In History," 2.
[4] Childress, "The 'Many Others' In History," 8.

Tubman and Truth as Black female heroes and examines how these depictions maintain or challenge the "superwoman" stereotype. I examine how artists from the 1940s to the 1960s, such as Charles White and William H. Johnson, depict Tubman and Truth with elements of the "superwomen" myth to portray them as exceptional Black women with enough strength to overcome the challenges of slavery to free themselves, free others, and fight white oppression. I also examine how portrayals of Tubman as Moses from artists such as John Biggers and Jacob Lawrence further depict her as a "superwoman," with consideration of how this masculine framing of Tubman's heroism maintains the gender bias that exists within dominant understandings of heroism. Through such analysis, I highlight how portrayals of Tubman and Truth as "superwomen" are problematic, arguing that they downplay Black women's race, gender, and class oppression, and narrow the frame of Black women's resistance, with erasure of "ordinary" individuals' activism, thus limiting our understandings of Black female heroism.

Moreover, in exploring how depictions of Tubman and Truth change over time, this chapter highlights how artists and writers gradually moved away from the "superwoman" myth throughout the twentieth century, with depictions from the 1970s onwards offering strong rebuttals to this myth. In doing so, I analyse how artists and writers moved away from stereotypical depictions of Black women towards more productive models of Black female heroism. I consider how artists and writers, such as Elizabeth Catlett, Faith Ringgold, and Childress, challenge the "superwoman" stereotype through representations of Tubman and Truth that recognise the triple oppression of Black women and honour their varying forms of resistance, such as domestic work, collaborative networks, and the protection of loved ones. I recognise that Tubman and Truth's continued veneration as *the* embodiments of Black female heroism limits the extent to which representations shift away from the "superwoman" myth, as the celebration of Tubman and Truth as exceptional Black women inevitably leads to their veneration as "superwomen." Nevertheless, I argue that depictions of Tubman and Truth as

"superwomen" decline significantly from the 1970s onwards, revealing how several Black artists and writers, including June Jordan, create an alternative heroic lineage that celebrates these two figures alongside other Black women. In doing so, I argue that these artists and writers elevate the behaviours of other Black women to the heroic and allow for the re-evaluation of who is deemed a hero, which is vital to the development of Black female heroism. Hence, by exploring how artists and writers maintain or challenge the myth of the "superwoman," this chapter broadens our understandings of Black female heroism and highlights the importance of shifting away from exceptionalism when developing productive models of Black female heroism.

The Myth of the "Superwoman"

The "superwoman" stereotype perpetuates the notion that Black women are exempt from weakness and pain and maintains that they possess inordinate strength to endure suffering and oppression, with this supposed strength outpacing that of white women and most white and Black men. Michele Wallace analysed the "superwoman" image in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* in 1979, arguing that the stereotypes and images of Black women from slavery to today become entangled in an "intricate web of mythology" to create the "superwoman."[5] She states that this woman has:

> inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. Less of a woman in that she is less "feminine" and helpless, she is really more of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with

[5] Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London: Verso, 1979), 107.

> infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman.[6]

It is important to note that Wallace's argument, and especially her views on the Black macho, faced much criticism at the time. Black writer Robert Staples condemned Wallace for publicising such divisive views and Black activist Jean Carey Bond criticised Wallace for "perpetuating images that reinforce the racist climate in which black men and boys are gunned down in the streets."[7] While Carole E. Gregory criticised Wallace for failing to discuss Angela Davis's work on the Black matriarch, she praised her definition of the "superwoman," stating that it "stirred up emotions about all of the women in my family […] I, too, have been raised with a myth that black women do not feel their suffering."[8]

More recently, several Black feminist scholars have built on Wallace's research of the "superwoman," developing arguments about this stereotype and using it to describe their unique experience as Black women. In 2013, Jamilah Lemieuz wrote about her personal experience with this myth, stating that "I don't do emotional auto-pilot…yet I am constantly expected to be unbroken and hard."[9] In the same year, Trudy Hamilton discussed her exposure to this image after a Black man criticised her for buying painkillers. He commented that "I thought y'all were strong," implying that Black women have inordinate strength to withstand any level of pain.[10] Hamilton condemns her companion for perpetuating the "superwoman" image and maintains that this situation shows that "Black people have internalised said images" so much so that they

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[6] Wallace, *Black Macho,* 107.
[7] Robert Staples, "The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists," *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 6/7 (1979): 24 – 33. Jean Carey Bond, "Two Views of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman,*" *Freedomways* 9, no. 1 (1979): 18.
[8] Carole E. Gregory, "Two Views of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*," *Freedomways* 9, no. 1 (1979): 23 – 24.
[9] Jamilah Lemeieux, "I'm Not Strong, I'm Just Human," *Clutch,* May 21, 2013, http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2013/05/im-not-strong-im-just-human/.
[10] Trudy Hamilton, "Human Being Here; Find Your "Strong Black Woman" Stereotype Elsewhere," *Gradient Lair,* June 24, 2013, https://www.gradientlair.com/post/53784397093/human-being-here-not-strong-black-woman.

start to believe that they are "positive" images.[11] She also argues that the strong Black woman image, which "is supposed to be a 'positive' embodiment of the very negative controlling images of Sapphire and Mammy," are actually a dehumanising, controlling image that affirms white supremacy.[12] Mikki Kendall supports this, maintaining that the myth is "inherently dehumanising and damaging" and that "we all have to learn that there is no such thing as a 'positive' stereotype. Least of all one that kills Black women."[13]

Furthermore, in 2014, Chanequa Walker-Barnes identified three core features of what she terms the "StrongBlackWoman" image, namely caregiving, independence, and emotional strength and/or regulation.[14] She argues that there is a "distinction between being a Black woman who is strong and being a "StrongBlackWoman," maintaining that the "manifestation of strength that has become normative for Black women is uniquely racialised and gendered."[15] Karla Scott also argued that the ability to "handle anything" is a key characteristic of "strong" Black womanhood, "a role requiring an almost animalistic brute strength not often attributed to women of other races."[16] Scott's research analyses the development of the "strong" Black woman myth and highlights how "interpretations of Black womanhood contributed to the myth-making."[17] In highlighting the problematic nature of the "strong" Black woman image, Scott turns to Tubman and Truth, contending that:

[11] Hamilton, "Human Being Here; Find Your 'Strong Black Woman' Stereotype Elsewhere."
[12] Hamilton, "Human Being Here; Find Your 'Strong Black Woman' Stereotype Elsewhere."
[13] Mikki Kendall, "Black Women and Police Brutality," *The Islamic Monthly*, February 2, 2016, https://www.theislamicmonthly.com/black-women-and-police-brutality/. Mikki Kendall in Hamilton, "Human Being Here." Kendall's "Strong Black Woman Myth and The Harm It Does" was originally posted on Storify, but this site was closed down in May 2018.
[14] Walker-Barnes highlights how her use of the phrase StrongBlackWoman with spaces omitted is intentional and is meant to emphasise the distinction between being a Black woman who is strong and a StrongBlack Woman. Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy A Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 3 – 4.
[15] Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy A Yoke*, 3 – 4.
[16] Karla Scott, *The Language of Strong Black Womanhood: Myths, Models, Messages, and a New Mandate for Self-Care* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), xii.
[17] Scott, *The Language of Strong Black Womanhood*, xv.

> [Their] legacy of strength for survival of self and the Black community supported and further motivated the myth that Black women were indeed capable of anything – and it was expected of them. Both interpretations of Black womanhood contributed to the myth-making of the strong Black woman as one whose strength is designed and developed to benefit others – be it slave owners or one's own community of people.[18]

While it is important to recognise that Tubman and Truth were strong individuals who overcame great oppression, it is also vital that they are not portrayed as "StrongBlackWomen" or "superwomen." Such images perpetuate damaging views of Black women and produce problematic models of Black female heroism that support racism, sexism, and classism. This chapter builds on these arguments and analyses how representations of Tubman and Truth reinforce or refute the myth of the "superwoman." In evaluating how representations interact with the "superwoman" myth, I demonstrate that certain depictions of Tubman and Truth produce positive models of Black female heroism, while others sustain problematic images of Black women. In analysing such representations, we can more fully appreciate the heroism of Black women and build a model of Black female heroism that recognises their oppression, their resistance, and the "ordinary."

Recognising the experiences and oppression of Black women is a central facet of the Black female heroism presented in this thesis and is a key component of the "superwoman" myth. Indeed, Wallace argues that the myth of the "superwoman" is not used to celebrate Black women, but is employed as a weapon against them by concealing their oppression. She condemns images of "strong" Black women for obscuring their "disenfranchisement, exploitation, oppression, and despair" and contends that by proclaiming Black women as strong, we fail to reflect on the adverse situations for which this strength is required.[19] In doing

[18] Scott, *The Language of Strong Black Womanhood*, xv.
[19] Michele Wallace, "Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity," in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1990), 61.

so, we fail to condemn the challenges that Black women face, provide them with assistance and/or make white people feel responsibility or guilt for the adverse situation facing Black women. Moreover, Wallace contends that Black women who perpetuate this myth are doing a disservice to young Black girls, proposing that it is "an act of unkindness, of extreme injustice really, to tell her that she was a woman of special strengths, of exceptional opportunities" considering the challenges that she will face as a Black woman.[20] Indeed, Marcia Ann Gillespie argues that "strong" Black women are "placed on a pedestal to be admired rather than helped," turning them into virtuous figures who should be judged or emulated, rather than helped, understood, or protected, thus reducing them to less than human status.[21] Moreover, Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant maintains that the image of the "strong" Black woman is important in the U.S. redemption narrative of race, gender, and class. She argues that through this narrative, "strong" Black women embody the qualities that inspire a simplified and sentimental view of America's social reality. Indeed, she maintains that the "superwoman" image sustains the notion that "personal actions and agency trump all manner of social abuses," whether it be slavery, segregation, or contemporary institutional oppression.[22]

Depictions of the "Superwomen"

The "superwoman" image obscures the oppression of Black women and distracts from the inequalities that they face. Hence, when analysing representations of Tubman and Truth, it is important to examine how artists and writers recognise the oppression of Black women in their portrayals of Black female heroism and whether they reinforce or refute the "superwoman" image. From the 1940s to the 1960s, several Black male artists depicted Tubman and Truth

[20] Wallace, *Black Macho*, 108.
[21] Marcia Ann Gillespie, "The Myth of the Strong Black Woman," in *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men,* ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 33.
[22] Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman: Voice and the Embodiment of a Costly Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 3.

with elements of the "superwoman" and StrongBlackWoman stereotype. Charles White and William H. Johnson portray Truth and Tubman as strong, selfless Black women who put others' needs before their own, while John Biggers and Jacob Lawrence's depictions of Tubman as Moses emphasise her as a lone Black woman with inordinate strength. White's mural *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* from 1943 is one of the earliest artworks to highlight Tubman and especially Truth as a selfless, strong "superwomen." White was a prominent Black artist who was committed to creating artwork of Black people, believing that "art must be an integral part of the struggle […] it must ally itself with the forces of liberation."[23] Raised on the South Side of Chicago by his mother, White's passion for drawing and painting developed from a young age. During his elementary school years, White was involved with an outdoor art class and began visiting the public library and the art galleries at the Chicago Art Institute.[24] In 1932, White and several young Black artists came together to organise an art club called The Arts and Craft Guild that raised money for lessons at the Art Institute, whereby one member of the group would attend and then repeat the lessons for the other members.[25] In 1937, White won a scholarship to officially attend the Art Institute, giving him the chance to expand this art training and, after graduating in 1938, he benefited from Roosevelt's New Deal by joining the Federal Art Project in Illinois, with subsidies affording White the time, materials, and opportunity to create public art full-time.[26]

White quickly established himself as an important Black artist and in 1941 was awarded $2000 from the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship to complete the *Contribution* mural for

[23] Charles White in Jeffrey Elliot, "Charles White: Portrait of an Artist," *Negro History Bulletin* 41, no. 3 (1978): 828.
[24] White discovered the outdoor art class in a park on his way home from school and, when they invited him to join, he returned to the class daily amidst working to help this mother financially. John A. Stinespring and Linda C. Kennedy, "Two Lives: Mentor and Artist," *The Clearing House* 68, no. 3 (1995): 140 – 141. Benjamin Horowitz, "Images of Dignity: The Drawings of Charles White," in *Images of Dignity: The Drawings of Charles White*, ed. Charles White, Harry Belafonte, James Porter and Benjamin Horowitz (The Ward Ritchie Press, 1956), 9.
[25] "Two Lives," 141 – 142. Horowitz, "Images of Dignity," 10.
[26] Andrea Barnwell, *Charles White* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002), 18.

the Hampton Institute in Virginia. In the 1950s, White reflected how this mural "dealt with the theme I had long before tried to argue about in High School, the contributions of the Negro people to the development of democracy in the United States."[27] During his time at school, White's teacher neglected to educate his students about Black people, with Crispus Attucks being the only Black figure that his teacher discussed. White felt that he "certainly couldn't accept Mr Bid's one sentence" on Black history and instead conducted his own research, whereupon he discovered other Black people, such as "Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Fred Douglass."[28] Nevertheless, when White tried to share his discoveries with his fellow students and teachers, Mr Bid "told him to shut up and sit down," forcing White to continue his research in his own time and channel his desire to educate his community on Black history into his artwork.[29] Indeed, White wanted to highlight the successes and advancements of Black people to challenge the idea "that to be a Negro was something of which to be ashamed" and that "Negro people were an inferior people, illiterate, [and] uncouth."[30]

White's 1943 mural (figure 3.1) challenges "the clownish role forced upon Negroes in the cinema, by thousands of barbs and shafts in the comic strips, in the newspapers, [and] in casual conversation of white people."[31] It depicts scenes from slavery, the American Revolutionary War, and the Civil War, alongside several famous Black figures, such as Crispus Attucks, Peter Still, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, Paul Robeson, and Huddie Ledbetter.[32]

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[27] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s, Box 4, Folder 64, Charles W. White papers, 1933 – 1987 (bulk 1960s – 1970s). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/charles-w-white-papers-9350/subseries-3-1/box-4-folder-64.

[28] White attended a predominantly white urban high school in Chicago. Charles White in M. J. Hewitt, "We got the message and are grateful", *Freedomways* 20, no. 3 (1980): 200.

[29] Hewitt, "We got the message," 200.

[30] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s.

[31] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s.

[32] Crispus Attucks was the first soldier to die in the American Revolutionary War. Peter Still was an enslaved person who ran away and Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) was a composer, blues singer and songwriter who became a star in the 1930s. The presence of Truth, Douglass, Carver, Washington, and Anderson is a nod to

Figure 3.1. Charles White, *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*, 1943, egg tempera, 11'9" x 17'3", Hampton University, Virginia.

The mural was completed over six months and captured the interest of students at Hampton, which was founded in the 1860s after the Civil War to provide education to Black people and became central in the development of Black artwork. Several students observed the creation of White's mural, with some, including John Biggers, becoming involved in sketches and painting.[33] White's mural depicts slavery through an immense machine in the centre, an image which bears striking resemblance to Diego Rivera's 1933 Detroit Industry murals. Indeed, White's influence under the Mexican muralist movement and its leaders Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, who produced accessible and socially useful art, is highlighted through the composition of this mural.[34] This influence began when White was

White's earlier mural *Five Great American Negroes* from 1939 which depicts these five individuals. Andrea D. Barnwell, *Charles White* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002), 32 – 34.

[33] Barnwell, *Charles White*, (34. In *Freedomways*, John Biggers describes how he and his fellow students "stood around him in awe, watching this master draftsman slicing with a pencil as a blacksmith hammers iron, unfolding and modelling heroic and monumental archetypes, our heroes and ancestors." John Biggers, "His influence caused me to turn out little Charles White," *Freedomways* 20, no. 3 (1980): 175.

[34] The muralism movement began in Mexico in 1920 at the end of the revolution when President Álvaro Obregón commissioned public murals with the aim of unifying the country. Once Obregón's presidency came to an end in 1924 and the commissions dried up, many Mexican muralists, including Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros,

studying in Chicago and intensified when White and his then wife Elizabeth Catlett moved to Mexico City in 1946, where they lived with Siqueiros, who became White's mentor, and socialised with other Mexican artists, including Leopoldo Mendez.[35] White commented that Mexican muralists' artwork "had a tremendous influence on me" and that "I found people in Mexico who were also dealing with the same kind of approach (in terms of content) that was just my mental experience."[36]

Although White's military service prevented him from travelling to Mexico until after he completed *Contribution,* this mural bears a strong resemblance to Rivera's Detroit murals, which depicted "the Spirit of Detroit" among a sea of factories.[37] While Rivera's murals focus on the lives of white workers in the face of capitalism, White highlights Black oppression and the Black people who fought against it. White reinterprets Rivera's depiction, with the machine in the centre representing American capitalism and the attaching chains reminding the viewer that this system, which was built on the back of slavery, continues to oppress Black people despite emancipation. Such portrayals reflect the social realism of White's artwork and highlight how his artistic style was also influenced by social realists like Harry Sternberg, with White commenting that "Harry was the most important teacher I ever had […] because of the nature of the kind of stuff I was doing, was more geared to social realism."[38] Indeed, White's focus on Black men in this mural aligns with much of his early artwork that depicted young

moved to the United States in search of new opportunities. Anna Purna Kambhampaty, "Mexican Muralists Changed the Course of 20th Century American Art," *Time,* February 20, 2020, https://time.com/5786068/whitney-museum-mexican-muralists/. R. Blakeslee Gilpin, "Love Letters to Black America: Charles White's Art for the People," *Slavery and Abolition* 34, no. 2 (2013): 283.

[35] White stated that "I was especially moved by Leopoldo Mendez, the great master of popular wood-cut" and that "one of the honours of which I am most proud is that of having been elected an honorary member of the Taller." Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s. Cameron, 358. R. Blakeslee Gilpin, "Love Letters to Black America," 286.

[36] Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965, transcript. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-charles-w-white-11484#transcript.

[37] Rivera was commissioned to create the murals by Edsel Ford, Henry Ford's son and Ford's company's River Rouge plant was Rivera's chief inspiration for the factories in the mural. Alex Goodall, "The Battle of Detroit and Anti-Communism in the Depression Era," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (2008): 463 – 464.

[38] Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965.

male workers, demonstrating his sustained interest in the Black working-class and reflecting his association with and participation in leftist politics.[39] Despite the violent central scene, White provides the viewer with hope by portraying huge Black hands dismantling the machine and Black activists breaking the chains that surround Black men's necks, highlighting the crucial role that Black people played in achieving emancipation. In doing so, White follows the style of Rivera and other Mexican muralists to portray a visual narrative that corrects the omission of Black people's contributions to America's political, intellectual, and cultural history, celebrates their cultural heritage, and highlights the oppression of Black people.

While this mural is an important expression of Black resistance, it nevertheless prioritises the experiences and activism of Black men. Throughout the mural, White highlights various forms of Black male heroism through different forms of activism, such as armed resistance, and their contributions to American democracy, including advancements in the arts and science. While the whitewashing of American history that White talks of means that this mural is vital in highlighting the important contributions of Black people, White's focus on Black men fails to recognise the crucial contributions of Black women or their triple oppression. Indeed, White's depiction of slavery and capitalism through industrial machinery is imbued with masculinity, and the mural only features three Black women, namely Marian Anderson, Tubman, and Truth. As figure 3.2 shows, Anderson is depicted above Paul Robeson and Huddie Ledbetter on the bottom right, yet she appears as a motionless portrait rather than performing her art, unlike the guitarist below. Truth is depicted wearing a red shawl directly above Booker T. Washington and just below the huge Black fist at the top and centre of the mural.

[39] From an early age, White participated in Communist Party activities, with Stacey I. Morgan noting that a Party pamphlet from the mid-1930s and an article in the CP's *Young Worker* titled "Free Angelo Herndon" were reportedly authored by White. Morgan, 49. John Murphy argues that White played a leading role in the social life of the radical left in New York, with his 1947 exhibition at the progressive American Contemporary Art Gallery and his role as a contributing artist and editor to *Masses and Mainstream* in the 1950s. John Murphy, "Charles White: The Rt and Politics of Humanism, 1947 – 1956," *American Communist History* 17, no. 3 – 4 (2018): 282 – 284.

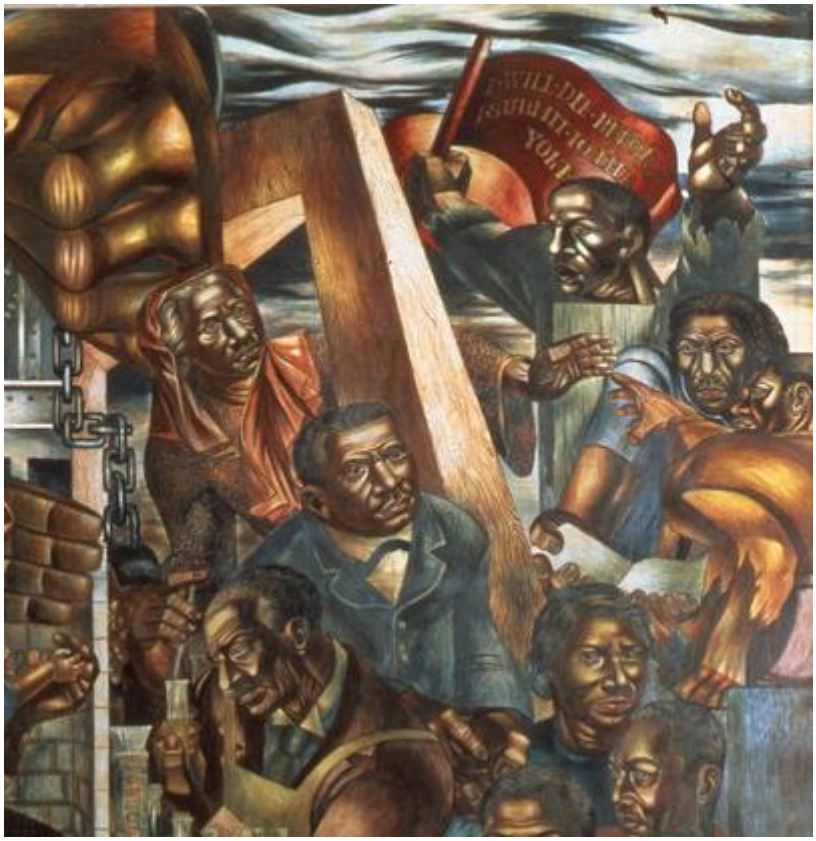

Figure 3.2. Charles White, *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*, 1943, close up showing Tubman, Truth, and Anderson.

Unlike the motionless Anderson, Truth is depicted as helping a Black man, with her arm reaching out towards his hand behind the wooden doorframe, which symbolises the entrance to the Underground Railroad. This man, who appears twisted as if he is injured, appears at Tubman's left shoulder, meaning she is opposite Truth on the right side of this doorframe in a blue shirt, with a book in her hands.[40]

White's depiction of Tubman, Truth, and Anderson amidst a sea of Black male heroism and activism offers a limited vision of Black female heroism, as it overlooks Black women's oppression. Indeed, as Tubman and Truth are the only antislavery female activists depicted, White portrays them as *the* antislavery Black female heroes and as the only "superwomen" strong enough to overcome the oppression of slavery. Such a portrayal narrows

[40] "Art Today: Mural by a Talented Artist," *Daily Worker*, August 28, 1943, 6 in Charles W. White, "Scrapbook 1 Pages," 1941 – 1942, Box 12, Folder 44, Charles W. White papers, 1933 – 1987 (bulk 1960s – 1970s). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/charles-w-white-papers-9350/series-8/box-12-folder-44.

Black women's antislavery resistance to Tubman and Truth's activism, which overlooks alternative forms of resistance and heroic behaviours, and limits Black female heroism. White further highlights Truth as a "superwoman" by emphasising her selflessness and willingness to put others before herself, with the red of her shawl and dress representing the danger of her activism and the sacrifices that she made when fighting for Black equality. Truth's determination to help others is heightened by her hand reaching out towards the distorted hand of the injured-looking man at Tubman's shoulder, giving the sense that she will pull him to the safety of the Underground Railroad.

Truth's depiction at the doorway of the Underground Railroad is interesting considering she did not participate in this covert network with whom Tubman was famously associated. White's depiction of Tubman holding an open book is also curious since she was illiterate and not well-known for giving speeches, like Truth. Indeed, it appears as though White has confused Tubman and Truth's activism, which is significant considering artists at this time were striving to use distinctive characteristics in their representations to ensure figures were recognised and to disseminate Black history. This was crucial in the first half of the twentieth century considering the high illiteracy rates among Black people, the sparse information on Black figures in textbooks, and the lack of such textbooks in Black schools.[41] Indeed, creating established images of Black heroes with distinguishable characteristics, such as Truth's glasses, was vital in guaranteeing the dissemination of their activism and heroism in Black communities. In confusing the activism of Tubman and Truth, White conflates these Black female heroes and fails to appropriately recognise their vital resistance and key contributions to the Black female struggle, therein offering a limited vision of Black female heroism. This is heightened by White's situating of Tubman and Truth within the Black male heroic pantheon and his focus on

[41] In 1952, the illiteracy rate for Black people aged 14 years and older was 10.2%, which was five times that of white people at 1.8%. Howard Fuller, "The Struggle Continues," *Education Next*, June 30, 2006, https://www.educationnext.org/the-struggle-continues/#:~:text=In%201952%2C%20the%20illiteracy%20rate,see%20Figures%201%20%26%202).

Black male resistance. In doing so, White overlooks the triple oppression of Black women and erases the varying forms of resistance they undertook to overcome racism, sexism, and classism. Indeed, White's portrayal of Tubman and Truth as *the* antislavery Black female heroes perpetuates their position as "superwomen" who were the only Black women strong enough to fight for equality in the nineteenth century.

White was not the only Black artist from the 1940s to employ elements of the "superwoman" myth, with Johnson's painting from 1945 heralding Tubman as *the* Black female hero who possessed exceptional levels of strength to fight for freedom. Through his *Fighters for Freedom* series, Johnson positions Tubman as *the* lone Black female activist and *the* symbol of Black female heroism, with his artwork overlooking "ordinary" Black women and narrowing Black women's resistance. Johnson was an important Black male artist from the twentieth century who spent much of his life in Europe. He grew up in South Carolina and moved to New York City in 1918 at the age of seventeen after earning enough money for a place at the National Academy of Design. In 1926, Johnson moved to France where he met Danish artist Holcha Krake, whom he married in 1930. They spent much of the 1930s in Scandinavia before moving back to New York City in 1938 amidst the threat of another world war. After their return, they settled in Harlem and Johnson became an art teacher in the Harlem Community Art Centre, where he immersed himself in African American folk art and became involved with the Black art community.[42] While living in New York, Johnson worked on his 1945 painting series *Fighters for Freedom.* Through this series, Johnson, who once proclaimed "I am a Negro and proud," fulfilled a lifetime goal of creating "a series of decorative, historical, and legendary panels on the story of the Negro."[43] The series was constructed "in an intricate mural pattern,"

[42] Johnson enjoyed some success until his wife's death in 1944, upon which his mental and physical health declined. He spent the last twenty-three years of his life in a hospital on Long Island and died in 1970.
[43] William H. Johnson, "Exhibition Panels," c. 1950s, Box 2, Folder 14, William H. Johnson papers, 1922 – 1972 (bulk 1926 – 1956). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/william-h-johnson-papers-6889/series-5/box-2-folder-14.

whereby Johnson "collected a mass of clippings from which he cut out figures and prepared sketches."[44] It depicted several notable Black men and women who were at the forefront of the Black freedom struggle, such as Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln.[45] The series also included paintings that commented on America's involvement in World War Two, with works depicting conferences in the fight against fascism.[46] With artworks of the Black freedom struggle and World War Two, Johnson's series draws comparison between Black people's resistance against oppression abroad in the 1940s and that at home in the nineteenth century.

While Chapter Four fully discusses this comparison in relation to Johnson's portrayal of an armed Tubman, here I focus on Johnson's use of the "superwoman" in his portrayal of Tubman. Although the series contains multiple examples of Black male heroism through different Black men who undertook various forms of activism, the series portrays Tubman as *the* symbol of Black female heroism and thus portrays her as a "superwoman" who was uniquely capable of fighting for freedom, as the title of the painting suggests.[47] *Three Great Freedom Fighters* (figure 3.3) depicts Tubman standing between John Brown and Frederick Douglass amidst a barren landscape, with Tubman literally joining the hands of Douglass and Brown. Johnson's use of colour is significant in this painting, as it helps direct the viewer's eye

[44] The series was only exhibited once in the United States at the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library in Spring 1946. Johnson "was disappointed in the reaction from the Negro public" and there was "no indication that the panels were viewed by critics of the press." In 1947, Johnson exhibited the series in Copenhagen, Denmark "where they were called "unbound by the dimensions of time." William H. Johnson, "Exhibition Panels," c. 1950s.

[45] *Fighters for Freedom* was not solely focused on the Black freedom struggle, but also depicted other famous figures who were recognised for their roles in liberating people from colonial rule. Richard J. Powell, *Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 203 – 207.

[46] Powell maintains that at least five of the series" paintings re-enact these conferences, including *Three Allies in Cairo.* This painting depicts President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek at their 1943 meeting in Cairo, where they discussed how to defeat the Japanese. Powell, *Homecoming,* 207.

[47] On the back of a photograph of this artwork, Johnson wrote "F. Douglass, H. Tubman, J. Brown, three great abolitionists." William H. Johnson, "Loose items from Scrapbook," 1920s – 1947, Box 2, Folder 12, William H. Johnson papers, 1922 – 1972 (bulk 1926 – 1956). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/william-h-johnson-papers-6889/series-4/box-2-folder-12.

and communicates the artists' message about these three fighters who depict a trinity of distinct individuals fighting for the same cause.

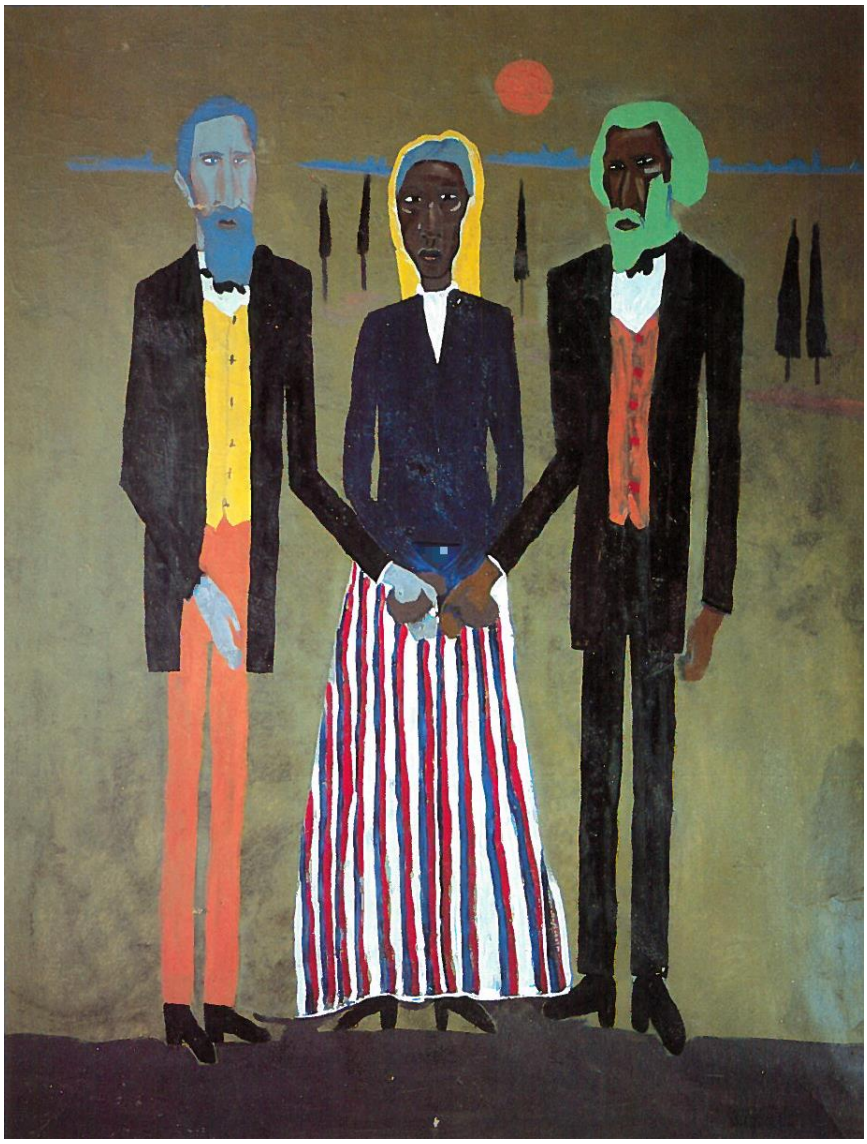

Figure 3.3. William H. Johnson, *Three Great Freedom Fighters*, 1945, oil on paperboard, 36 x 27", Private Collection.

The varying skin tones of the three activists highlights the fact that they are holding hands and allows Johnson to highlight his belief that these activists held a shared mission in the fight for freedom. The colours of their clothes are also important in emphasising the connections between them, with both Brown and Douglass in black and orange, and Tubman and Brown wearing yellow. The orange in Brown and Douglass's clothes also links to the orange sun in the sky, reflecting how their activism will bring light and hope to Black people across the

country. Moreover, the yellow of Tubman's headscarf, which appears as a halo around her head, draws the viewer's eye to the centre and stresses her importance in bringing these activists and their mission together. The eye then goes down towards Tubman's blue, red, and white striped skirt, which is reminiscent of the American flag and suggests that Tubman is a symbol of America. The skirts' stark contrast to the brown background draws the viewer's eye in, whereupon we see the hands of the three activists that meet at the centre of Tubman's skirt. Indeed, by placing their hands at the centre of this flag, Johnson portrays the three activists working to unite a country that has been divided by slavery.

Johnson's representation of Tubman in this scene situates her heroism within a male heroic pantheon, which does not centre around Black women's experiences, and his portrayal emphasises her position as a "superwoman." By depicting her as the crucial centre of this trinity, Johnson subscribes to the elements of the "superwoman" myth, which states that Black women possess more emotional and mental strength than men, and that their strength exists primarily for the benefit of others. This is evident in Johnson's portrayal, with Tubman possessing enough strength to unite these two men who had a complicated relationship. While Douglass was largely against the use of violence in the fight against slavery, he was nonetheless among the minority of people who publicly supported Brown in the aftermath of his failed Harpers Ferry raid of 1859.[48] By portraying Tubman as uniting these men, Johnson highlights Tubman as a vital figure in uniting those with differing views in the fight against slavery. Indeed, through this painting, Johnson suggests that without Tubman, these two activists may not have been able to come together. In this way, Johnson highlights Tubman's "superwoman" strength and its fundamental role in the success of the Black freedom struggle. Tubman's importance to this movement is further emphasised by the fact that Johnson presents Tubman as *the* Black female

[48] Douglass stated that "the nation was sinking into a sleep of moral death, and needed some such thunderclap as John Brown's raid up Harper's Ferry, to startle it into a sense of danger." Frederick Douglass in Neely Tucker, "Hearing Frederick Douglass: His Speech on John Brown," *Library of Congress Blog*, June 15, 2020, https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2020/06/hearing-frederick-douglass-his-speech-on-john-brown/.

hero. *Three Great Freedom Fighters* is the only painting in Johnson's *Fighters for Freedom* series that highlights a specific Black female antislavery activist. The series also includes a painting titled *Underground Railroad,* which depicts several white and Black people who worked against slavery through this network in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, this painting has been criticised for lacking the thematic complexity and clarity of Johnson's previous work, with critics calling it "a strained, awkward handling of materials and subject matter."[49] The artwork depicts thirty-six portraits and busts, with scenes of antislavery interspersed, such as enslaved figures escaping on boats and horses. However, the portraits are not linked with these scenes of antislavery resistance, making it difficult to determine who was responsible for which elements of activism on the Underground Railroad.

Moreover, the lack of distinguishing facial features or signature possessions makes it difficult to determine if Johnson is poorly portraying notable figures or if he is acknowledging the nameless, "ordinary" individuals who are often side-lined for the exceptional. The awkward and ambiguous nature of this artwork makes it difficult to determine Johnson's aim, yet it appears as though the artist is creating a pantheon of important Underground Railroad activists. Indeed, Johnson's use of portraits, which have typically been used to emphasise power and standing, suggests that he is highlighting the importance of these figures. However, this pantheon of heroic figures prioritises men and especially white male figures, with seventeen portraits of white men compared to twelve of Black men, four of white women and just three of Black women. Perhaps Johnson wanted to highlight the fact that the Underground Railroad network was made up of white and Black people, yet it seems strange to focus on white people over Black people in an artwork that celebrates the latter's liberation. Hence, with *Three Great Freedom Fighters* being the sole artwork that depicts a specific Black female antislavery

[49] Considering Johnson's declining mental and physical health after his wife's death in 1944, critics believe this largely affected his artwork and is the reason for this awkward image. Powell, *Homecoming,* 207.

activist in the 1945 series, Johnson positions Tubman as *the* antislavery Black female hero, with other forms of Black women's activism obscured.[50]

Moses and the "Superwoman"

Depictions of Tubman with elements of the "superwoman" continue into the 1950s and 1960s, with several Black artists employing the image of Tubman as Moses in their representations. During her role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Tubman was nicknamed Moses for her ability to free her people. Bradford's biography of Tubman notes that Moses was "the name by which she was known among her emancipated followers from the land of bondage."[51] The nickname stayed with Tubman throughout her life and became an important part of her memory after her death, with artists and writers frequently celebrating Tubman as the Moses of her people. While the religious imagery of these representations will be fully explored in Chapter Three, it is important to consider how these portrayals shape our views of Tubman's heroism. Indeed, it is crucial to explore the extent to which these depictions uphold the myth of the "superwoman." Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many artists and writers depicted Tubman as Moses, either by using the nickname or including religious imagery. The following chapter explores the importance of the Moses framework in representations from the 1950s to the 1960s, while this chapter focuses on two representations to demonstrate how this framework highlights Tubman as a "superwoman," namely John Biggers's mural *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education* from 1953 and Jacob Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* series from 1967. Biggers was a prominent Black artist who originally intended to become a plumber when he enrolled at the Hampton Institute in 1941 yet he decided to pursue a career as an artist after joining in an art

[50] The other artworks that highlight antislavery activism in this series, but that focus on Black male heroism are *Nat Turner* and *Let My People Free,* the latter of which depicts Frederick Douglass alongside Abraham Lincoln.
[51] Reverend Henry Fowler in Bradford, *Scenes,* 71.

class with Viktor Lowenfeld.[52] A Jewish refugee from Austria who escaped Nazi persecution in 1939 by accepting a teaching position at Hampton, Lowenfeld encouraged his students to create artworks that reflected their own experiences. He became Biggers's mentor and introduced him to other young Black artists, including White and Catlett, who were invited to teach at Hampton by Lowenfeld in 1943.[53] After being drafted into the Navy in 1943 and discharged in 1945, Biggers became chairman of the new art department at Texas Southern University in 1949 and began to create murals in Houston, including his one from 1953.

Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education (figure 3.4) highlights Black women's role in the freedom struggle and was created for the Blue Triangle Branch of the Young Women's Christian Association's new building in Houston, Texas.[54] The community centre allowed women and girls of colour to meet, learn new skills, and prepare for working life. In this context, Biggers believed that the mural should be something that the "occupants of the building could identify themselves with their own background and cultural heritage."[55] His design counters White's portrayal of Black men as the saviours of Black women and praises Black female heroism, with Biggers stating that "in the history of our country, no more heroic work has been done than that performed by woman."[56] Drawing inspiration from the Mexican muralist movement, just as White did, Biggers uses this representation to promote racial pride and highlight the important role of Black women in the struggle for emancipation

[52] Alivia J. Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, in association with Harry N. Abrams 1995), 25.
[53] As noted previously, Biggers became White's assistant and posed for the 1943 *Contribution* mural. Barnwell, *Charles White*, 34. Biggers, "His influence caused me to turn out little Charles White," *Freedomways*, 175. "Two Lives," 140.
[54] Originally it was proposed that the mural be a portrait of Dela Lee, an important member of the community, but Biggers persuaded officials that a mural honouring Black women at the YWCA's new building in Houston would be more fitting.
[55] John Biggers in Alvia Jean Wardlaw Short, "Strength, Tears and Will: John Biggers" "Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education," *Callaloo*, no. 5 (1979): 136.
[56] John Biggers and Carroll Simms, *Black Art in Houston: The Texas Southern University Experience* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 1978), 63. Although the mural was commissioned in 1952, the mural was not unveiled until 1958 for reasons unknown.

and equality.[57] Tubman and Truth are the central figures of this mural through which a narrative of Black women's heroism is portrayed. Biggers uses these activists to highlight the importance of Black women in the Black freedom struggle, focusing on their contributions to Black history through the images of Tubman and Truth.

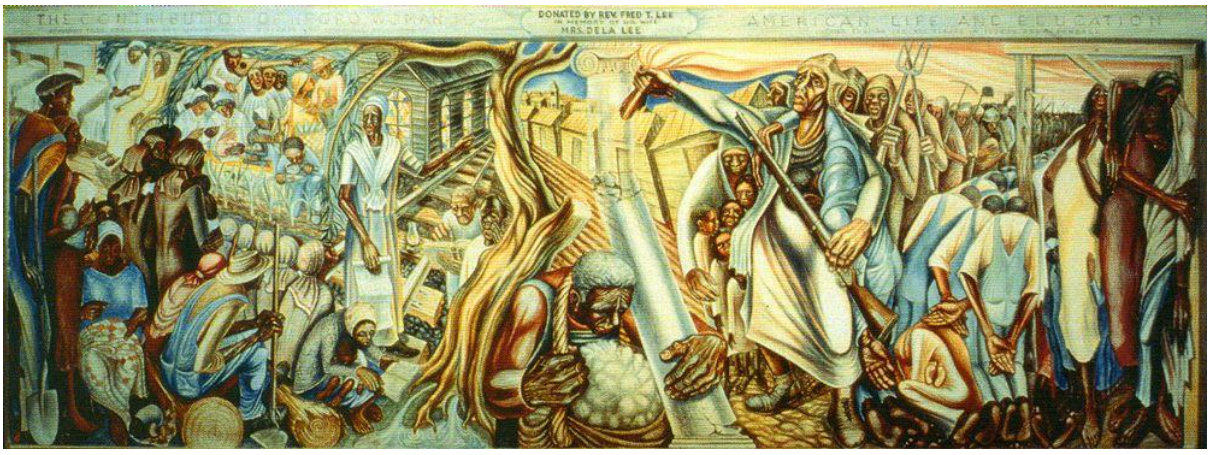

Figure 3.4. John Biggers, *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education*, 1953, egg tempera, 8' x 24', The Blue Triangle Community Centre, Houston, Texas.

The mural is split into two panels to honour each activist, with Tubman leading people to freedom on the right and Truth preaching to a group of free Black people on the left, with one hand pointing down the railway and towards the shotgun houses, and the other holding a scroll with a list of demands. While leading people to freedom, Tubman holds up a torch of light in one hand, a rifle in the other and a Black man is draped around her shoulders. Through this image, Biggers emphasises Tubman in the role of Moses, with the stream of enslaved people following Tubman resembling images of Moses leading the Israelites from Egypt and her torch reminiscent of the torch of light that guided Moses across the desert at night. Biggers's portrayal emphasises Tubman as a "superwoman" by emphasising her inordinate strength, as she is able to carry a rifle, a torch, and a fallen Black man. This not only highlights her physical

[57] The Mexican mural movement began in the 1920s when artists began to paint social and political messages onto public buildings as part of efforts to reunify the country under the post Mexican Revolution government. Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros led the movement and influenced several African American artists, including Biggers, Charles White, Hale Woodruff and Charles Alston. See James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 15 – 20.

strength, but also symbolises how she singlehandedly carried the weight of Black people's freedom. Furthermore, Biggers highlights how Tubman not only protected people with her gun but also with her body through the depiction of children huddled under her right arm, which emphasises her selflessness and willing to sacrifice.

Similarly, Jacob Lawrence's portrayal of Tubman as Moses in his 1967 painting series *Harriet and the Promised Land* contains elements of the "superwoman" myth. Lawrence was an important Black artist who studied at the WPA sponsored Harlem Art Workshop in the 1930s before participating in the Federal Art Project, which Ellen Harkins Wheat argues had a monumental impact on his artistic development.[58] Indeed, Lawrence recalled that the WPA "was my education" and that "it gave you dignity because you could work and get paid for it… It gave you more than just money."[59] Throughout his career, Lawrence created artworks that highlighted the life and struggles of Black people, with works on "ordinary" people alongside historical figures such as Douglass, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Tubman. Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* was a seventeen-panel series that highlights Tubman's life, as well as her role on the Underground Railroad. It was originally created as a children's book that was distributed by Windmill Publishers, who approached Lawrence with the idea and allowed him to choose the subject.[60] Lawrence commented that when he was approached by the publisher, "immediately I thought of me doing a Negro subject" and then "I suggested Harriet Tubman," noting that "if you're involved in history and in Negro history I think it's inevitable that you would be fascinated by the life of Harriet Tubman."[61] The series begins by depicting Tubman as an enslaved child, moving to her decision to flee North and her role on the Underground

[58] Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 29 – 30.
[59] Jacob Lawrence in Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence*, 44 – 45.
[60] Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 61.
[61] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Carroll Greene. October 26, 1968, transcript. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jacob-lawrence-11490#transcript.

Railroad. The images are accompanied by a ballad that was written by Lawrence's wife Gwendolyn Knight, which describes each scene and offers the reader additional context. Audrey Thompson highlights the importance of the ballad to the series, contending that the accompanying text plays "an integral role in the artistic construction" of the story and highlights how Lawrence and Knight want "to instruct the viewer as well as communicate an emotional experience."[62]

While the Moses imagery of this series will be fully explored in the next chapter, here I focus on a particular image that depicts Tubman escaping with a group of enslaved individuals. As figure 3.5 shows, Lawrence portrays Tubman on the far right leading a group of people across a bare landscape to freedom, just as Moses led the Israelites across the desert to the Promised Land.

Figure 3.5. Jacob Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, 1967, in Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, 24 – 25.

Lawrence's positioning of the individuals in this image is important: the figures next to Tubman clearly demonstrate that she is their leader, while the group of individuals to the left with their backs to the horizon appear never-ending, allowing Lawrence to give the impression that more

[62] Audrey Thompson, "Harriet Tubman in Pictures: Cultural Consciousness and the Art of Picture Books," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 25, no. 1 (2001): 90.

people are following. The image also features Tubman's guide the North Star, which is representative of the torch of light that illuminated the night sky for Moses and the Israelites. Lawrence clothes Tubman in a white dress and red shawl, and makeshift shoes cover her feet, with bloodied footprints on the white background highlighting the physical arduousness of her journeys. Lawrence's choice of red is important, as it not only emphasises the danger of Tubman's trips, but also symbolises the sacrifices that Tubman made when leading enslaved people to freedom. Indeed, while the bloodied feet were not included in the final version at the publishers' request, they reflect how Tubman was a strong, selfless "superwoman" who put herself through much physical and mental pain to save her people.

Chapter Three will analyse these representations in full and demonstrate that the focus on portraying Tubman as Moses is representative of the importance of the Exodus narrative to Black people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, it is important to note that depictions of Tubman as Moses are problematic, as they support the notion that Tubman was a lone woman and thus support the myth of the "superwoman." As Wallace argues, part of the danger of the "superwoman" image is that its focus on the lone historical figure results in this individual coming to stand for the whole Black community. She maintains that this only distracts us from the debates and dilemmas with which Black activists are engaged and once more conceals the oppression of Black women.[63] Moreover, Beauboeuf-Lafontant argues that perpetuating the "superwoman" image erases the coalition of politics and strategies Black women created and worked within, therein safeguarding white supremacy and exploitation.[64] Focusing on lone individuals also disregards the lineage of Black women's resistance and, as Vivian May argues, marginalises those who could not and did not resist in the same way as the "superwoman" or with the same toughness of mind, spirit, and body.[65] She maintains that

[63] Michele Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 155.
[64] Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 42 – 43.
[65] Vivian M. May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught: Re-examining Harriet Tubman's Place in Women's Studies," *Meridians* 12, no. 2 (2014): 32 – 34.

focusing on the heroic rhetoric and individualist lens ignores the less overt forms of resistance and the wider contexts in terms of available or chosen modes of resistance. Indeed, this purports the idea that certain types of resistance are superior to others, suggesting that certain individuals' resistance, such as Tubman and Truth's, is more important than other forms of activism. Thus, with its focus on the lone individual, the heroic lens of the "superwoman" discourse narrows the definition of Black women's resistance.

In portraying Tubman as Moses, artists like Biggers and Lawrence perpetuate the idea of the lone "superwoman" by presenting Tubman as someone with spiritual powers that enabled God to work through her, just as God worked through Moses. While Tubman professed a strong relationship with God and credits much of her success to her faith, it is important to recognise that Tubman was part of an extensive network on the Underground Railroad, one that required communication and teamwork to ensure its success. Indeed, May argues that placing Tubman on a pedestal separates her from the wider Black community and perpetuates the idea that she is selfless, and without equal. She maintains that this image of Tubman as a "superwoman" presents her as an ahistorical celebrity who came from nowhere, and who rose and resisted because of nothing more than her unique personal merits.[66] Moreover, positioning Tubman as the Moses of her people frames her heroism through a masculine lens. While artists such as Biggers and Lawrence do not present Tubman as a man, their framing of her heroism through a male religious figure is problematic. In doing so, artists and writers fail to fully recognise the struggles that Black women faced because of their race, gender, and class, and the varying forms of resistance that they used to fight this triple oppression. Thus, their representations further perpetuate the image of the "superwoman" and fail to create an effective representation of Black female heroism.

[66] May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught," 32 – 34.

Furthermore, although Tubman's nickname largely arose because she led people from bondage to freedom just as Moses did, it is important to note that contemporaries used the Moses framework because they could not reconcile a Black woman performing a type of heroism that was typically reserved for men. As demonstrated in Chapter One, heroism has historically been viewed as the remit of men and especially so when it comes to risk-taking actions, such as rescue missions. Hence, Tubman's contemporaries came to understand her heroism through a masculine lens, which is emphasised by the fact that several stated that they viewed Tubman as a man. John Brown stated that Tubman was the "most of a man naturally that I ever met" and, as previously mentioned, Douglass likened her to a white man when he stated that "excepting John Brown…I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships" than Tubman.[67] In portraying Tubman as Moses, artists and writers continue to frame Tubman's heroism through a masculine lens, which disregards Black women's activism and oppression, and perpetuates the myth of the "superwoman." Moreover, Chapter Three will further consider how the creation of more religious portrayals of Tubman than Truth is indicative of the fact that the former's actions are seen as "more" heroic than the latter's. Indeed, Truth's role as a preacher and doing God's will is perceived as "less" heroic than Tubman's risk-taking role on the Underground Railroad, therein demonstrating the gender bias within heroism. Thus, in creating representations of Tubman and Truth, artists and writers risk perpetuating this gender bias unless they consider the implications of placing Tubman's heroism in a masculine framework.

[67] John Brown in Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 13. Douglass to Harriet Tubman, August 29, 1868, in *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman,* ed. Sarah Hopkins Bradford (Auburn: W. J, Moses, 1869), 7.

A Variety of Activism in Biggers's *Contribution*

While Biggers's positioning of Tubman as Moses emphasises her role as a "superwoman," it is important to highlight the crucial yet subtle ways in which Biggers recognises different forms of Black women's activism, therein contributing to the creation of an alternative heroic lineage. Alongside emphasising Tubman's activism on the Underground Railroad and Truth's role as a public speaker, Biggers highlights other forms of Black women's activism. Biggers honours Black women's literature by referencing Phillis Wheatley, with the woman at Truth's feet reading *Poems and Life of Phillis Wheatley*. Wheatley was an enslaved Black woman who published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773, making her the first Black person, the first Black enslaved person, and the third American woman to publish a book of poems.[68] By including Wheatley's text below Truth's image, Biggers emphasises the importance of literature in Black women's resistance, alongside the oral tradition. Moreover, Biggers's mural highlights the lynching of Black men and alludes to Black women's activism in the anti-lynching campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From the 1890s to the 1930s, Black women were heavily involved in anti-lynching campaigns, which aimed to refute the myth of the Black rapist that in turn created the myth of the "bad" Black woman. Both myths were produced by white people to allow for the continued abuse of Black people, with the promiscuity of the "bad" Black woman, or Jezebel, presenting a stark contrast to white women's supposed purity, innocence, and vulnerability.[69] Indeed, white men's desire to "protect" white women from Black men and maintain white supremacy was responsible for the rise of the myth of the Black rapist and the subsequent rampant lynching of Black men. In the late nineteenth century, several Black women, including Ida B. Wells, Frances Ellen

[68] Wheatley was enslaved as a child and taught to read and writer by her white enslavers in Boston.
[69] Lynching became a major part of the national club movement of women and in 1922 The Anti-Lynching Crusaders organisation was formed, with Mary Talbert as its national director. The myth of the "bad" Black woman purported that Black women's "loose" morals meant they did not deserve the respect that was afforded to white women and therefore, their sexual assault and exploitation was not reprehensible. Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 163 – 164.

Watkins Harper, and Mary Church Terrell, ardently opposed lynching and campaigned for its eradication through speeches and publications. When three of her black friends were lynched in 1892, Wells published an article stating that the men were killed because their successful businesses posed an economic threat to local whites.[70] Terrell wrote a response to Thomas Nelson Page's statement that the increase in lynching was linked to the increase in the rape of white women by Black men, arguing that "it is a great mistake to suppose that rape is the real cause of lynching" as the Black man has consistently been subjected to violence "ever since he became free."[71] Harper also strongly condemned the violence that Black people were subjected to, writing that "it is an astounding proposition that a great nation is powerful enough to stop white moonshiners from making whiskey but is unable to prevent the moonshiners or anyone else from murdering its citizens."[72]

The scene on the far-right side of Biggers's mural references this activism by hinting at a recent lynching. Wooden gallows frame the mini scene, with a pregnant woman staring up at the structure and another woman holding a fallen man underneath. In an earlier sketch of the mural (figure 3.6), Biggers references lynching more overtly. The wooden pillar to the left of the pregnant woman is replaced by a piece of broken rope and the fallen man is shirtless, with a blue tinge to his face that suggests asphyxiation. Indeed, the broken rope, emaciated man, and grieving women suggest that he has been the victim of a recent lynching.[73] The 1952 sketch also shows that Biggers originally depicted the woman at Truth's feet not reading Wheatley's text but holding a tiny red figure on the end of a long piece of string, which on closer inspection appears to be a lynched figure (figure 3.7).

[70] Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 196.
[71] Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View," *North American Review* 178, no. 571 (1904): 853 – 868. Lerner, 207.
[72] Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "How to Stop Lynching" Editorial," *The Women's Era* 1, no. 2 (1894): 8 – 9. Lerner, 195.
[73] Biggers's depiction of these Black women grieving is reminiscent of images of women grieving by Jesus" cross in classic European paintings, such as Raphael's *Christ Falling on the Way to Cavalry* (1514 – 1516).

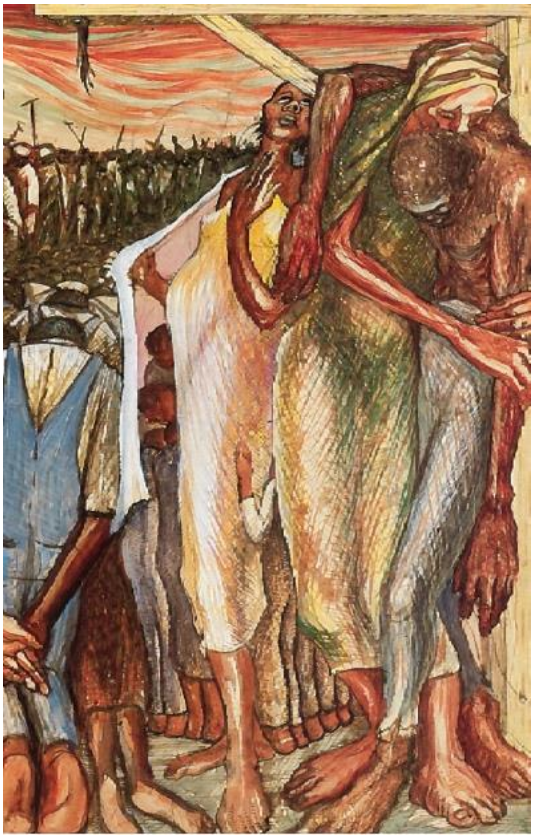

Figure 3.6. John Biggers, *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education*, 1952, conté crayon, tempera on paper, in Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers*, 69.

Figure 3.7. John Biggers, *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education*, 1952, conté crayon, tempera on paper, in Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers*, 67.

It is unclear why Biggers changed his design, but it could be a comment on the evolution of lynching in the twentieth century. While lynchings were largely public spectacles in the nineteenth century, by the 1950s they became more covert crimes, with bodies no longer defiantly hanged from trees, but instead buried in shallow graves or hidden in concealed places.[74] It is possible that Biggers made his references to lynchings more subtle to recognise this change and highlight that these violent acts were not a thing of the past but continued into the 1950s. Although we cannot be certain about the reasons for the change in design, the fact that Biggers retained the gallows, grieving women, and fallen man is significant, as it highlights the lynchings that many Black women campaigned against. Biggers's references to lynchings and the fear that Black women experience for their loved ones is powerful in communicating why Black women spent many years fighting against this demonstration of white violence and white supremacy. Hence, by alluding to Black women's anti-lynching activism, alongside Wheatley's writings, Truth's orality, and Tubman's rescue missions, Biggers highlights different forms of Black women's resistance and contributes to the creation of an alternative heroic lineage. Indeed, while Biggers's framing of Tubman as Moses perpetuates her position as a "superwoman," his acknowledgement of varying forms of activism is an important shift away from this myth.

Countering the "Superwoman"

While several Black artists emphasise Tubman and Truth as "superwomen" from the 1940s to the 1960s, it is important to highlight that there were others whose portrayals rejected the "superwoman" myth during this period. Indeed, this chapter demonstrates a slow yet significant shift away from this myth as the twentieth century progresses, with artists and writers portraying

[74] For example, Emmett Till's body was sunk in the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi in 1955. For more on the evolution of lynching, see Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America 1840 – 1940* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 2011).

Tubman and Truth less as "superwomen" and more as "everywomen." One such artist who provides a strong rebuttal to the "superwoman" myth is Elizabeth Catlett through her 1947 *Negro Woman* series. Catlett was a prominent Black female artist who was born and raised in Washington D.C. yet spent most of her life in Mexico. After graduating from Howard University in 1935, an institution that was central to the teaching and exhibition of Black art, Catlett began studying ceramics and lithography at the Chicago Art Institute and the South Side Community Art Centre. Whilst in Chicago, Catlett met several prominent Black artists, including Lawrence and Margaret Taylor Burroughs, and she met her first husband Charles White. After they married in 1942, Catlett and White moved to New York where she taught at the George Washington Carver School in Harlem before receiving the Julius Rosenwald Fund grant in 1946, whereupon she moved to Mexico and created *The Negro Woman.* This series, which Melanie Anne Herzog defines as "revolutionary," is a collection of fifteen linocut prints with one sentence captions that celebrate the historic resistance and survival of Black women.[75] The captions of the fifteen prints run together to create the following narrative:

> I am the Negro woman. I have always worked hard in America… In the fields… In other folks' homes… I have given the world my songs. In Sojourner Truth I fought for the rights of women as well as Negroes. In Harriet Tubman I helped hundreds to freedom. In Phillis Wheatley I proved intellectual equality in the midst of slavery. My role has been important in the struggle to organise the unorganised. I have studied in ever increasing numbers. My reward has been bars between me and the rest of the land. I have special reservations… Special houses… And a special fear for my loved ones. My right is a future of equality with other Americans. [76]

[75] Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 65.
[76] The full series was published in Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: In the Image of the People* (New Haven: Yale University Press & The Art Institute of Chicago, 2005), 10 – 11.

Although Catlett's original plan to exhibit the series in Black universities and community centres in the U.S. was not realised, the images were exhibited at the Barnett Aden Gallery in Washington D.C. between December 1947 and January 1948, and appeared in the Taller de Gráfica Popular's 1949 catalogue *Doce Años Obra Artística Colectiva*.[77] Indeed, Catlett's series follows the style of this Mexican artist print collective, whose members used their artwork to advance revolutionary social causes, and the organisation became a base for political activity and artistic output, attracting many foreign artists as collaborators.[78] Catlett was introduced to Taller de Gráfica Popular in the 1930s whilst studying at Howard and her move to Mexico after winning the Rosenwald grant was largely motivated by a desire to work with them.[79] Indeed, Rebecca Schreiber notes that Catlett joined this collective because she wanted to create public art that was inexpensive and easy to reproduce.[80] The immediacy and accessibility of the Taller artists' printmaking allowed them to comment on historical events, such as the Mexican Revolution, as well as current events and injustices, such as fascism in Europe.[81] Catlett was inspired by the Taller's methods and believed that they could be used by Black artists to disseminate information to African Americans on the Black freedom struggle. Through *In Sojourner Truth* (figure 3.8) and *In Harriet Tubman* (figure 3.9), Catlett depicts both activists performing the roles that they are best known for.

[77] Stacey I. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature 1930 – 1953* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 317.
[78] The Taller de Grafica Popular, or "People's Graphic Workshop," is an artist's print collective that was founded in Mexico in 1937 by Leopoldp Mendez, Pablo O"Higgins and Luis Arenal. Catlett's *The Negro Woman* series is very similar to the Taller's print series *Estampas de la Revolucion Mexicana*, also created in 1947. Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 58.
[79] James Porter, her teacher, arranged for Catlett and another student to paint a mural as part of the PWAP in Washington D.C. Through this work, Catlett learned about the work of Mexican muralists. Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 35 – 37.
[80] Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico*, 38.
[81] Taller artists created artwork on issues concerning working class Mexicans and produced much of its work for trade unions, student organisations and the government's anti-illiteracy campaign. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico*, 39 – 40.

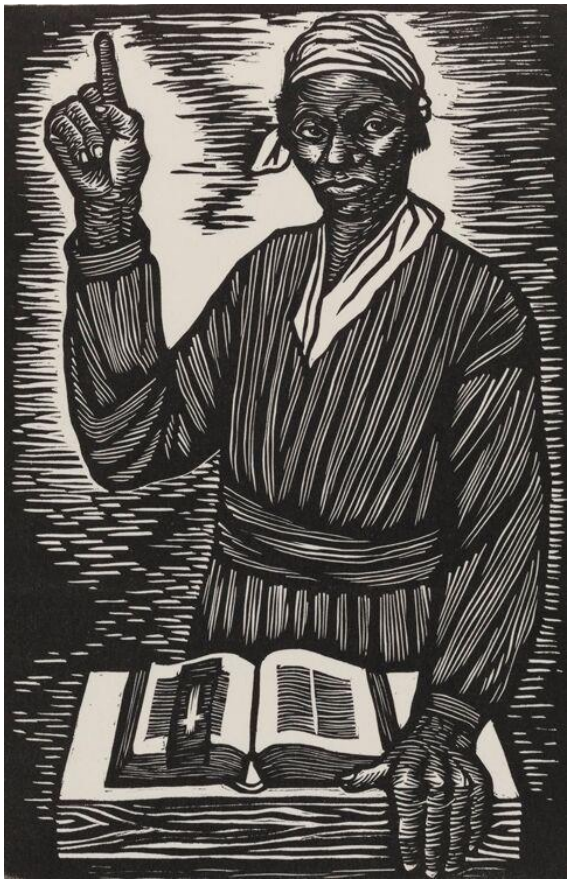

Figure 3.8. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Sojourner Truth,* 1947, linocut, 8$^{7/8}$" x 6",
Collection of Elizabeth Catlett.

Figure 3.9. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Harriet Tubman,* 1947, linocut, 9" x 6$^{7/8}$",
Collection of Elizabeth Catlett.

Truth stands at a lectern with one hand resting next to the Bible and the other pointing towards the sky, reminding the viewer of God's presence. Tubman leads a group of enslaved people on a journey North, with one hand pointing to freedom and her eyes looking towards the viewer over her shoulder. The only other named Black woman in the series is Wheatley, who Catlett portrays writing on a piece of paper whilst watching enslaved women walking in chains. Through these images, Catlett celebrates Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley for their activism in the Black freedom struggle and highlights their oppression under slavery.

With the other twelve images and their accompanying captions, Catlett also highlights the oppression of Black women and Black people more generally. *My reward has been bars between me and the rest of the land* depicts a Black woman behind barbed wire and the image *I have special reservations* portrays Black women seated at the back of a bus behind a "Colored Only" sign. The series also highlights varying forms of Black women's activism and recognises alternative heroic behaviours. *I have special reservations* foreshadows Rosa Parks's protest in Montgomery, while the fallen lynched man in *And a special fear for my loved ones* highlights the involvement of Black women, such as Wells-Barnett and Parks, in anti-lynching campaigns.[82] Through this image and caption, Catlett highlights Black women's vital role in anti-lynching campaigns, whilst simultaneously honouring the victims and recognising the violence and injustice that these lynched Black men endured. Moreover, the series broadens understandings of Black women's heroic behaviours by recognising how Black women "studied" in classrooms, "worked hard in America. In the fields. In other folks' homes," and highlights how they have "been important in the struggle to organise the unorganised."[83] This is crucial, as by positioning Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women and elevating

[82] Rosa Parks campaigned and raised funds for the Scottsboro boys, who were facing judicial lynching after being falsely accused of raping two white women in 1931.
[83] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: In the Image of the People*, 10 – 11.

their behaviours to the heroic, Catlett establishes an alternative lineage of Black female heroism that, unlike White and Johnson's portrayals, centres around Black women's experiences.

Furthermore, Catlett's depiction of enslaved women alongside images of Black women working "in the fields" and "in other folks' homes" highlights the frequent exploitation of Black women's labour and emphasises that class is a crucial form of Black women's oppression. Indeed, Catlett's series was created just two years before Claudia Jones published her article "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman," which highlighted how Black women are "confined to the lowest-paying jobs," with the majority working in domestic service and agriculture.[84] With the linocuts and captions emphasising how Black women faced different yet interrelated forms of oppression, Catlett's series reflects Jones's argument and her own association with the Left. Indeed, the caption that includes the words "organise" and "unorganised" references Black women's work in trade unions and further reflects Catlett's political beliefs, alongside the crucial link between the Left and the Black freedom struggle. Although Catlett did not officially join the Communist Party in the U.S., she associated with many Party members and those with left-leaning political beliefs throughout her career.[85] Catlett's close friend and fellow artist Margaret Taylor Burroughs was associated with communism through her husband Charles Burroughs, who was educated in the Soviet Union, and through her activism and teaching, so much so that the Chicago Board of Education interrogated Burroughs about her communist connections in 1951.[86]

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[84] Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman," *Political Affairs* 28 (1949): 51 – 54.

[85] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 39. Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 80.

[86] Charles Burroughs received his education in the USSR because his mother did not want him to suffer from a Jim Crow-style education. Whilst in Chicago, Catlett lived with Burroughs and studied ceramics at the South Side Community Arts Centre (SSCAC), which was founded by Burroughs in 1940. The centre was sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded Illinois Art Project. Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico*, 36. Tammy Xu, "All About Love," *South Side Weekly*, August 6, 2019, https://southsideweekly.com/all-about-love-margaret-burroughs/.

Catlett was also involved with several organisations that had communist links, including the communist-initiated organisation National Negro Congress, the South Side Writers' Group founded by communist Richard Wright, the Abraham Lincoln School directed by communist William Patterson, and the left-wing George Washington Carver School in Harlem.[87] These associations meant Catlett feared being subpoenaed by the House of Un-American Activities Committee on not only her own activities, but that of her friends, and this led her to permanently move to Mexico.[88] As a foreigner in Mexico, Catlett was unable to join a political party, yet she became aligned with the pro-workers party Partido Popular. This association, alongside her involvement with the communist artists of the Taller collective, led the United States to label Catlett an "undesirable alien" and prohibited her from re-entering the country until 1971.[89]

Catlett's use of Tubman, Truth, Wheatley, and "ordinary" individuals to highlight the oppression of Black women is reflective of the social realism of her artwork. During the 1930s and 1940s, many Black artists and writers believed cultural work could, as Stacy I. Morgan argues, "leverage transformations in the social and political sphere" and call attention to race prejudice and class inequalities.[90] With their artwork criticising social and political injustice, many artists saw themselves as cultural workers who strove to make their works available to the masses in the hope that they would instigate change and celebrate the achievements of "ordinary" people. Catlett was one such artist, with Anita Bateman arguing that if Catlett's artwork "could be reduced to a single element, that element would be social realism" and that her artwork illustrates "the struggles of her people, using a transnational artistic language to

[87] Catlett and White moved to New York in 1942 after meeting in Chicago and marrying in 1941. Washington, *The Other Blacklist,* 80.
[88] Dalila Scruggs, "Activism in Exile: *Elizabeth Catlett's* Mask for Whites," *American Art* 32, no. 3 (2008): 4. Schrieber, 44.
[89] Catlett did not return to the United States until 1971, when she exhibited her work at Studio Museum in Harlem. Catlett was only granted a special permit by the US State Department because of a letter writing campaign by her friends and colleagues. Scruggs, 5.
[90] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 2.

make political statements."[91] Indeed, Bateman notes how Catlett uses visual art and text to criticise pervasive systems of oppression and comment on social conditions "in a way that forefronts her position as an artist-activist."[92] The printmaking method that Catlett used, with its democratising aim, is also indicative of her artwork's social realism. Catlett and other artists within the social realist movement wanted their artwork to be inexpensive and easy to reproduce to ensure its immediacy and accessibility to a mass, working-class audience. By using such a printing method, Catlett ensures that the Black working-class women depicted in her artwork were able to access the series, with the use of text and images guaranteeing that even illiterate people could draw inspiration from the recognisable figures and "ordinary" individuals. Furthermore, the social realism of Catlett's series is important when considering how the artwork departs from the "superwoman" myth. By drawing attention to the socio-political conditions of Black working-class women, Catlett highlights their triple oppression, whilst simultaneously criticising the power structures and institutions that perpetuate their subjugation.

Moreover, by recognising nameless individuals alongside Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley, therein elevating "ordinary" behaviours to the heroic, Catlett further creates an alternative heroic pantheon that celebrates Black women's varying resistance. Catlett's depiction of different forms of Black women's activism collectively presenting important challenges to oppression offers a vital challenge to the myth of the "superwoman," as it rejects the notion that individual "superwomen" are responsible for the advancement of Black people and broadens our understandings of heroic behaviours beyond those established by this myth. Through the captions and images, Catlett crucially highlights those who remain nameless, but nevertheless should be honoured for their contributions. Indeed, the captions of the Tubman,

[91] Anita Bateman, "Narrative and Seriality in Elizabeth Catlett's Prints," *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 258 – 259.
[92] Bateman, "Narrative and Seriality," 259.

Truth, and Wheatley linocuts suggest that there were other Black women who "helped hundreds to freedom," "fought for the rights of women," and "proved intellectual equality."[93] In doing so, Catlett depicts Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley as symbols for those Black women whose efforts remain unknown, which is vital for expanding our understandings of Black female heroism. Indeed, Catlett's portrayals of Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley create "everywomen," which resembles the "everyman" trope that emerged during the New Deal, whereby artists created works to represent the everyday man and his everyday struggles.[94] Catlett replicates this in *The Negro Woman* series, with Tubman, Truth, and Wheatley portraying "everywomen" who symbolise all the Black women who also liberated Black people, fought for women's rights, and demonstrated their intellectualism.[95]

Childress's 1952 "Many Others" article continues Catlett's decision to recognise notable Black women through an alternative heroic lineage and to highlight the fact that there are many "ordinary" Black women whose behaviours should also be acknowledged yet too often have been overlooked, ignored, or forgotten. Indeed, Childress's article highlights the importance of "everyday" actions that "ordinary" Black women employed in the face of oppression, with Mildred recalling how "every minute of grandma's life was a struggle" and that she constantly worried over "what to do about…food…coats…shoes…sickness…death."[96] As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Catlett and Childress's recognition of "ordinary" Black women's actions is important when developing a well-rounded model of Black female heroism, with Barbara Smith and Gloria T. Hull arguing that "only through exploring the experience of supposedly "ordinary" Black women […] will we be able to begin to develop an

[93] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: In the Image of the People*, 10 – 11.
[94] Stephanie Lewthwaite, *A Contested Art: Modernism and Mestizaje in New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 82 – 83.
[95] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: In the Image of the People*, 10 – 11.
[96] Childress, "The 'Many Others' In History," 8.

overview and an analytical framework for understanding the lives of Afro-American women."[97] As the first part of this chapter shows, when it comes to honouring Black women's activism during slavery, artists often default to Tubman and Truth, portraying them as *the* symbols of Black female heroism. However, such representations downplay the activism of "ordinary" Black women whose resistance to their triple oppression is often overlooked or unknown because of silences in the archives, therein narrowing our understandings of Black female heroism.

The celebration of "ordinary" Black women's actions alongside those of the exceptional continues into the 1970s with Childress's 1975 play *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, which challenges the "superwoman" myth and the masculine framing of Tubman's heroism by rejecting her portrayal as Moses. Indeed, Childress's play is representative of many portrayals in the 1970s and 1980s, with artists and writers, especially Black women, framing Tubman's heroism without the masculine lens of Moses. Childress was an important Black writer and playwright who Elizabeth Brown-Guillory argues is the only Black woman in America whose plays have been written, produced, and published over four decades.[98] She joined the left-leaning American Negro Theatre in the 1940s, which laid the foundation for her career as a playwright of seventeen plays, and chaired its successor organisation the Committee for the Negro in the Arts.[99] A radical Black feminist who was a founding member of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, Childress believed that Black theatre was an important place of representation for Black people, stating that it is an "opportunity of seeing and viewing the Negro people" that can "inspire, lift, and eventually create a complete desire for the liberation

[97] Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith, "Introduction: The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in *But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, The Feminist Press, 1982), xxi.
[98] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 28.
[99] Olga Dugan, "Telling the Truth: Alice Childress as Theorist and Playwright," *Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (1996): 124. Julie Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band: A Love/ Hate Story in Black and White* and the Black Feminist Nation," *MELUS* 43, no. 2 (2018): 99.

of all oppressed peoples."[100] Indeed, Childress wrote that "theatre serves as the mirror of life experience and reflects only what looks into it; everyone yearns to see his own image once in a while."[101] Childress created *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* as a published script in 1975 and it is an adaptation of the first act of Childress's 1952 play *Gold Through the Trees,* a portrayal of Black women's resistance across the African diaspora.[102] The script, which was published primarily for juvenile audiences, portrays Tubman working in a hotel laundry in the 1860s alongside two fictional Black women, Lennie and Celia.[103] The three women are working to finance the Underground Railroad, which they mention in hushed tones. Tubman recruited Lennie and Celia at a church meeting, with a flashback scene noting how the Railroad conductor said:

> as I put my hand to the plow to do the work of Freedom, so I also put *my money* into the work. I have none now, so will spend my summer washin and ironin so that when the fall come I have *some of my own* to put…to buy goods, medicine, paregoric for the babies and ammunition for the pistol [emphasis in original].[104]

Although Lennie and Celia were keen to join Tubman in raising funds, Celia's dedication is waning as she cannot see how they are making a difference. She states that "maybe if *everybody* worked and gave their money to the Underground, it would mean something. This way I just

[100] Alice Childress, "For a Negro Theatre," *Masses and Mainstream* 4 (February 1951): 63.
[101] Alice Childress, "But I Do My Thing," *New York Times,* February 2, 1969, D9.
[102] The first act of *Gold Through the Trees* depicts Tubman working in a laundress with Lennie and Celia in 1852. Childress adapted this scene for *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* by adding certain lines and expanding upon certain scenes, such as Tubman's meeting with John Brown. Interestingly, the 1952 play titles Tubman's character as "Harriet," whereas the 1975 published script names the character as "Harriet Tubman."
[103] The play takes place "very close to the end of legal slavery" in Cape May, New Jersey. The script's character notes describe Lennie as "a strong, determined no-nonsense kind of young woman" and Celia as "a very attractive young woman who has certainly been more sheltered than the other two." Alice Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* (New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 1975).
[104] This flashback scene is absent in *Gold Through the Trees.* Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds,* 6.

can't see it, but I believe in freedom and I understand [emphasis in original]."[105] Tubman replies that there "ain't no such thing as understandin. Understandin mean action […] if *nobody else* do nothin, you got to [emphasis in original]."[106]

At times, Childress refers to Tubman as Moses, with Lennie commenting that "Moses got the charm. Slave holder will never catch Moses."[107] However, Childress's references to Tubman as Moses are not essential to the script and reflect the fact that this text was created for a juvenile audience, many of whom at this time recognised the conductor as Moses through other children's books and artwork.[108] Hence, Childress's portrayal of Tubman represents an important departure from the "superwoman" image. In depicting the three women working together in the laundry, Childress highlights how Tubman was part of a wider network of people who performed various forms of resistance when working to sustain the Underground Railroad. She notes that the Underground Railroad was not just made up of conductors and station masters but relied on many people to perform various tasks to facilitate the rescue of enslaved individuals. Moreover, Childress's decision to portray Tubman, Lennie, and Celia as laundresses is an important comment on the working-class life of Black women, highlighting how many are confined to low-paid jobs while white women wear white dresses and spend "the summer in a big hotel, ridin in carriages."[109] Indeed, Childress's decision to place the three Black women in a laundry reflects her deep commitment to leftist politics and her belief that interracial alliances among the working class were crucial for liberation.[110] It also highlights how Childress, among many other Black feminists from the 1970s, viewed the domestic as a

[105] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 7.
[106] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 7.
[107] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 9.
[108] Up to and around the time Childress wrote this script, numerous children's books refer to Tubman as Moses, including Dorothy Sterling's *The Story of Harriet Tubman* (New York: Doubleday, 1954), Sam Epstein and Beryl Epstein's *Harriet Tubman: Guide to Freedom* (Champaign: Garrard Publishing Company, 1968), Matthew G. Grant's *Harriet Tubman: Black Liberator* (Mankato: Creative Education, 1974) and Marcy Heidish's *Woman Called Moses* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).
[109] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 2.
[110] Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*," 81.

site of women's revolutionary consciousness, with the "everyday" actions of "ordinary" Black women potentially being radical.[111] In analysing Childress's *Wedding Band* from 1973, Julie Burrell highlights how the playwright reimagines the domestic scene not as a site of oppression, as it was for many Black women working in white households, but as "a site of feminist-nationalist autonomy."[112] Burrell argues that through her work Childress centres Black women's community as the critical foundation on which to construct the Black nation and privileges female kinship in an attempt to shift Black nationalism away from heteropatriarchal conceptions of Black solidarity.[113] Hence, Childress's portrayal of the three Black women in a laundry room not only highlights the varying roles needed to sustain the Underground Railroad, but also emphasises the playwright's reimagined view of the domestic.

Childress's depiction also shifts away from the "superwoman" not only by portraying Tubman as an "ordinary" Black woman like Lennie and Celia, but also by humanising her through demonstrating that she experienced fear during her escape. When Lennie chastises Celia for being afraid, telling her that "we ain't got no room for no rabbity, timid kinda women in this work," Tubman disagrees and reassures Celia that her fear is perfectly normal.[114] She tells the women that "you lookin at a woman who's been plenty afraid […] don't you think I was scared?"[115] Childress also uses Lennie and Celia to represent the "ordinary" Black women who largely went unrecognised yet played a crucial role in the Black freedom struggle. Indeed, Childress references the conflict between the remembered and the forgotten when Celia tells Tubman that "it's easy to kill yourself for something when thousands of people be cheerin you on. Lennie and Celia don't mean nothin to nobody. We could die here and nobody would know

[111] Other examples include Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez. Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*," 79.
[112] Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*," 78 – 79.
[113] Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*," 78 – 79.
[114] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 9.
[115] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds*, 9.

or care."[116] However, Lennie criticises Celia's desire for recognition, telling her that "if you lookin for praise, you don't belong here" and Tubman reminds Celia that "When I run away was nobody to cheer me on."[117] This dialogue not only reminds the reader that Tubman was not a "superwoman," but also highlights the silences that pervade Black women's history. Childress criticises the way in which certain individuals have been recognised at the expense of others, reflecting her view that "the Negro woman has almost been omitted as important subject matter in the general popular American drama, television, motion pictures and radio" and her determination that "our story has not been told in any moment."[118] Indeed, Childress notes that Black writers are often urged to "improve their characters' 'image'" as "a favourite portrait is the Black person who has 'accomplished' something under the drastic conditions."[119] However, Childress contends that "Black writers cannot afford to abuse or neglect the so-called ordinary characters who represent a part of ourselves" and stresses the importance of telling stories about the "ordinary" alongside the exceptional.[120]

Hence, as with the "Many Others" article, Childress's *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* highlights the issues with prioritising certain figures over "ordinary" Black women and in celebrating the activism and behaviours of particular individuals over others. In doing so, Childress demonstrates her criticism of the "superwoman" image, which is also noted in her novel *A Short Walk* from 1979, with Brown-Guillory arguing that the hero Cora challenges the "superwoman" myth by experiencing "a series of trials and errors," rather than possessing inordinate strength.[121] Childress's criticism of the "superwoman" and Black female stereotypes

[116] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* 8.
[117] Childress, *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* 8 – 9.
[118] Alice Childress, "The Negro Woman in American Literature," *Freedomways* 6, no. 1 (1966): 14 and 17.
[119] The chapters published in this edited collection are taken from papers given at a conference held from 30 November to 1 December 1978 at the University of Tennessee. Alice Childress, "Knowing the Human Condition," in *Black American Literature and Humanism*, ed. R. Baxter Miller (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 9 – 10.
[120] Childress, "Knowing the Human Condition," 9 – 10.
[121] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, "Race, Gender and Social Politics in Alice Childress's "A Short Walk"," *CLA Journal* 51, no. 2 (2007): 110.

aligns with the work of other Black female writers from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Paule Marshall. In 1974, Mary Helen Washington praised these Black female writers for challenging the "superwoman" image and celebrated Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969) for giving us "a look at the real woman behind this particular stereotype."[122] In exploring and challenging Black female stereotypes and framing Tubman's heroism without a masculine lens, Childress's *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* aligns with the Black feminist scholarship that proliferated in the 1970s. Burrell argues that Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman*, which Farrah Jasmine Griffin argues is the "founding text of contemporary black women's thought," was shaped by Childress's writing and bears the marks of the radical Black feminists of the playwright's generation.[123] Indeed, during the 1970s, many Black feminists, such as Angela Davis, Michele Wallace and Barbara Smith, published works that explored Black women's oppression and criticised the white women's liberation movement.[124] This scholarship continued and flourished in the 1980s, with publications from bell hooks, Gloria Hull and Patricia Bell Scott, Hazel Carby and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the last of whom coined the term "intersectionality."[125]

It is important to note that, during the 1970s and 1980s, representations largely portray Tubman and Truth as part of the wider Black freedom struggle. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and amid rising conservatism, artists sought to commemorate the Black freedom struggle and the improvements to civil rights that were made in the 1950s and 1960s.

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[122] Mary Helen Washington, "Black Women Image Makers," *Black World* 23 (August 1974): 11.
[123] Burrell, "Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*," 88. Farrah Jasmine Griffin, "Conflict and Chorus: Reconsidering Toni Cade's *The Black Woman: An* Anthology," in *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism,* ed. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 116.
[124] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1972): 81 – 100. Wallace, *Black Macho.* Barbara Smith was the founder of the Combahee River Collective, who published The Combahee River Collective Statement in 1974.
[125] hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981). Hull, Smith, and Scott, *But Some of Us Are Brave.* Hazel Carby, *Reconstructive Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 8 (1989): 139 – 167.

Murals by Angelo di Benedetto, Malaquias Montoya, David Fichter, and Wilfred Stroud included portraits of Tubman and Truth alongside other Black freedom fighters, such as Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr., to honour their contribution to the Black freedom struggle from slavery to today.[126] However, several Black feminist scholars understood the limitations of the Civil Rights Movement and Black nationalism for Black women, and conversely used Tubman and Truth to highlight the continuing oppression of Black women. As previously examined in Chapter One, hooks turned Truth's question into a statement for her book *Ain't I A Woman* and the Combahee River Collective, founded by Black feminists such as Barbara Smith in 1974, was named after the expedition that Tubman led in 1863, which freed around seven hundred enslaved individuals. Angela Davis highlights that, with the exception of Tubman and Truth, enslaved Black women remain "enshrouded in unrevealed history."[127] She argues that Tubman was "an exceptional individual" but "what she did was simply to express in her own way the spirit of strength and perseverance which so many other women of her race had acquired."[128] Crenshaw also references Truth and the "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech in her discussion of intersectionality, arguing that the Black female activist "challenged not only patriarchy, but she also challenged white feminists wishing to embrace Black women's history to relinquish their vestedness in whiteness."[129] Moreover, in her discussion of the "superwoman," Wallace states that "the existence of a Sojourner Truth or a Harriet Tubman did not mean that black women were superwomen […] it only meant that some unusually talented women had emerged despite a vicious and cruel system of human devastation."[130]

Building an Alternative Heroic Lineage

[126] Angelo di Benedetto, *Justice through the Ages,* 1978. Malaquias Montoya, *Freedom Struggle Mural,* 1983. David Fichter, *The Freedom Quilt Mural,* 1988. Wilfred Stroud, *From Africa to America* (Panel 4), 1988.
[127] Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," 90.
[128] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 23.
[129] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 154.
[130] Wallace, *Black Macho,* 153.

Such Black feminist scholarship perhaps influenced representations of Tubman and Truth in the 1990s, with further significant shifts away from the Moses and "superwoman" image. Building on Catlett and Childress's representations, artists from this period showed greater appreciation for "ordinary" Black women and their varying forms of resistance, with such representations further supporting the creation of an alternative heroic lineage that positioned Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women. One important example is Faith Ringgold's *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* (figure 3.10) from 1991, which was created as part of Ringgold's story-quilt series *The French Collection.*

Figure 3.10. Faith Ringgold, *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles*, 1991, silkscreen, 85.7cm x 88.9cm, Faith Ringgold Private Collection.

Similar to Catlett's *The Negro Woman*, Ringgold uses images and accompanying captions to tell the story of fictional character Willia Marie Simone, who as previously noted is an

amalgamation of Ringgold and her mother Willie Posey Jones.[131] Willia is a Black woman from Atlanta who moves to Paris at the age of sixteen in 1920 to become an artist. The eight quilts included in the series detail her struggle of being a Black woman in the European art world and Ringgold describes the series as "a surreal meditation on why many of us black women have never done the things we'd like to do."[132] Indeed, the artist states that she created the series to rewrite history because "the life of African American women artists has been so bleak that if I dealt with it factually, it would be too depressing."[133] Michele Wallace, Ringgold's daughter, notes that the series highlights the complicated relationship between Black cultural production and European culture, emphasises that issues of race, gender, and class were "cloaked and embedded in the evolution of European and American Modernism," and recognises the way in which "black female subjectivity managed to survive the racial and sexual politics of Afro-American Modernism."[134]

The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles is the fourth story-quilt in the series, which was initially displayed at New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art and then toured the U.S. as part of a travelling exhibition in 1999.[135] It depicts Black women members of the fictional National Sunflower Quilters Society of America who travelled to Arles to "complete *The Sunflower Quilt*, an international symbol of their dedication to change the world [emphasis in original]" and promote the cause of freedom.[136] From left to right, the quilt depicts Madam

[131] Ringgold commented that "I created this woman to be a kind of Josephine Baker, but a painter, who went to Paris and became an artist. I bring into her life the things an artist needs to fully develop. She is kind of my alter ego." Faith Ringgold in Fern Gillespie, "New York artist takes as dancing at the Louvre," *Crisis*, September – October 1998, 29. In an interview from 1994, Ringgold declared Catlett "an absolutely wonderful artist," but admitted that Catlett did not play a great influence over her artwork because "she was not thrust at me with the same vigour that the men were." Faith Ringgold in Melody Graulich and Mara Witzling, "The Freedom to Say What She Pleases: A Conversation with Faith Ringgold," *NWSA Journal* 6, no. 1 (1994): 18.
[132] Faith Ringgold in Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 358.
[133] Gillespie, "New York artist takes as dancing at the Louvre," 29.
[134] Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 357.
[135] The quilts visited several cities, including Baltimore, Fort Wayne, and Chicago. Gillespie, "New York artist takes as dancing at the Louvre," 26 and 28.
[136] The story-quilt series was also published as a book. See Faith Ringgold, *The French Collection: Part One* (New York: Being My Own Woman Press, 1992), 133.

Walker, Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fannie Lou Hammer, Tubman, Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ella Baker. Although she is absent from the image, the accompanying text explains how Willia is going to join the women, with her Aunt Melissa asking her to "take good care of them in that foreign country […] these women are our freedom."[137] The Black women are seated amid a field of sunflowers with houses depicting Arles in the background. They all hold the quilt of sunflowers, and the image is framed by another quilt, which contains the accompanying text. Wallace states that through this quilt, Ringgold raises the question of the relationship of the Black freedom struggle to the individual Black female subject, and considers the connection between the artist's work and the activism of these Black women who worked to free the world of oppression.[138]

Another notable figure in the quilt is Vincent Van Gogh, who stands to the left of Baker holding a vase of sunflowers. Ringgold's inclusion of Van Gogh has several different functions: firstly, he serves as a symbol of white oppression, and secondly, he highlights the dominance of European artists and artwork in the art world and the difficulties that many Black people, and especially Black women, faced in entering this largely white and male arena.[139] The Black women question Willia's desire to be an artist in Europe, commenting that Van Gogh is a "strange looking man" who reminds Tubman of "slavers" and Truth of the men who stole her children.[140] Tubman states that "he's the image of the man hit me in the head with a rock when I was a girl" and Truth asks if Van Gogh knows anything about her child who was sold to a Dutch slaver, commenting that "he should pay for all the pain his people have given us."[141]

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[137] Ringgold created another quilt also titled *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* in 1996, which was an adaption of the 1991 quilt. In the latter quilt, Ringgold replaced the houses in the background with trees and included Willia, placing her to the right of Baker. Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133. Ringgold, *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles,* 1996, colour lithograph, 57.15cm x 76.2cm, Art by Women Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

[138] Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture,* 360.

[139] Van Gogh stands to the left of Baker holding a vase with sunflowers, which represents his still-life *Sunflowers* from 1888. He stands still in the image and the text describes how he appeared "like one of the sunflowers," which is emphasised through his yellow hat. Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.

[140] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.

[141] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.

When Tubman says "make him leave," the text reveals that "he was not about to be moved. Like one of the sunflowers, he appeared to be growing out of the ground," highlighting the deep-rooted nature of white male oppression.[142] Through this dialogue, Ringgold also highlights the internal conflict that she experienced as a Black female artist in the white European art world. Moreover, when Willia states that she travelled to Europe to be an artist because "it is not possible to be an artist in the States," the women remind Willia that European art is not the only form of artwork, as they state that "we are all artists. Piecing is our art. We brought it straight from Africa."[143] Thus, Ringgold highlights the tensions that arise when some Black artists favour European and Western styles over African and Black artistic traditions.

Furthermore, Ringgold's story-quilt highlights a vital shift away from the Moses and "superwoman" image in the 1990s, making it an important portrayal of Black female heroes. Ringgold never refers to Tubman as Moses and frames her activism with a Black feminist lens, rather than a masculine one. Moreover, through the artwork, Ringgold recognises the varying resistance of Black women and portrays them not as lone individuals, but as part of a wider struggle for freedom. Just like Catlett's 1947 series, Ringgold uses the images of the activists and the text to emphasise the different forms of resistance taken up by Black women. The accompanying text describes how Tubman "brought over 300 slaves to freedom," Truth "spoke up brilliantly for women's rights during slavery," Bethune "was special advisor to Presidents," Hamer "braved police dogs, water hoses, brutal beatings and jail" to register voters, and Parks "became the mother of the Civil Rights Movement."[144] In depicting the Black women holding the freedom quilt and stating that "these women are our freedom," the artist creates a pantheon of Black female heroes and emphasises that the combined activism of these Black women played vital roles in freeing the world of oppression.[145]

[142] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.
[143] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.
[144] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.
[145] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.

Ringgold also uses the image of the quilt as a reflection of these Black women's activism. She describes them as "a fortress of African American women's courage, with enough energy to transform a nation piece by piece," with the phrase "piece by piece" emphasising the link between their activism and the quilt.[146] Traditionally, quilts are created from many small pieces of different types of fabrics, with women using the knowledge and skills that have been passed down to them from their ancestors. Just as a quilt is created, freedom is achieved through the varying activism of people from across generations, with their individual actions building to overcome oppression over time. Ringgold's family history demonstrates the crucial intergenerational aspect of quilting, as her quilting skills were passed down to her through four generations, and hooks notes how the quilts that her grandmother Baba created "were maps charting the course of our lives," writing that she considers Baba to be their "family historian, [and] storyteller."[147] This sense of history being passed down is highlighted in Ringgold's quilt, with the text describing how "Sojourner wept into the stitches of her quilting for the loss of her thirteen children mostly all sold into slavery," with her trauma literally sewn into the quilt and passed down to future generations.[148] Moreover, Ringgold's portrayal of the women quilting is crucial a reference to the importance of quilting to Black women's activism. For example, in 1966 the Freedom Quilting Bee was established in Alabama to enhance Black women's pride and participation in the Civil Rights Movement and raise money for the local Black community.[149] Thus, Ringgold's depiction references the history of Black women's quilting,

[146] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.
[147] Ringgold gained her skills from her mother Willi Posey, who learned from her mother Ida Matilda Posey and grandmother Betsy Bingham, the latter of whom learned from her mother Susan Shannon, once an enslaved woman. Melanee Harvey, "Faith Ringgold, Who I Am and Why: A Multi-Generational History of Artistic Creation," *The International Review of African American Art,* December 23, 2013, http://iraaa.museum.hamptonu.edu/page/Faith-Ringgold%2C-Who-I-Am-and-Why. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 121. For more information on the intergenerational aspect of Black women's quilting, see Vanessa Kraemer Sohan, "But a quilt is more:" Recontextualising the Discourse(s) of the Gee's Bend Quilts," *College English* 77, no. 4 (2015): 294 – 316.
[148] Ringgold, *The French Collection,* 133.
[149] The Bee raised money to improve the socioeconomic status of the local Black community and brought Black women together into a strong cooperative that survived until 2012. Nancy Callaham, *The Freedom Quilting Bee: Folk Art and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Pres, 1987), 3 – 4.

alongside symbolising how the individual activism of these Black women combined to free the world of oppression.

Moreover, this quilt emphasises the intergenerational aspect of quilting and Black women's activism by depicting figures from across the nineteenth and twentieth century. Indeed, this quilt seems to transcend time and highlights that Ringgold does not view time as linear, but more fluid. The artist states that the quilting bee takes place on 22nd March 1922, yet some of the Black women, including Tubman and Truth, were no longer alive at that time and others, such as Parks and Hamer, had not performed the activism which the text highlights.[150] In blurring time and the worlds of the living and the deceased, Ringgold emphasises the intergenerational importance of not only quilt making but also of achieving freedom, and demonstrates that the memory of one generation lives on in what they have created to inspire the next generation. Furthermore, the text describes how the Black women need to return to their activism after the quilting bee, with Tubman stating that:

> I got to get back to that railroad […] Ain't all us free yet, no matter how many laws they pass. Sojourner fighting for women's rights. Fannie for voter registration. Ella and Rosa working on civil rights. Ida looking out for mens getting lynch. Mary Bethune getting our young-uns education, and Madame making money fixing hair and giving us jobs. Lord, we is sure busy.[151]

This not only highlights the varied activism of these women and emphasises their collective importance to the Black freedom struggle, but also demonstrates that the fight for Black

[150] The date is included on the edge of the sunflower quilt – on the left side it reads "The Sunflower Quilters Society of America March 22nd, 1922" and on the right side it reads "an international symbol of our dedication to change the world." It is unknown why Ringgold chose this specific date. Truth died in 1883 and Tubman died in 1913. Rosa Parks" activism in Montgomery did not occur until 1955 and Fannie Lou Hamer was only five years old in 1922.
[151] Ringgold, *The French Collection*, 133.

women's equality is not over. Here Ringgold builds on the scholarship of Black feminists from the 1980s whose work highlights the struggles that Black women continue to face. Thus, Ringgold's story-quilt provides an important rebuttal to the "superwoman" myth by emphasising varying resistance and refuting the lone woman image, and in creating an alternative heroic lineage, Ringgold highlights the long history of Black women's activism that is necessary to eradicate racism, sexism, and classism.

Ringgold's quilt series bears similarities to Catlett's *The Negro Woman*, with both artists using images and captions to highlight Black women's oppression and to celebrate their heroism through an alternative heroic lineage that prioritises Black women's experiences. By the late 1990s, Catlett had begun to honour Black women through a different form, namely with figurative and abstract sculptures, such as *Sojourner* from 1999. After creating *The Negro Woman* series in 1947, Catlett continued to create artwork with the Taller de Gráfica Popular in Mexico until 1966. Although Catlett renounced her American citizenship in 1962 and thereafter was prohibited from travelling to the United States, her artwork was an important part of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[152] Catlett became one of the main female voices in the Black Arts Movement, with Herzog noting that her identification with the Movement "brought to the fore her inborn identity as a black woman."[153] Indeed, Herzog argues that Catlett's strongest commitment as an artist after 1975 was "to make art for black people, with an emphasis on the enduring dignity and strength, the struggles and achievements of black women."[154] She comments how Catlett recognised the worth of Black women's views, knowledge, and experience as being central to the survival of all Black people. In an interview with Glory Van Scott in 1981, Catlett said that "Black women have been cast in the role of

[152] Catlett was not given an American visa until 1971 because the U.S. government were concerned about her links to the Mexican Communist Party. Camille Bishops, "Elizabeth Catlett: Sculpture, Printmaker, Interview #2," in *Artist and Influence 1991 Volume X*, ed. James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1991), 23.
[153] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 133.
[154] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 165.

carrying on the survival of black people," arguing that "we can learn from black women. They have had to struggle for centuries."[155] Indeed, from the 1990s onwards, Catlett created figurative sculptures that represented "strong, active, self-determining women," with the artist noting that she tried to "express emotion through abstract form, color, line and space."[156]

Catlett's *Sojourner* is an example of these figurative sculptures with its abstract depiction of Truth. In 1981, Catlett expressed a desire to create a sculpture of Truth and Tubman, stating that "I want to do so badly Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. I haven't seen any sculptures of them."[157] Although Catlett commented that "they have housing projects named for them, cultural centres named for them" and "I've done linoleum cuts of both," her determination to create sculptures of Tubman and Truth demonstrates that the artist felt sculptures were important in the memorialisation of Black history. As noted by Kirk Savage and Joseph Tilden Rhea, public memorialisations like sculptures are installed by those in power and are the result of concerted political efforts, rather than spontaneous or inevitable events.[158] Indeed, Catlett understood the political, social, and economic dimensions surrounding sculptures, stating that "you can't do a thing and then expect somebody to just accept it […] There is a give and take with whoever does the commissioning and I can't do it and then say, 'Cast this in bronze and put it somewhere.'"[159]

Catlett's opportunity to create one of the first public sculptures of Truth came in 1998, when she was commissioned by the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission in 1998 to

[155] Catlett in Glory Van Scott, "Elizabeth Catlett: Sculpture, Printmaker, Interview #1," in *Artist and Influence 1991 Volume X*, ed. James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1991), 14.
[156] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 167 – 169.
[157] Catlett also notes the difficulty in working with commissioners, stating that "there is a give and take with whoever does the commissioning and I can't do it and then say, "Cast this in bronze and put it somewhere," although I've done it." Catlett in Van Scott, 10.
[158] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 135. Joseph Tilden Rhea, *Race Pride and American Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 18.
[159] Catlett in Van Scott, "Elizabeth Catlett," 10.

create an artwork for installation in Downtown's Convention Centre Sculpture Garden in Sacramento.[160]

Figure 3.11. Elizabeth Catlett, *Sojourner*, 1999, Mexican limestone, 7', Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California.

[160] Ruth Inge Hardison created a sculpture of Truth in 1968, but this was not placed in the public domain. In 1999, two public sculptures of Truth were created, namely Catlett's *Sojourner* and Tina Allen's *Sojourner Truth Monument* in Battle Creek. The first public sculpture of Tubman was included in Ed Dwight's *Underground Railroad Memorial* in 1994 and the first public sculpture dedicated to Tubman was created by Fern Cunningham in 1999, titled *Step On Board.* In September 2012, the sculpture was vandalised and broken into several pieces. It was restored by the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission and placed on display at the Crocker Art Museum in 2014, as it was too fragile to move. Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, "Beloved Sculpture Restored." Accessed November 9, 2020, http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs194/1103391372734/archive/1118244831713.html. Sacramento Arts, "Sojourner by Elizabeth Catlett." Accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.sacmetroarts.org/Programs/Public-Art/Public-Art-Collection/Maintenance-Projects/Sojourner.

The sculpture (figure 3.11) is a seven-foot abstract structure of a woman with feminine curves in a large, pleated skirt, with her arms crossed and her head turned upwards to the sky. Catlett's use of Mexican limestone is not only a homage to her time in the country and the Mexican artists she worked with, but also reflects the mixed ancestries of Mexicans, Black people, and her own children whom she had with Mexican artist Francisco Mora.[161] The majority of the stone is smooth, yet the hair is textured to make it appear as though the woman has tight short curls. Interestingly, although the title *Sojourner* refers to Truth, the sculpture contains very few distinguishing characteristics, such as her signature shawl and glasses, to signify that this is Sojourner Truth. Instead, Catlett departs from the social realism of her 1947 series and chooses an abstract, block-like structure to reject the "superwoman" and portray an "everywoman" who symbolises all the Black women who worked tirelessly for freedom and equality. Indeed, Herzog states that Catlett's sculptures from this period represent women of African descent, with the faces being "ethnically ambiguous" to allow all Black women to identify with them.[162] In creating a sculpture that symbolises "everywoman," Catlett creates a representation that not only celebrates Truth, but also recognises the "ordinary," nameless Black women and their contributions to the Black freedom struggle. Part of Catlett's reasoning for creating abstract artworks was an attempt to "reach out to ordinary people who have little or no experience or understanding of art principles, and extend to them what I may feel about a subject."[163] Thus, through *Sojourner,* Catlett used the symbol of Truth to create an "everywoman" that could inspire and identify with "ordinary" Black women.

Furthermore, Catlett's titling of the sculpture as *Sojourner* rather than *Sojourner Truth* is significant. Truth was born Isabella but changed her name in 1843, stating that:

[161] Catlett had three children with Mexican artist Francisco Mora. Melanie Ann Herzog, "Elizabeth Catlett," in *Singular Women: Writing the Artist,* ed. Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 175.
[162] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 168.
[163] Catlett in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 169.

> The Lord gave me the name Sojourner because I was to travel up and down the land showing the people their sins and being a sign unto them. Afterward I told the Lord I wanted another name because everybody had two names; and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people.[164]

While the title refers to the Black female activist, Catlett's permanent limestone structure is at odds with the title *Sojourner*, which has a transient meaning. However, it could be that Catlett learned the Hebrew meaning of the word "sojourner" whilst working with Jewish immigrant Viktor Lowenfeld at the Hampton Institute. "Sojourner" is the frequent translation of the Hebrew term "gēr," which conveys the idea that a person or group is living, either temporarily or permanently, in a community or place that is not primarily their own, as they are not a full native land-owning citizen, and their survival is dependent on the good-will or acceptance of that community.[165] Hence, Catlett's use of "Sojourner" can be taken as a reference to Truth and also as a way to relay the experience of enslaved Black women, who were forced to reside in a place that was not their own. The term "gēr" is also featured in the Old Testament, for example it is used to reference the Israelites in Egypt. As Chapter Three shows, Old Testament imagery became an important part of Tubman and Truth's representations considering the crucial role that stories of redemption and suffering played in the lives of enslaved individuals. Thus, through the title Catlett highlights enslaved Black women's difficult experience of un/belonging and notes the importance of Old Testament tales in the lives of Black people. Titling the sculpture *Sojourner* and using Mexican limestone also refers to the experience of Mexican immigrants in America, as well as Catlett's experience in Mexico as an expatriate. Although

[164] Truth in Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[165] Gēr is used of the Israelites in Egypt and is especially used of free aliens living among the Israelites. Other translations include "stranger," "temporary resident" or "resident alien."

Catlett was permitted to return to the United States for an exhibition of her work in 1971, she did not move back to New York City until 1983 and did not regain her American citizenship until 2002. Indeed, through the sculpture, Catlett highlights the many layers of involuntary migration and diaspora at work from Africa to the Americas and Europe. Thus, titling the sculpture *Sojourner* has several important meanings, alongside referencing the Black female activist.

Ain't I An "Everywoman"

The shifts away from the "superwoman" myth that Catlett, Childress, and Ringgold had made throughout the twentieth century continued into the twenty-first, with the 2015 mural *Ain't I A Woman* highlighting Truth as a relatable "everywoman." This representation highlights a legacy of Black women's activism and refutes the "superwoman" myth by acknowledging the oppression of Black women and celebrating their use of the oral tradition through Truth's image and words. The mural was created in Kingston, New York, as part of the annual O+ Festival, which the organisation O+ (pronounced O positive) runs to support uninsured artists and musicians.[166] O+ was founded in Kingston in 2010 by a small group of artists, activists, doctors, and dentists to build relationships between artists, writers, and health providers to help strengthen local communities. Their year-round efforts culminate in day or weekend long events, such as the O+ Festival, in cities across the country, where artists and musicians perform in exchange for a variety of services that are donated by health care providers.[167] Executive director of the non-profit Joe Concra commented that the 2015 Festival "was the most

[166] The signature mural from the 2015 O+ Festival was *Pronkstilleven* by Gaia, which depicts Kingston-born painter John Vanderlyn (a white man) and Sojourner Truth. The mural scales the side of a building with portraits of each person taking up one side of the wall. The portraits are covered with flowers, making it appear as though the flowers are growing up from the ground and blossoming into the portraits. I have not been able to find any link between Truth or Vanderlyn, and not found any explanation from the artists as to why they chose these two figures. Mad Mimi, "Sixth O+ Festival Makes its Mark on Kingston." Accessed November 4, 2020, https://madmimi.com/s/2aa3e6.

[167] O Positive Festival, "About." Accessed November 4, 2020, https://opositivefestival.org/about/.

successful to date," with care provided to 222 artists, musicians, and volunteers through 497 treatments.[168] Another organiser Theresa Widmann commented that the 2015 event was "our biggest success yet" and that "it's beautiful proof of the things we can accomplish when we join together with our varied talents and gifts and a common goal."[169]

The mural *Ain't I A Woman* (figure 3.12) was created on the wall of Milne Fabrication Factory on Franklin Street and Furnace Street by graffiti artists Jetsonorama and Jess X Chen in collaboration with three Black female poets, namely Jennifer Falu, Mahogany Browne and T'Ai Freedom Ford.[170] The Black poets were asked to create poems about Black womanhood to celebrate 150 years of Black women employing the oral tradition as a form of activism. Unfortunately, time constraints meant that Falu's poem could not be incorporated into the image, yet portraits of Browne and Ford and extracts from their poems are included in the mural.

Figure 3.12. Jetsonorama and Jess X Chen, *Ain't I A Woman*, 2015, wheat paste and acrylic on brick, 72 Franklin Street, Kingston, New York.

[168] Joe Concra in "Sixth O+ Festival Makes its Mark on Kingston."
[169] Theresa Widmann in "Sixth O+ Festival Makes its Mark on Kingston."
[170] Jetsonorama, or Dr Chip Thomas, is a Black male artist who spent thirty years working as a General Practitioner in the Navajo Nation. His artwork promotes issues facing indigenous communities in the area, stating that "Just as escaped slaves found solace in indigenous communities back in the day, I have found that here [is] where I feel that the work I do makes a difference." Diana Kirk, "Practicing Medicine and Art on the Navajo Reservation – Chip Thomas a.k.a. Jetsonorama," *The Progressive*, April 11, 2017, https://progressive.org/dispatches/practicing-medicine-and-art-on-the-navajo-reservation-a-conv/. Jess X Chen, also known as Jess X Snow, is an Asian-Canadian artist, whose parents immigrated from China to Canada in the 1980s. When We Fight We Win, "Jess X Chen." Accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.whenwefightwewin.com/activists/jess-x-chen/.

Figure 3.13. Jetsonorama and Jess X Chen, *Ain't I A Woman*, 2015
close up showing Truth inside the smartphone.

Browne is depicted on the left-hand side of the mural, wearing a denim jacket and a halo circles her head, with extracts from her poem "Black Girl Magic" reverberating off the halo. She holds the screen of a smartphone up to the viewer that depicts Truth's portrait in the bottom right corner (figure 3.13). As with Browne's portrait, the words from Gage's report of Truth's "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech ripple away from her halo, with the phrase "Ain't I A Woman" capitalised and highlighted in yellow text. The smartphone symbolises the digital nature of much twenty-first century activism, with Black Lives Matter activists using social media platforms and hashtags to organise protests and publicise instances of racism, sexism, and violence.[171] It also highlights how technology has changed the way in which Black activists employ the oral tradition. Smartphones allow speeches to be recorded and disseminated throughout the world, with hashtags, such as #SayHerName, #BlackLivesMatter and #NoPeaceNoJustice, beginning on social media and turning into protest chants. The way in which the words emanate from Browne, Truth, and Ford's halos' as if they are sound waves or ripples in water also represent

[171] For example, George Floyd's murder was captured by a witness on their mobile phone.

how the oral tradition traverses time and space. Just as Truth used public speaking to fight racism, sexism, and classism in the nineteenth century, so are Black female activists using their words to fight oppression in the twenty-first century. The use of poetry and the inclusion of Truth's speech also highlights the importance of oral tradition in the memorialisation of Black female heroes and emphasises that the oral tradition is a crucial mode of memory transmission among Black people.

Furthermore, Browne and Ford's poems are an important part of this representation, with their words serving to reclaim Gage's report of Truth's speech which, as Margaret Washington argues, was littered with whiteness and class privilege.[172] Browne's poem "Black Girl Magic" discusses the oppression of Black women, highlighting how they have been told that they "ain't posed to be here" and "ain't posed to dream at all."[173] Wallace's argument that Black women are expected to bear great responsibility and face inordinate adversity without complaint is echoed in the following verse:

> You ain't posed to do nothing but carry babies
> And carry weaves
> And carry felons
> And carry families
> And carry confusion
> And carry silence
> And carry a nation — but never an opinion[174]

[172] Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 228.
[173] Mahogany Browne, "Black Girl Magic," in Browne, *Black Girl Magic: A Poem,* (Brooklyn: Penmanship Books, 2016).
[174] Browne, "Black Girl Magic."

By using anaphora and repeating the phrase "and carry," Browne emphasises the weight of the responsibility that is placed on Black women, who are often expected to be "superwomen." Indeed, she challenges the inordinate strength of the "superwoman" and recognises that Black women are all too often expected to silently endure pain and oppression. The phrase "but never have an opinion" also highlights how Black women are often excluded from discussions on social and political issues. In the final verse of the poem, Browne encourages Black women to challenge oppression, telling them to "fly," "wonder," "shine," and "bloom," until "you turning into a beautiful blk [sic] woman right before my eyes."[175] Although Browne's poem does not specifically reference Truth, the mural depicts Browne as a mirror image of the antislavery activist, both in the way they are positioned towards the viewer and with their words encircling their heads.[176] This mirror image and Browne's reference to expectations that Black women must carry great responsibility is significant. It highlights the fact that, although the specific problems facing Black women have changed since the nineteenth century, the locus of oppression remains embedded in racism, sexism, and classism. Thus, this mural and Browne's poem challenge the "superwoman" discourse by highlighting how Black women have faced centuries of oppression.

On the right side of the mural is a portrait of T'Ai Freedom Ford, with extracts from her poem "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance" projected onto her image. Unlike Browne's work, Ford's poem makes specific references to Truth, and is dedicated to her, alongside Black artist and philosopher Glenn Ligon.[177] The poem's title is a quote from Truth, who used this phrase to title her portrait photographs in 1864, which she sold to sustain herself financially and

[175] Browne, "Black Girl Magic."
[176] Browne's poem does refer to several other 20th and 21st century famous Black women, namely "Nina Beyoncé Tina Cecily Shonda Rhimes," Viola Davis, Kerry Washington and Michelle Obama. Browne, "Black Girl Magic."
[177] Glenn Ligon is a Black male conceptual artist from New York whose work explores, race, language, desire, sexuality, and identity. He produces paintings, videos, photography, and digital media, and uses his life experience to inform his artwork. Alongside Thelma Golden, Ligon coined the term post-Blackness, a philosophical movement that attempts to reconcile American understandings of race with the lived experiences of Black people in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

it became "her motto as her reputation grew."[178] Through this quote, Truth sought to make distinctions between herself as a living person and the reproduced copies of herself, with Nell Irvin Painter arguing that these portraits were as much about "the rhetoric of the image as the portrait itself."[179] Bernier argues that Truth separated her physical and intellectual wants "by distinguishing her spiritual and metaphysical complexities from her corporeal realities," allowing her to conceal her shadow yet free her substance.[180] Indeed, Truth's quote highlights the poverty that she and many working-class Black women experienced after emancipation, with the disadvantages facing Black people evolving from slavery to other forms, such as sharecropping. In titling her poem with this quote, Ford emphasises the continued class oppression of Black women by drawing comparisons between the poverty of Truth and that of Black women today. Truth's quote also highlights the subjugation of Black women's bodies, which Ford addresses in her poem, demonstrating a further link between Truth's world and that of Black women today. Ford states that "flashbulbs mistake me for celebrity or bored whore," "as Black woman I am installation art as negress," and "black skin shiny as gold teeth worthless swag."[181] She also writes "What parts of me ain't for sale as woman?/ As black woman i am untitled—nameless," which not only highlights the financial struggles that Black women continue to face, but also references the sale of enslaved Black women who were stripped of their names and African identities, and the fact that Truth was "forced" to sell her portraits to sustain the substance.[182]

Thus, this mural highlights the oppression of Black women, whilst simultaneously recognising the importance of the oral tradition among Black female activists. Indeed, this was

[178] Kathleen Collins, "Shadow and Substance": Sojourner Truth," *History of Photography* 7, no. 3 (1983): 183.
[179] Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 485.
[180] Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 210 – 212.
[181] T'ai Freedom Ford, "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance," in *& more black,* ed. T'ai Freedom Ford, (New York: Augry Books, 2019), 14.
[182] Ford, "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance," 14.

emphasised by a poetry reading at the unveiling of the mural during the O+ Festival, with Ford performing "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance." This celebration of Black women's orality and activism was particularly important considering the context of Black Lives Matter. Founded by three Black women, this movement challenges conventional models of charismatic male leadership, with Treva Lindsey arguing that there is a push back against "messianic leadership models" and "cisgender, heterosexual Black men as movement leaders."[183] With the *Ain't I A Woman* mural highlighting Black women's activism in the context of Black Lives Matter, which prioritises collaborative networks, it rejects the conventional idealisation of Black men's leadership. Moreover, as with Catlett's series and Ringgold's quilt, *Ain't I A Woman* uses images and text in its portrayal of Black women's heroism to reject the "superwoman" image and highlight a legacy of activism and heroism among Black women. In creating an alternative heroic lineage, Catlett and Ringgold's artworks highlight Black women's activism from across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with Willia's statement that "I will make you women proud of me" suggesting that she will continue their activism.[184] Similarly, the mirror image of Browne and Truth in *Ain't I A Woman* emphasises that Black women are not only continuing to use their words to fight their triple oppression, but also that Black women continue to face this oppression. While these representations were created during different time periods, each artist and writer portrays the idea of a legacy of Black women struggling for freedom through a variety of different methods. In doing so, they portray Tubman and Truth as Black female heroes in an alternative heroic lineage without subscribing to the myth of the "superwoman."

Conclusion

[183] Treva B. Lindsey, "Negro Women May Be Dangerous: Black Women's Insurgent Activism in the Movement for Black Lives," *Souls* 19, no. 3 (2017): 317.
[184] Ringgold, *The French Collection.*

Through analysing representations of Tubman and Truth throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this chapter delves into the complexities of Black female heroism and explores how artists and writers interact with the myth of the "superwoman." By examining a variety of representations, drawn from both visual culture and literature, this chapter discusses how artists and writers' depictions support or undermine the model of Black female heroism presented in this thesis by considering how they recognised Black women's oppression and acknowledged different forms of resistance, including those of "ordinary" figures. I explore how several artists from the 1940s to 1960s employ elements of the "superwoman" myth in their depictions of Tubman and Truth. White's 1943 mural and Johnson's 1945 artwork position these Black women in the heroic pantheon of Black men, therein overlooking the resistance of "ordinary" Black women and neglecting the various ways in which Black women challenged oppression. I also consider how representations that emphasise Tubman as Moses, such as Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* series from 1967, further perpetuate the "superwoman" image by positioning Tubman as a lone individual who worked solely with God and framing her heroism through a masculine lens, which downplays Black women's oppression and their resistance. Indeed, such portrayals of Tubman as Moses speak to the gender bias within heroism that prioritises certain masculine heroic behaviours over others. Although this chapter highlights how Biggers's 1953 mural portrays Tubman as Moses and contains some elements of the "superwoman," I also emphasise how his mural honours Black women's oppression by recognising varying forms of heroic behaviour, including anti-lynching activism and orality, which provides vital shifts away from the "superwoman" myth. Moreover, I argue that Catlett's *The Negro Woman* series from 1947 offers a crucial challenge to the myth of the "superwoman" by highlighting the oppression of Black women and honouring their varying resistance, thus presenting a productive model of Black female heroism that counters the "superwomen" portrayals of artists like White, Johnson, and Lawrence.

Furthermore, I contend that Catlett's series is crucial for establishing an alternative heroic lineage, with the behaviours of "ordinary" Black women depicted in the series elevated to the heroic. This rejection of the "superwoman" and creation of an alternative heroic pantheon flourished from the 1970s onwards amidst the proliferation of Black feminist scholarship, with Childress's *When the Rattlesnake Sounds* highlighting Tubman's participation in an influential network of "ordinary" yet heroic Black women. Ringgold's story-quilt from 1991 builds on this to present Tubman and Truth as part of a legacy of Black female heroism by celebrating Black women's varying contributions to the Black freedom struggle, while Catlett's sculpture *Sojourner* continues her work from 1947 to present an "everywoman" whom all Black women can be inspired by and identify with. This shift away from the "superwomen" is further demonstrated in the images and poetry of *Ain't I A Woman* from 2015. Browne and Ford's poetry, alongside the mirror image of Browne and Truth, highlight the continual oppression of Black women and emphasise a legacy of Black women's activism and heroism, one that prioritises Black women's oppression and experiences. The continued veneration of Tubman and Truth limits the extent to which representations shift away from the "superwoman." Nevertheless, the creation of an alternative heroic lineage that places Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, both "ordinary" and well-known, is important as it broadens our understandings of Black women's heroic behaviours, which is crucial in creating a productive model of Black female heroism.

Chapter Three

"I'm bound for the promised land"[1]

Religious Representations of Tubman and Truth

John Biggers's 1953 mural *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education* celebrates the importance of Black women in the fight for equality, with Tubman and Truth used as the central figures through which a narrative of Black female heroism is portrayed. Through this mural, Biggers highlights the piety of Tubman and Truth, with the former positioned as the Moses of her people and the latter depicted as a preacher who enlightened people through her speeches and sermons. Biggers is one of several artists and writers from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who use Christian imagery in their portrayals of Tubman and Truth. This chapter analyses these representations, discussing how artists and writers use religious imagery to cement Tubman in her role as Moses and Truth as a preacher. Building on the previous chapter, I examine how religious representations of Tubman as Moses emphasise her exceptionalism, noting how this can further perpetuate the myth of the "superwoman." I argue that this focus on exceptionalism restricts Black female heroism by narrowing our understanding of heroic behaviours and dismissing the actions of "ordinary" individuals. By comparing Tubman's depiction as Moses to Truth's portrayal as a preacher from the 1940s to the 1960s, this chapter also highlights a prioritisation of the former's heroism. While noting that Catlett effectively portrays Truth as a Black preacher, I demonstrate how several artists, including Charles White, Biggers, and Jacob Lawrence, use religious imagery to emphasise Tubman's heroism more so than Truth's, despite the latter's being grounded in

[1] Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W. J. Moses, 1869), 17.

religion, and argue that this speaks to the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism, with Tubman's rescue missions deemed "more" heroic than Truth's preaching.

Moreover, this chapter highlights significant changes to religious representations of Tubman and Truth across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In noting how Tubman's portrayal as Moses dominates representations from the 1940s to the 1960s, this chapter further explores the masculine framing of Tubman's heroism through her depiction as Moses and expands on how this supports the "superwoman" myth. Conversely, I highlight how Truth's depiction as a preacher underwent important changes in the 1970s amidst the proliferation of Black feminist thought, with artists and writers, such as June Jordan and Tina Allen, re-interpreting the religious language that pervades Olive Gilbert's *Narrative* to emphasise Truth as a Black feminist icon. Through such analysis, this chapter argues that artists and writers use religion to emphasise the importance of orality and consciousness-raising to Truth's activism, whilst simultaneously shifting away from ideas of exceptionalism. I maintain that such representations are crucial for highlighting Truth's malleability as a Black female hero by broadening our understandings of heroic behaviours and argue that this further creates an alternative heroic lineage, as this expansion of heroic attributes inevitably allows other Black women to be considered heroic. Furthermore, I examine how Tubman's role as Moses resurfaces in the twenty-first century with Mike Alewitz's 2000 mural and the 2019 *Harriet* biopic, arguing that this re-emergence demonstrates how the exceptionalism of Moses is inherently intertwined with Tubman's heroism, with the continued foregrounding of rescue missions as an important heroic behaviour. Thus, this chapter emphasises how Tubman is a less malleable heroic figure than Truth, with Tubman's heroism largely confined to the masculine framing of Moses, which employs elements of the "superwoman" myth.

The Religious Beliefs of Truth and Tubman

As with so many enslaved individuals, religion played an important role in the lives of Tubman and Truth. Although their specific beliefs differed slightly, Tubman and Truth were devout Christians who learned their religion from their families and their white oppressors. Over the course of her life, Truth engaged with African spirituality and several aspects of Christianity, including Methodism, Quakerism, and Protestantism. She was initially introduced to religion by her mother, who taught her a blend of rudimentary Protestantism and African religion, which involved talks with God and communion with the heavens.[2] While enslaved in Kingston, New York, Truth also met Quakers who lived in the surrounding area, many of whom were antislavery and sympathetic towards enslaved Black people. Indeed, it was Quakers who directed Truth towards the Van Wagenens' home when she fled Dumont's house in 1826 and who helped Truth in the recovery of her son Peter from his illegal sale to the South.[3] The antislavery stance of Quakers meant that they remained an important part of Truth's life, yet her experience of living with the Van Wagenens led her to adopt Methodism. Truth attended Methodist meetings that talked of Jesus' role as a Saviour and she came to understand the meaning of Christ's life in relation to her own.[4] She became involved with the Ulster County Methodists, whose doctrines of individual free will and support of Black preaching attracted many Black people. She joined the St. James Methodist Episcopal Church in Kingston, New

[2] As there is no information about the origins of Truth's African ancestry, it is difficult to be more specific about the kinds of African spirituality that influenced her religious beliefs. Margaret Washington, "Going "where they dare not follow": Race, Religion and Sojourner Truth's Early Interracial Reform," *Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): 49.

[3] Truth initially headed to a Quaker settlement where her friend Levi Roe lived, but his ill health led his fellow Quakers to take Truth to the Van Wagenen's home. Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 57 – 58. In *Narrative*, Gilbert describes how Truth met a man who "counselled her to go to the Quakers, telling her they were already feeling very indignant at the fraudulent sale of her son, and assuring her that they would readily assist her, and direct her what to do." Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 46.

[4] Washington, "Race, Religion and Sojourner Truth's Early Interracial Reform," 49. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 69 – 70.

York and, after impressing the congregation with her faith and charisma, became a public preacher on the Methodist circuit.[5]

Truth's role as a preacher was further cemented when she was introduced to Perfectionism by a white man named James LaTourette, who was the leader of Gotham's Methodist splinter group in New York City.[6] Perfectionists believed that certain people achieved special holiness through traumatic, soul-grappling encounters with the Holy Spirit and that striving for special holiness was manifested through evocative worship, by bringing God's word to the less fortunate and by addressing social ills. They embraced an expressive worship style and condemned the cold formal communion of traditional churches, with some supporting female preaching and encouraging women, both Black and white, to independently conduct reform work.[7] Their support of female preaching encouraged Truth to adopt Perfectionism as the basis of her faith, which she maintained when she joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1831. This activism-orientated church was established in the early nineteenth century by free Black people in New York and quickly became a centre for social and political discourse among working-class Black people.[8] Throughout her life, Truth used her Methodist, Quaker, and Zion connections in her role as a religious preacher to fight for equality and demand justice for Black people, and especially Black women.

[5] Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 80.
[6] Washington, "Race, Religion and Sojourner Truth's Early Interracial Reform," 50. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 85.
[7] It was his "radical" beliefs that led many to call LaTourette a Methodist maverick and his belief in Perfectionism led to his dismissal from New York City's John Street Church, where he practiced as an un-ordained Methodist preacher. John Street pastor Nathan Bangs deplored Perfectionism because it accepted female public witness, sermons based on practical dealings with the Holy Spirit and emotionalism. Washington, "Race, Religion and Sojourner Truth's Early Interracial Reform," 50. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 85.
[8] The church had several notable Black members, including Tubman, Truth, Frederick Douglass, David Ruggles and Jermain Loguen. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 89.

Tubman was also deeply religious, with much of her beliefs influenced by Christian denominations, including Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic.[9] Although Tubman's enslaver forced her and her family to attend a white Methodist church, Kate Clifford Larson's research demonstrates that Tubman also attended services at Bazzel's Methodist Episcopal Church and Scott's Chapel, a Methodist church for the local Black community.[10] In her later life, Tubman also became a member of the AME Zion Church, which helped her establish the Harriet Tubman Home for the Elderly in 1908 and then worked to preserve the home after her death in 1913.[11] Tubman's religious beliefs were also influenced by West African religious traditions, with her strong sense of spirituality being inspired and reinforced by African cultural traditions. Indeed, both Tubman and Truth's knowledge of West African spiritual beliefs were important to their activism, with both women using elements of African spirituality, especially public speaking, in the fight against oppression. Although Tubman and Truth's African ancestry is unknown, most African religions worshipped through sacrifices, gifts, and prayers, and the canon of West African religions was in the songs, chants, dances, myths, and histories that were told by male and female griots.[12] Indeed, Makungu M. Akinyela argues that oral tradition was at the heart of many African religions as it formed "the bridge between the spirit world and the material world and allows a space where both worlds could be experienced within the daily lives of the community."[13] Tubman and Truth's public speaking bears striking resemblance to the practices of such African griots, especially considering their claims of clairvoyancy and close communications with God. While contemplating the best time to escape Dumont's household, "the thought came to her [Truth] that she could leave just before the day dawned"

[9] Larson highlights how Tubman was known for fasting on Fridays, a practice that was then typical of Catholic, but also practiced by Methodists and Episcopalians. Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2004), 45.
[10] Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 45.
[11] Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 279 – 280.
[12] Most African religions shared a common belief in one creator God and a pantheon of male and female Gods who were involved with humanity. Makungu M. Akinyela, "Battling the Serpent: Nat Turner, Africanized Christianity, and a Black Ethos," *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003): 257.
[13] Akinyela, "Battling the Serpent," 257 – 258.

and Truth thanked God "for *that* thought! [emphasis in original]"[14] Tubman similarly communicated with and received guidance from God, such as the instance in which she prayed for absent train tickets during an escape, asking God "don't desert me," and they miraculously appeared.[15]

Although many white oppressors tried their hardest to eradicate enslaved people's African identities, elements of many African religions survived the Middle Passage and were kept alive by enslaved people in America. Indeed, enslaved people not only sustained many of their African religious beliefs and customs, but also learned from other African cultures and communities with whom they were enslaved.[16] Many enslaved Black people also combined elements of Christianity with components of their African faiths to create their own religion.[17] With numerous oppressors manipulating Christian services to preach obedience to white people, many enslaved Black people became wary of white preachers and began covertly attending their own ceremonies, which became a mixture of African and Christian beliefs. [18] Indeed, Mechal Sobel notes that during slavery, white cultural elements, including Christian values, were blended into African people's consciousness to create a "neo-African consciousness."[19] She argues that enslaved Black people achieved "a new coherence which preserved and revitalised crucial African understandings and usages […] while melding them

[14] Gilbert, *Narrative,* 41.
[15] Tubman was escorting an escaping enslaved woman by boat, yet they encountered difficulty when the friend they expected to give them tickets on the dock is not there. Tubman recalled that she prayed to God, saying "don't desert me" and miraculously they received the tickets they needed. Jean Humez, "In Search of Harriet Tubman's Spiritual Autobiography," *NWSA Journal* 5, no. 2 (1993): 173.
[16] Akinyela notes how the slave trade brought African people from different areas together, which led to an enforced cultural exchange whereby they learned from each other's cultural and spiritual systems. Akinyela, "Battling the Serpent," 259 – 260.
[17] Margaret Washington argues that this was crucial for the survival of enslaved people, maintaining that such chronicles "endowed the people's spirits and enriched their survival impulses." Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 12.
[18] They often cited passages that aligned with their aim to control, such as the following: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." Ephesians. 6:5 – 6:7.
[19] Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), xvii.

with Christian understandings," leading to the creation of "a coherent Afro-Christian faith."[20] One example of this adoption of Christian beliefs is the embrace of Old Testament tales, with enslaved and free Black people noting the similarities between the Israelites and themselves. Indeed, the focus on emancipation and overcoming oppressors in the Old Testament became crucial for many Black people.[21] Many believed that Black people were God's chosen people whom he intended to set free, with the Exodus narrative, whereby God used Moses to guide the Israelites to freedom in the Promised Land, becoming a crucial element of Black Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[22] As this chapter demonstrates, the importance of this narrative to enslaved people is evident in Tubman's depiction as the Moses of her people, with many believing that Tubman was sent by God to save them from slavery.

Establishing Tubman and Truth as Religious Figures

Tubman and Truth's devotion is demonstrated clearly in their biographies, with Bradford and Gilbert emphasising the Black women activists' devotion to their religious faith and their close relationship with God. The authors highlighted Tubman and Truth's piety partly because these two Black women were deeply religious and credited their successful activism to their faith. Nevertheless, it is also important to consider the context in which Bradford and Gilbert wrote these biographies, as this also explains the emphasis on religion in these texts. The abolitionist circles that Bradford and Gilbert were involved with were underpinned by religion, with much of abolitionism from the nineteenth century embedded in evangelical Protestant reformism. Influenced by evangelical trends, abolitionists branded enslaving and owning people a sin that required repentance in the form of immediate emancipation.[23] They used enslaved people's

[20] Sobel, *Trabelin' On,* xvii.
[21] This differs to the New Testament, which focuses on redemption through suffering with the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.
[22] Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 47.
[23] John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches 1830 – 1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984), 13.

narratives to condemn slavery and protest against the treatment of enslaved people, a strategy which is evident in Tubman and Truth's biographies.[24] When reflecting on Tubman's enslaved life, Bradford writes: "Thank God, neither family now need fear any earthly master or the bay of the bloodhound dogging their fugitive steps."[25] Gilbert also uses religion to condemn slavery, writing: "O their impious appeal to the God of the oppressed, for his divine benediction while they are making merchandise of his image! Do they not blush? Nay, they glory in their shame."[26] She goes on to condemn those "professing to believe in the existence of a God–yet trading in his image, and selling those in the shambles for whose redemption the Son of God laid down his life."[27] As these extracts show, abolitionists like Bradford and Gilbert often used religion to provide a moral argument against slavery and to humanise enslaved people.

Within this context, religious imagery and allusions came to badge individuals as worthy and deserving of sympathy and respect. The need to present Tubman and Truth as worthy of the title of hero is noted in both biographies. Gilbert provides various letters of support to validate Truth's biography, including a letter from Bishop Haven who writes that "there is no more deserving lady in the land than Sojourner Truth."[28] Bradford's biography also contains letters of support and validation for Tubman and her activism from notable individuals. As previously noted, Frederick Douglass wrote that "it is to me a great pleasure and a great privilege to bear testimony to your character," and William H. Seward commented that "a nobler, higher spirit, or a truer, seldom dwells in the human form."[29] Interestingly, Bradford writes that "there are those who will sneer, there are those who have already done so, at this quixotic attempt to make a heroine of a black woman, and a slave."[30] She goes on to state that:

[24] Although Tubman's biography was published after emancipation, the technique employed by Bradford is very similar to that of authors of enslaved people's narratives in the fight for abolition.
[25] Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W. J, Moses, 1869), 101.
[26] Gilbert, *Narrative*, v.
[27] Gilbert, *Narrative*, v.
[28] Gilbert, *Narrative*, vii.
[29] Frederick Douglass in Bradford, *Scenes*, 8. Willian H. Seward in Bradford, *Scenes*, 65.
[30] Bradford also published letters supporting Tubman from Gerrit Smith and Wendell Phillips. Bradford, *Scenes*, 3 – 4.

> It may possibly be that there are some natures, though concealed under fairer skins, who have not the capacity to comprehend such general and self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of others as that here delineated, and therefore they resort to scorn and ridicule, in order to throw discredit upon the whole story […] But whenever it has been possible to find those who were cognizant with the facts stated, they have been corroborated in every particular.[31]

Through these comments, Bradford highlights the mid-nineteenth century view of heroism, which was largely defined as white, male, and middle or upper-class, whilst simultaneously reassuring the reader that Tubman's biography is accurate and true. Indeed, this somewhat defensive comment shows that Bradford was aware of the need to include Tubman in the category of "hero," because hitherto her gender, race, and class as an enslaved Black woman largely excluded her from this canon. Hence, Bradford and Gilbert were strongly influenced by abolitionists' emphasis on evangelical Christian discourse and used religious imagery defensively to present Tubman and Truth as worthy and exceptional individuals who should be considered heroes.

The Preacher and Enlightener

Bradford and Gilbert's biographies used religious imagery to establish Tubman and Truth as exceptional Black women and present them as Black heroes. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many artists and writers similarly use religious imagery to highlight Tubman and Truth's piety, with portrayals of Moses and the preacher emphasising their importance as Black female heroes. During the 1940s, several representations highlighting

[31] Bradford, *Scenes*, 3 – 4.

Truth's devotion emerged, including Catlett's 1947 linocut *In Sojourner Truth* (figure 4.1) from *The Negro Woman* series.[32] While the previous chapter discussed the importance of the series' fifteen linocuts in refuting the myth of the "superwoman," this chapter explores Catlett's use of religious imagery in establishing Truth as a heroic Black preacher.

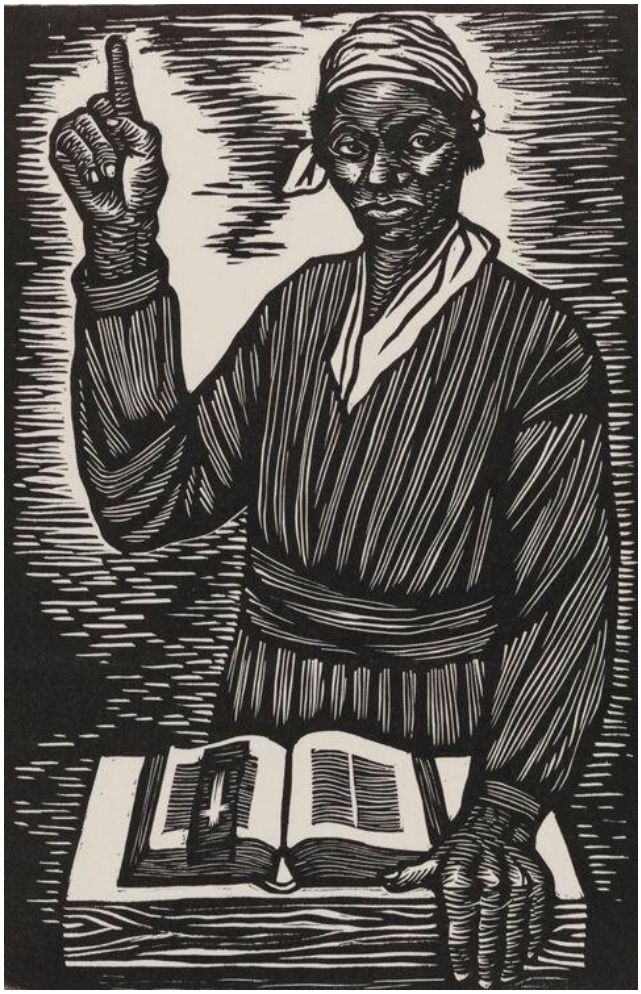

Figure 4.1. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Sojourner Truth,* 1947.

In this linocut, Catlett portrays Truth as a religious preacher standing before a lectern that holds an open Bible with a page holder depicting a cross, one of the oldest and most widely recognised Christian symbols that represents Christ, atonement, and salvation.[33] The image depicts a Latin cross and not only serves as a reminder of Truth's devotion to God, but also indicates that the

[32] Truth is not preaching in White's *Five Great American Negroes* (1939 – 1940) or in *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943), nor in William Johnson's artwork *Underground Railroad* (1945).
[33] George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 164.

text is the Bible and the Word of God.[34] Furthermore, whereas a closed book in conventional Christian artwork symbolises the Last Judgement, an open one represents truth, revelation, and education. Hence, Catlett's depiction of an open Bible on a lectern suggests that Truth is taking teachings from the Bible to enlighten her audience, therein demonstrating her piety and her role as a preacher. Truth's piety is also demonstrated through her dress, with the simple monochrome dress and headscarf mirroring the clothing that we see in photographs of Truth and reflecting the ideal of simplicity espoused by Methodism.[35] With Methodists believing that materialism and a focus on extravagant clothes promoted vanity and distracted from the pursuit of holiness, dressing simply was an important expression of Truth's beliefs. Thus, by depicting Truth with a Bible, cross, and in simple clothing, Catlett emphasises Truth's piety and highlights her role as a religious preacher.

Furthermore, Truth's gesture, where she points skyward with the index finger of her right hand, has religious significance and is known as the sign of preservation. Throughout religious artwork, hand gestures are given to certain individuals and often carry special meaning, with such gestures frequently used to convey messages.[36] Truth's gesture in Catlett's series is common among religious artwork and symbolises an individual requesting their own or someone else's preservation based on their fidelity to God.[37] Indeed, John the Baptist is frequently portrayed making the sign of preservation, for example in Leonardo da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist* (1513 – 1516) and in Anton Raphael Mengs's *St. John the Baptist Preaching in the Wilderness* (1758 – 1771). Just like Truth, John the Baptist was an itinerant preacher, and

[34] The cross has many different designs, yet Latin or Greek crosses are the most common in Christian art. A Greek cross has four equal arms and is used to symbolise the Church of Christ, whereas the Latin cross, with its longer lower arm, represents Christ and His sacrifice. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 163 – 164.
[35] The covering of the head is a sign of piety in Christianity, though it is not as important as it is to other religious, such as Islam. St. Paul wrote that "every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head…let her cover her head." Corinthians. 11.
[36] For example, when the index finger, middle finger and thumb are brought together, this symbolises the threefold Divinity, namely the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ashwin N. Ram and Kevin C. Chung, "Study of Hand Signs in Judeo-Christian Art," *The Journal of Hand Surgery* 33, no. 7 (2008): 1182.
[37] Ram and Chung, "Study of Hand Signs in Judeo-Christian Art," 1185.

throughout classical religious artwork, he is portrayed as pointing towards heaven or into the distance, to make him easily distinguishable to illiterate audiences and to remind the viewer to look towards the source of their salvation and listen to the Word of God. Hence, in depicting Truth with this gesture, Catlett highlights Truth's role as an itinerant preacher and determines that she is a significant Black woman who is deserving of respect. It is important to note that the use of the right hand and this gesture has bled into numerous secular images, such as James Montgomery Flagg's *I Want You* poster where Uncle Sam points towards the viewer with the index finger of his right hand.[38] Nevertheless, considering Catlett's formal art training, it is highly likely that she included this gesture to emphasise Truth's role as a preacher. From 1931 to 1935, Catlett studied with artists such as James Porter, James Wells, and James Herring, at Howard University, all of whom she greatly admired, and Catlett credits Porter with introducing her to the discipline that is needed to become an artist.[39] It is highly likely that Catlett spent time studying classical religious artworks at Howard that influenced her artistic style, especially considering Porter's study of medieval archaeology in Europe.[40]

Moreover, Catlett's time working with the Taller de Gráficia de Popular also likely encouraged her to include Christian religious symbolism, with their series *Estampas de la Revolucion Mexicana* (1947) being a great source of inspiration for *The Negro Woman* series.[41] The Taller's 1947 series was a portfolio of 85 linocuts with narrative titles and explanatory texts that was compiled by sixteen artists to celebrate the revolutionary fervour, courage, and

[38] James Montgomery Flagg's *I Want You* poster from 1917 was based on the British Lord Kitchener poster from 1914, which was also used to recruit soldiers.
[39] Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 16 – 17.
[40] James Porter attended graduate school at Columbia University and the Art Students League in New York and studied with painter Dimitri Romanovsky. In the summer of 1935, he used a fellowship from the Institute of International Education to study medieval archaeology at the Institut d"Art et d"Archéologie in Paris. Thereafter, he travelled around Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy "to make a first-hand study of certain collections of African Negro arts and crafts housed in important museums of ethnography." Smithsonian American Art Museum, "James A. Porter Biography." Accessed January 6, 2021, https://americanart.si.edu/artist/james-porter-3843.
[41] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 57.

martyrdom of ordinary Mexican people.[42] The artists drew inspiration from famous photographs of the Mexican Revolution, which were immediately recognisable to largely illiterate Mexican workers, a strategy that Melanie Anne Herzog argues ensured the accessibility of these prints for people whose historical knowledge of the Revolution was visual rather than literary.[43] Mary Theresa Avila contends that many Taller artists also used religious visual motifs to communicate with the Mexican people.[44] In her analysis of *Estampas de la Revolucion Mexicana*, she argues that Francisco Mora, whom Catlett married in 1947, imitates scenes of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden in his portrayal of rural policemen oppressing Yaqui Indians.[45]

Avila also contends that Ignacoi Aguirre's print depicts Emiliano Zapata with a halo, therein denoting him as an important Christian figure, and maintains that Aguirre portrays the Mexican revolutionary as Saint Sebastian.[46] Through such examples, Avila contends that these artists used religious imagery as parallels for the life of the Mexican working class and that this highlights the artists' formal art training and reflects their awareness and understanding of engagement with the Christian tradition of art.[47] Considering her close relationship and collaboration with the Taller collective, it is highly likely that Catlett was influenced by their

[42] There were fifteen male artists and one woman: Ignacio Aguirre, Luis Aresenal, Alberto Beltrán, Angel Bracho, Fernando Castro Pacheco, Jesus Escobedo, Antonio Franco, Arturo García Bustos, Julio Heller, Leopoldo Méndez, Francisco Mora, Isidro Ocampo, Pablio O"Higgins, Everardo Ramírez, Mariana Yampolsky and Alfredo Zalce.
[43] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 57.
[44] Mary Theresa Avila, "Chronicles of Revolution and Nation: El Taller de Gráficia Populars "Estampas de la Revolución Mexicana" (1947)" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico Art Museum, 2013), 83 – 86.
[45] White and Catlett divorced in 1946. After moving to Mexico in the same year, Catlett met Mora and the couple married in 1947, going on to have three children. In print one, Mora relates the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eve to the Yaqui Indians experience under Porfiriana (the term given to General Porfirio Diaz, who ruled Mexico as President from 1876 to 1910). The artist places a snake on the rural policeman's jacket and a cross around his neck, while his right hand wields a whip above a stream of Yaqui Indians. Avila states that the barely clothed man and woman at the front are reminiscent of images of Adam and Eve, such as Masaccio's *The Expulsion from Garden of Eden* (1425), which depicts a nude, distraught man and woman leaving the Garden under the watchful eye of a sword-wielding angel. She also argues that the crops in the background of print one is symbolic of the prosperity of the Garden of Eden. Avila, 83 – 85.
[46] Aguirre depicts Zapata with a sombrero, which looks very much like a halo. Avila also argues that the artists" depiction of Zapata outdoors with his hands bound behind his back and his portrayal as a prisoner is very similar to images of Saint Sebastian. Avila, "Chronicles of Revolution and Nation," 193 – 194.
[47] Avila, "Chronicles of Revolution and Nation," 69 and 87.

use of religious imagery, and subsequently employed similar tropes in *The Negro Woman* series. Indeed, when reflecting on her work with the Taller, Catlett commented that "I realised I could create for my people, as the Mexican artists were creating for their people."[48] She also noted that her husband Mora greatly influenced her artwork, stating that he "backs me up all the time" and "I wouldn't be a sculptor if it wasn't for him."[49] Hence, although depictions of the right hand have bled into secular artwork, Catlett's formal art training and the Taller's use of religious imagery mean that we should appreciate the religious significance behind Catlett's portrayal of Truth.

Of the representations I have sourced, Catlett's artwork is the first twentieth century visual representation that depicts Truth as a preacher, with the artist using religious imagery to underscore her important role as a heroic Black preacher. Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, there are limits to the extent to which Catlett's portrayal presents Truth as an exceptional "superwoman." The caption describes how Truth was one of many Black women who used their religious beliefs and their voice to fight "for the rights of women as well as Negroes," thus highlighting Truth as a symbol of "everywoman." Indeed, Catlett's decision to clothe Truth in plain clothing not only highlights the preacher's piety, but also further emphasises Catlett's portrayal of Truth as an "everywoman" who is relatable and who represents those enslaved and working-class Black women who fought for change but received little, if any, recognition. Moreover, these simple clothes also remind the viewer of Truth's previously enslaved status and her position as a working-class woman, enabling Catlett to further comment on the class oppression that many Black women faced. Thus, Catlett uses

[48] Elizabeth Catlett Art, "Life with Artist Francisco Mora." Accessed December 14, 2020, https://www.elizabethcatlettart.com/life-with-artist-francisco-mora#:~:text=Elizabeth%20Catlett%20and%20Francisco%20Mora,year%20later%20in%201947%2C%20married.

[49] Elizabeth Catlett in Glory Van Scott, "Elizabeth Catlett: Sculpture, Printmaker, Interview #1," in *Artist and Influence 1991 Volume X*, ed. James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1991), 12.

religious imagery to position Truth as a heroic Black preacher, whilst also portraying her as part of an alternative heroic lineage that rejects the exceptional "superwoman."

Significantly, this is not the first twentieth century representation that highlights Truth's piety and uses religious imagery to portray Truth as a Black female hero. Catlett's first husband Charles White created the mural *Five Great American Negroes* between 1939 and 1940 while the artist was working under the WPA in Chicago. After graduating from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1938, White joined the easel division of the Illinois Federal Art Project, with much of his artwork, such as *Kitchenette Debutantes* (1939), addressing the impact of the Great Depression on the Black community in urban Chicago.[50] Indeed, in 1940 White commented that "paint is the only weapon I have with which to fight what I resent. If I could write, I would write about it. If I could talk, I would talk about it. Since I paint, I must paint about it."[51] After spending a few months with the easel division, White joined the mural department and began working with muralists such as Mitchell Siporin and Edward Millman who had worked with the revolutionary Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. During his time in the mural division, White collaborated with artists who were creating murals for public display in auditoriums and exposition halls, which ignited his desire to create socially relevant and accessible artwork.[52] Once White had established himself as a distinguished artist within the Federal Art Project, his opportunity to paint murals came in 1939 when he was granted permission to create his first public mural for the Chicago Public Library.[53] *Five Great American Negroes* (figure 4.2) celebrates Black history through five Black heroes, namely (from left to right) Truth, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, and Marian Anderson.

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[50] Andrea Barnwell, *Charles White* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002), 18 and 22.
[51] Willard F. Motley, "Negro Art in Chicago," *Opportunity*, 1940, 21.
[52] Barnwell, *Charles White*, 26.
[53] Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965, transcript. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-charles-w-white-11484#transcript.

Figure 4.2. Charles White, *Five Great American Negroes*, 1939 – 1940, oil on canvas, 5' x 12'11", Howard University Law Library, Washington D.C.

The mural was initially installed at the George Cleveland Hall Branch of the library and has since been moved to the Law Library at Howard University in Washington D.C.[54] The figures included in the mural were chosen from the results of a survey conducted by the *Chicago Defender* among its readers and schoolchildren to determine which Black leaders they felt had contributed the most to Black progress.[55] The mural highlights White's commitment to using his artwork to effect change and combat injustice throughout his artwork, with White using images of these Black heroes to inspire Black people and show them that they had a history of which to be proud. Andrea Barnwell notes that through this mural, White sought to "redress some of the oversights in the curricula that he had witnessed as a student" and R. Blakeslee Gilpin argues that the figures in the mural are "exceptional Black Americans who serve as a model of the entire race."[56] As discussed in previous chapters, White's school teachers prioritised white history over Black history, with the artist recalling how his white teachers told him that the histories they taught "were written by competent people, and whatever they did not

[54] Andrea Barnwell notes "current library records do not document where or when it was installed." Barnwell, *Charles White*, 3. A newspaper clipping from 1939 also states that the mural "will be permanently displayed in the library of the Southside Community Art Centre as soon as it is established." Charles W. White, "Scrapbook 1 Pages," 1939 – 1940, Box 12, Folder 43, Charles W. White papers, 1933 – 1987 (bulk 1960s – 1970s). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/charles-w-white-papers-9350/series-8/box-12-folder-43.

[55] Barnwell, *Charles White*, 3.

[56] Barnwell, *Charles White*, 26. R. Blakeslee Gilpin, "Love Letters to Black America: Charles White's Art for the People," *Slavery and Abolition* 34, no. 2 (2013): 283.

mention was simply not important enough to mention."[57] Although White was told "to sit down and shut up," he continued to speak about Black history at school "whenever I had a chance" in an attempt to educate his classmates "about these discoveries of mine."[58]

White's determination to highlight notable Black figures and educate Black people on their history is evident in *Five Great American Negroes.* The mural moves from scenes of slavery with Truth on the left, to abolition with Washington and Douglass in the centre, to images of Black people's achievements in the sciences and arts with Washington Carver and Anderson on the right. White's depiction of Truth includes several elements that highlight her piety and emphasise her importance as a hero. Significantly, in this scene, White portrays Truth not preaching but leading a group of Black people away from slavery towards freedom and the opportunity for a better life. Indeed, it appears as though Truth is leading this group towards the kind of advancements that Black men and women, such as Washington Carver and Anderson, made in the aftermath of slavery. Notably, this scene is reminiscent of a ring shout, a religious ritual that was practised by many African people in the U.S. The ritual, which involves worshippers moving in a circle while stamping their feet and clapping their hands, originated in African dance and travelled with many enslaved individuals across the Middle Passage into the U.S., where it continued to have a profound influence on Black music and religious practice.[59] White's image is similar to such ring shouts, with his depiction of Truth and the Black people dancing, with their arms and legs raised and their bodies twisted. He also shows the group as moving forward in a slight curved line, with the paint strokes of the background making it appear as though the ground and sky are moving as Truth and her group

[57] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s, Box 4, Folder 64, Charles W. White papers, 1933 – 1987 (bulk 1960s – 1970s). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/charles-w-white-papers-9350/subseries-3-1/box-4-folder-64.
[58] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s. Box 4, Folder 64.
[59] The ring shout is described as "an impressive fusion of call-and-response singing, polyrhythmic percussion, and expressive and formalised dancelike movements." Art Rosenbaum, Johann S. Buis and Margo Newmark Rosenbaum, *Shout Because You"re Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 1.

travel forward. The artist further emphasises this movement through Truth, with the bend in Truth's legs and the lean towards her right side making it appear as though Truth is lifting her left foot, and the creases from White's brushstrokes giving her long pink dress a sense of movement. White's depiction of Truth and these individuals as performing a ring shout not only highlights Truth's role as a leading religious figure but also emphasises the blending of African spirituality and Christian ideals within enslaved Black communities.

White's depiction of Truth and some of the enslaved individuals with bare feet also has religious connotations. Throughout religious artwork, bare feet are used to symbolise modesty and willing servitude, with two Biblical stories portraying the washing of feet as humility and penitence.[60] While bare feet are a reference to the poverty of enslaved individuals, it is important to note that White would have understood the religious connotations of this imagery considering his art training. Typically, formal art training involved studying classical artworks that were often imbued with religious imagery, as Christianity became the predominant power that shaped European culture after classical antiquity. Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, Biblical texts and stories inspired artists and patrons to create numerous religious images. As a result, the Western art world was dominated by religious artworks and formal art training came to rely on such works.[61] Hence, White's formal training at the Art Institute likely involved studying classic artwork that was imbued with religious images, which lead to the use of conventional religious artistic techniques, such as bare feet, in his paintings. Indeed, White's admiration for George Inness is significant, as this nineteenth-century American landscape painter was greatly influenced both by the Old Masters, many of

[60] Firstly, in the house of the Pharisee, a woman washes Christ's feet with her tears as a token of her humility and penitence, as through cleaning Christ's feet, the woman's sins are forgiven. Luke. 7:38. Secondly Jesus washes the feet of His disciples in the Last Supper. John. 13:5. Because of these stories, it has become tradition for bishops to perform the ceremony of washing feet on Maundy Thursday. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 47.
[61] The National Art Gallery, "Art and Religion." Accessed January 18, 2020, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/about-research/art-and-religion/art-and-religion.

whom created paintings with religious imagery, and by the ideas of Christian philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 – 1772).[62]

White's use of religious imagery in his portrayal of Truth emphasises her devotion. Nevertheless, his depiction of Truth leading a line of enslaved Black people is interesting considering the physical liberation of people is not something for which she was known. White's portrayal could be explained by the importance of the Exodus narrative to many Black people at this time, with White wanting to depict this physical escape from slavery to inspire hope, despite Truth never physically leading people to freedom. However, when discussing the portrayal of the individuals for this mural with Betty Hoag in 1965, White recalled how he "picked out little symbolic things to represent each [person]" and regarding Truth, he described her "symbolic little thing" as "leading groups of her people."[63] While Truth is not known for leading people, White could be referring to Truth's efforts to secure federal land in western states for formerly enslaved individuals. Throughout 1870, Truth campaigned for separatism as a means for Black progress, arguing that Black people needed independent land, housing, and education that was completely free of racism, sexism, and classism.[64] Ultimately, Truth did not secure much support for her campaign and her mission came to an end in 1874 when she travelled to Washington D.C. with her petition.[65] With the failure of this mission in mind, White's comment that Truth's symbolic little thing was "leading groups of her people" could

[62] The Old Masters refers to painters who worked in Europe before the nineteenth century, including Jacopo Bassano, Tintoretto, and Matthias Grünewald, who created several religious paintings. Emanuel Swedenborg was a Swedish pluralistic-Christian philosopher and Inness was influenced by Swedenborg's notion that everything in nature had a relationship with the spiritual world and thus needed to receive an "influx" from God to continually exist.

[63] Charles White, interview by Betty Hoag. March 9, 1965.

[64] She financed petitions and travelled across the country preaching about women's rights, suffrage, racism, and her desire for separate land. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America,* 357 – 359.

[65] Truth's poor financial situation and her grief at the loss of her grandson Samuel Banks, who was her almost constant companion, led her to drop her campaign for land. Nell Irvin Painter doubts that Truth presented her petition to Congress, as no report of such a submission survives. It is also important to note that Truth's campaign occurred after the publication of Gilbert's biography in 1850 and, during the time at which White created this mural, there were few other texts on Truth describing her petition. Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 242.

be a reference to her leading people in the metaphorical sense, namely guiding them in religious ceremonies through preaching and directing them towards knowledge and "truth." Indeed, White's depiction of Truth leading people could reference how Truth led Black people towards freedom by enlightening them on the complex ways in which they are oppressed, thus raising their consciousness. In doing so, White emphasises how Truth's sermons and speeches inspired people to act, with the people following Truth in this mural representing those she encouraged to fight for equality.

In highlighting Truth's ability to lead people in the metaphorical sense through consciousness-raising, White broadens dominant understandings of Black women's heroic behaviours, which allows for the recognition of those Black women who performed such activism. Hence, White's portrayal demonstrates how Truth is a malleable heroic figure who is capable of embodying different types of heroic behaviours and attitudes. However, it is important to note that White's portrayal of Truth was at times mistaken to be Tubman, who is frequently depicted leading enslaved people to freedom, with an article in *The Chicago Sunday Bee* stating that the mural portrays Tubman, not Truth.[66] As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this is not the only time that White blurred Tubman and Truth's resistance, with his 1943 *Contribution* mural depicting the two women as performing each other's activism. Indeed, both murals demonstrate that White saw these two individuals as *the* twin mountain peaks of Black female heroism. Barnwell argues that in *Five Great American Negroes,* White created an amalgamation of Tubman and Truth, contending that the artist attempted to capture both women's historic significance.[67] In this way, White highlights varying types of Black women's activism through this mural and creates a blend of different models of antislavery Black female heroism in this one figure. Throughout his career, White strove to "defend them [Black people]

[66] Robert A. Davis, "The Art Notebook," *The Chicago Sunday Bee,* October 6, 1940 in Charles W. White, "Scrapbook 1 Pages," 1939 – 1940, Box 12, Folder 43.
[67] Andrea Barnwell, "Five or Six great American Negroes?," in *The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art,* ed. Andrea Barnwell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 56 – 57.

against misrepresentation" by refuting racist stereotypes and "showing that we too had our philosophers, our artists, our explorers, our orators, our military heroes."[68] It could be that White wanted to depict multiple forms of Black women's resistance, including Tubman's, but was restricted to the five individuals chosen by the *Chicago Defender* survey. Hence, White not only broadens our understandings of Black women's heroism by highlighting Truth's consciousness-raising, but also recognises Tubman's role on the Underground Railroad through this image. In doing so, White celebrates varying forms of resistance and educates Black people on different antislavery Black women activists.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that White's depiction of Truth leading people inevitably evokes images of Moses, especially considering the importance of the Exodus narrative during this time, and thus, conjures images of Tubman. Hence, although White's mural uses religious imagery to highlight Truth's activism and heroism, this is somewhat moderated by a prioritisation of Tubman's resistance. This speaks to the bias within dominant understandings of heroism, with certain forms of activism prioritised over others, and specifically highlights gender bias within heroism, whereby certain acts, such as rescue missions, are perceived as masculine and "more" heroic.[69] It is also indicative of the conventional gender roles as set by religious archetypes, with male religious figures doing God's work and female religious figures communicating God's will. Depicting Truth as leading people allowed White to honour varying types of resistance and to note the importance of the Exodus narrative to many Black Christians. However, it is important to note that this portrayal of Truth leading people inevitably evokes images of Tubman as Moses. Hence, although White uses religious imagery to emphasise Truth's heroism, this is somewhat tempered by the fact that his portrayal inevitably evokes images of Tubman and thus prioritises her activism.

[68] Charles W. White, "Autobiographical Essay used by Sidney Finkelstein," c.1950s, Box 4, Folder 64.
[69] As the following chapter will show, rescue missions and military operations are typically perceived as masculine, with these types of heroism largely attributed to men.

The Moses of Her People

While Black artists such as Catlett and White use religious imagery to position Truth as a heroic preacher in the mid-twentieth century, many more were highlighting Tubman as the Moses of her people. While Bradford's biography was crucial in establishing what became Tubman's nickname, the representations created by Black artists such as White, Biggers, and Lawrence during this period did much to cement Tubman's position as Moses. As discussed in the previous chapter, portraying Tubman as Moses is problematic for Black female heroism, as it frames her heroism through a masculine lens and emphasises exceptionalism, with Tubman deemed so extraordinary that she is likened to a divine saviour. Such depictions signal that Tubman's activism and heroism cannot be reconciled with her Black womanhood and must be framed with a masculine lens to be understood. While gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism is partly responsible for this framing of Tubman through a masculine lens, it is also important to recognise the crucial role that the Exodus narrative played in the lives of Black Christians. Indeed, this narrative provided great inspiration during the fight for civil rights, and the important role of Christianity in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s partly explains the increasing depictions of Tubman as Moses during this period. Religious institutions and their members played prominent roles in the organisation of grass-roots activism during the Civil Rights Movement, with several Christian organisations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, becoming vital in the fight for equality. Indeed, Gary Selby argues that the Exodus narrative "provided a mechanism through which participants [of the Civil Rights Movement] could attribute causality to the events that were unfolding around them," with leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. frequently using Exodus rhetoric in

speeches such as "I've Been to the Mountaintop" to relate the struggles of Black people to the struggles of the Israelites.[70]

In this context, it is no surprise that representations of Tubman as Moses proliferated during the 1950s and 1960s, with a close cohort of Black male artists, including White, Biggers, and Lawrence, creating several such portrayals.[71] In the 1950s and 1960s, White created three portrayals of Tubman in the role of Moses, namely *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman)* in 1951, *General Moses and Sojourner Truth* in 1954 and *General Moses (Harriet Tubman)* in 1965. While all three artworks are important in demonstrating White's interest in depicting Tubman as Moses, this chapter focuses on the 1951 artwork to analyse the religious imagery that pervades this portrayal. In *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman)* (figure 4.3), the viewers' eye is immediately drawn to Tubman, who dominates the foreground of the image. White depicts Tubman leading a seemingly never-ending group of Black people, with the figures snaking around Tubman's head against the backdrop of mountains. The individuals look weary but relieved, with one man throwing his hands in the air in celebration of their journey to freedom. Through this depiction, White emphasises Tubman's role as Moses on the Underground Railroad, with this scene bearing striking resemblance to images of Moses leading an endless line of Israelites out of slavery and towards freedom.[72]

[70] Gary S. Selby, *Martin Luther King and the Rhetoric of Freedom: The Exodus Narrative in America's Struggle for Civil Rights* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 168 – 169.
[71] These three Black men were part of a group of young Black artists who knew each other and worked together to promote Black art in the mid-twentieth century. In 1964, Elton C. Fax published an article in Freedomways that called White, Catlett, William H. Johnson, and Biggers "Four Rebels in Art," stating that these four artists "speak to the world in forceful reproach at what they see and feel as gross injustice." This article highlights the prominence of these four artists in the mid-twentieth century, suggesting that they were commonly grouped together and therefore would know each other and their work. Elton C. Fax, "Four Rebels in Art," *Freedomways* 4, no. 2 (1964): 215. Lawrence met White in the late 1930's, when the latter moved from Chicago to New York. Jacob Lawrence, "To Our Colleague," *Freedomways* 20, no. 3 (1980): 182.
[72] Examples include Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg's *The Israelites Resting after the Crossing of the Red Sea* (1815) and Ivan Kramskoy's *Prayer of Moses after the Israelites go through the Red Sea* (1861), which depicts Moses in the foreground and his followers behind him.

Figure 4.3. Charles White, *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman)*, 1951, linocut, $20^{3/4}$" x $23^{7/8}$", Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.

In his numerous artworks that depict Tubman as Moses, White calls her by this nickname. However, with the 1951 artwork, White makes a direct connection between Tubman and the Book of Exodus by including *Exodus I* in the title. The Book of Exodus tells the story of Moses and the Israelites, with Exodus I referring to the Israelites' affliction in Egypt and describing their oppression.[73] Hence, through the title, White draws direct comparisons between the Israelites and the African people that were kidnapped and enslaved in the Americas and the colonies, therein portraying Black people as God's chosen people. Moreover, White's decision to use the term "Black Moses" in the title is significant. In doing so, White recognises that Moses has historically been depicted as a white man in much Christian artwork, even though it is more than likely that Moses, alongside many other Christian figures, was not white. By titling

[73] The Book of Exodus is one of the first five books of the Old Testament and describes the origins of the Israelites in two parts. The first part (chapters 1 – 18) describes the first half of Moses" life, the Israelites" trouble in Egypt and the plagues that led the Israelites to flee. The second part (chapters 19 – 40) details how God gave the Law to Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, how they built the special holy tent (Tabernacle) and the rules for worship.

Tubman as the "Black Moses," White strongly positions her as not only the Moses who led people to freedom, but as the Moses who saved Black people from oppression. Indeed, although White frames Tubman's heroism through a masculine lens with this Moses depiction, which is problematic for Black female heroism, the term "Black Moses" emphasises Tubman's position as a *Black* hero.

The mountains in the background serve to further position Tubman as Moses, as two mountains feature prominently in Moses's story. At Mount Horeb, Moses witnessed the burning bush and was appointed by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, while at Mount Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments.[74] Numerous artists use mountains in their artworks of Moses and hence, by featuring mountains in this linocut, White further links Tubman to Moses and suggests that God anointed Tubman to free her people.[75] Moreover, Tubman's hand gesture, whereby she points towards freedom with two fingers, also cements her role as a religious figure. As previously mentioned, individuals are portrayed with specific hand gestures in religious artwork that have significant meanings. Tubman's gesture in White's artwork, with the middle and index finger pointing forward, is the sign of blessing and is one of the most recognisable hand gestures among Christians. In traditional Christian artwork, it is commonly used by holy men and Christ to bless objects and people in the name of the Holy Trinity.[76] Although blessings are traditionally given with the right hand, by portraying Tubman with this hand sign, White depicts Tubman blessing the journey North and communicates to the viewer that God was always present throughout her trips. Indeed, in this portrayal, White suggests that Tubman was granted the power to bless by God and thus portrays her as a deeply religious and

[74] Certain Biblical passages describe this as Mount Horeb and in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is said to receive the Ten Commandments on Mount Horeb not Mount Sinai. Thus, the names are used depending on which Biblical passages you read. The Stations of Exodus are 42 locations that the Israelites visited on the journey out of Egypt.
[75] Examples include Thomas Brigstocke's *Moses with His Arms Supported by Aaron and Hur* (1840 – 1860), Sebastien Bourdon's *Moses Striking the Rock* (1616 – 1671), John Everett Millais" *Victory O Lord* (1871) and Corrado Giaquinto's *Moses Striking the Rock* (1743 – 1744).
[76] Ram and Chung, "Study of Hand Signs in Judeo-Christian Art," 1186.

exceptional figure who was favoured in God's eyes. Hence, while White's depiction of Truth highlights her malleability, his portrayal of Tubman as Moses in *Exodus I* reveals how her heroism is largely confined to a masculine lens, with the representation perpetuating the notion that she is an exceptional "superwoman," whose support from God means she can overcome overwhelming oppression.

Another strong depiction of Tubman as Moses from the 1950s appears in the aforementioned mural *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education* (figure 4.4) by Biggers, who was taught by White and Catlett whilst in attendance at the Hampton Institute. As discussed in the previous chapter, Biggers worked under White as his assistant when he created *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* in 1943, and Biggers produced his 1953 mural in response to White's masculine portrayal of Black history. While the previous chapter noted the mural's importance in disrupting the myth of the "superwoman" by emphasising Black women's oppression and honouring their varying resistance, this chapter develops its discussion of Tubman's portrayal as Moses and explores the religious imagery that Biggers uses to highlight Truth as a preacher.

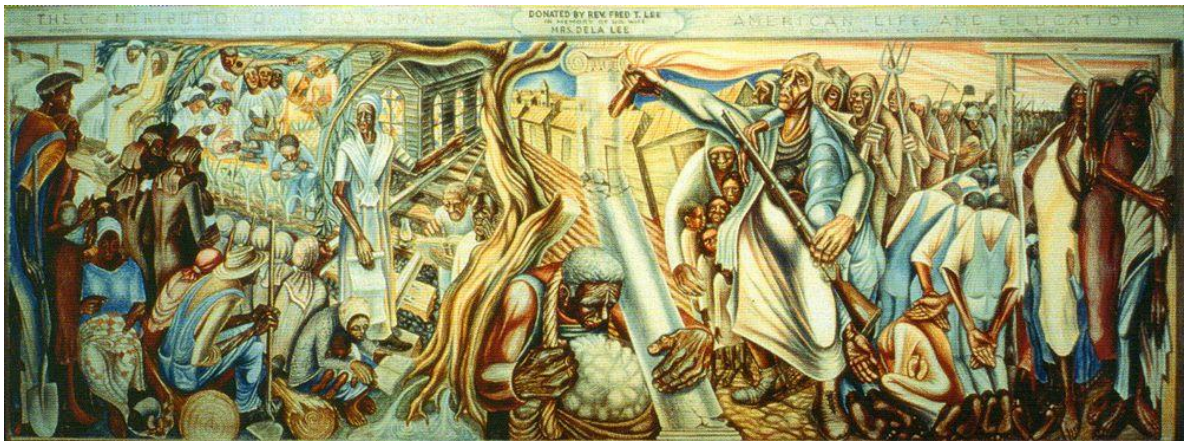

Figure 4.4. John Biggers, *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education*, 1953.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Biggers created this mural for the Young Women's Christian Association's (YWCA) Blue Triangle Branch in Houston, Texas, making the religious imagery of this mural especially significant. The national YWCA was founded in 1906

to empower women and promote equal rights, and by the 1920s it was the third-largest autonomous American women's organisation.[77] The Blue Triangle was founded in 1919 as the first branch of Houston's YWCA, emerging out of the ever increasing need to provide a space for women and girls of colour to meet and learn. In the late 1940s, the organisation sought a building of their own, leading ten women from the community to organise and purchase land for their new building, which would feature Biggers's mural.[78] Initially the YWCA promoted racial segregation, with white and Black women having separate branches, but by their 1946 national convention many YWCA members were calling for desegregation.[79] Nancy Marie Robertson notes that white and Black YWCA members were able to work together because of their shared religious commitment, contending that many Black women used Christianity to persuade white members to support their struggle against white supremacy.[80] Bettye Collier Thomas supports this, maintaining that Black women used the language of evangelical Christianity to argue for gender equality in their churches and local communities, and to effect social change in white-dominated organisations.[81]

Although Biggers once described himself as "irreligious," as the son of a Baptist preacher and a student at a Protestant school, he understood the significance of religion in many Black people's lives.[82] Indeed, his years of reading the Bible as a child, combined with his

[77] The Young Women's Christian Association was originally founded in New York City in 1858 and became a national organisation in 1906. Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA 1906 – 46* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 3. It is important to note that the organisation referred to in this thesis is now known as the YWCA USA. There are YWCA organisations around the world. The YWCA was first founded by philanthropist Lady Mary Jane Kinnaird in London in 1855 to help single women who were looking for work in the capital. In 1894 the World YWCA was founded between the United States, Great Britain, Norway, and Sweden.

[78] After the purchase of the land, the property was deeded to the Houston YWCA. The Blue Triangle, "History." Accessed December 15, 2020, http://www.the-bluetriangle.org/history/.

[79] Nancy Marie Robertson argues that over the first half of the twentieth century, white women slowly shifted away from segregationist policies towards desegregation and integration. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood,* 3.

[80] Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood,* 2 – 3.

[81] Bettye Collier Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2010), xix.

[82] When Biggers's father died in 1937, his mother Cora sent Biggers and his brother to Lincoln Academy, which was run by the American Missionary Association, where he worked as a janitor to pay for his fees. Olive Jensen Theisen, *A Life on Paper: The Drawings and Lithographs of John Thomas Biggers* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2006), 91.

formal art training, influenced his artistic style, and explains his frequent references to Biblical events and places.[83] As previously mentioned, Biggers changed career direction after enrolling in an art class with Viktor Lowenfeld at the Hampton Institute. Biggers frequently praised Lowenfeld for his influence over his artistic development, commenting that "it was Viktor Lowenfeld who helped me firm up my convictions of who I really was," and that when it comes to discussing the meaning of painting "Lowenfeld and his tremendous insight always comes into the conversation."[84] Biggers stated that Lowenfeld produced a philosophical basis for understanding the developmental problems of Black culture by focusing on the ancestral heritage and social status of Black people and the impact of Western culture on them.[85] Considering Lowenfeld's formal art training in Europe, which entailed studying classical artwork with much religious symbolism, it follows that Biggers also studied these old masters, leading to the use of conventional religious artistic techniques in his works. Indeed, Lowenfeld's Jewish heritage may have led him to encourage Biggers to further explore the connection between the experience of the Israelites and that of Black people in his artwork.

When we take into consideration that the 1953 mural was created for a Christian organisation, Biggers's formal art training and the religious environment in which he was raised, it is hardly surprising that the artist used several religious tropes and images. Tubman's large, looming figure dominates the mural and Biggers's uses several religious tropes to highlight the conductor as Moses. As in White's linocut, Biggers depicts a never-ending stream of Black people following Tubman as a reference to Moses leading the Israelites to freedom. The artist places a rifle in Tubman's left hand and a torch in her right, with the flames

[83] In an interview with Paul Goodnight, Biggers recalls how "my old man was a preacher [so] we learned to read the Bible early." Dianna Vosburg, "Keeping the Dream Alive: Paul Goodnight and John Biggers." YouTube video, 7:49. March 23, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnz13kplXHs.
[84] Fax, "Four Rebels in Art," 224. John Biggers in John Biggers and Hazel Biggers, interview by Gabrielle S. Edgcombe. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.* May 17, 1988. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn513656.
[85] "Two Lives," 140.

illuminating the sky. This torch is reminiscent of God's pillar of fire, which features in the story of Moses. In the Book of Exodus, God appeared to Moses as a pillar of fire in the sky at night and pillar of cloud by day, allowing him to guide the Israelites to freedom throughout the day and night.[86] Biggers's inclusion of a burning torch that fills the sky with light reflects this element of Moses's story and signals that God was ever-present on Tubman's journeys North, which occurred under the cover of darkness. Indeed, Tubman's biography describes how she travelled "cautiously and by night," and that she "seemed ever to feel the Divine Presence near."[87]

Significantly, Biggers's depiction of Tubman as Moses somewhat overshadows his portrayal of Truth. On the left side of the mural, Truth is shown preaching to a group of previously enslaved Black people, who listen intently as she provides them with direction for their new lives.[88] Biggers emphasises Truth's piety by dressing her in plain clothes, with her muscular arms and lined face highlighting the arduousness of slavery. With her left hand, Truth points down a set of train tracks that symbolise the Underground Railroad, which run between the tree of life and a small church with stained glass windows. In her right hand, she holds a scroll that lists several demands, including "petition for land," "public education," "equal rights for women," "independence," and "freedom of speech," which Biggers includes to highlight the human rights that were routinely denied to Black people and for which they will now fight. Biggers's depiction of a scroll is significant, as Christian artwork often depicts Old Testament authors with this ancient type of book. By including this item, Biggers references the Old

[86] The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud allowed Moses to lead his people throughout the day and night. "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and *by night in a pillar of fire to give them light*, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Exodus. 13:21 – 13:22.
[87] Bradford, *Scenes*, 19. Bradford, *Harriet*, 23.
[88] The Black progress of which Truth speaks is demonstrated through a series of mini scenes in the top left corner, with doctors caring for patients, people practicing the arts, farmers harvesting crops and scientists performing experiments. The prosperity of these scenes is cemented through the symbolism of the "tree of life" in the centre, with a stunted branch on the right side yet thriving branches with foliage on the left.

Testament and its narratives of suffering and redemption that were crucial to many Black Christians.[89]

While Truth's depiction is smaller and somewhat overshadowed by the dramatic scene on the right of Tubman leading people to freedom, it is a crucial part of the mural and communicates an important message about Black female heroism. Indeed, Biggers's portrayal of Truth preaching about Black progress outside a church represents how Black women's activism in the mid-twentieth century, such as that performed by women from the YWCA, frequently involved the church and religion. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Black women's faith was central in their struggle against their triple oppression. Indeed, Collier Thomas argues that Black women were emboldened by their faith and filled with hope, which they used to create organisational networks that were indispensable in the fight against racism, sexism, and classism.[90] She demonstrates how the faith of many Black women encouraged them in their commitment to the Black freedom struggle and inspired them to fight for equality.[91] Many Black women understood that it would be very difficult to achieve their goals without the support of white people, especially white women. Hence, in the first half of the twentieth century, many Black women joined white-led Christian groups, including the YWCA, and worked with white women in several religious organisations, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.[92] This involvement with the church and religious groups fostered organisational skills and leadership training among Black women, which was crucial in the

[89] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 180.
[90] Collier Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice,* xvi.
[91] Collier Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice,* xvi – xviii.
[92] The YWCA was established by white women in 1855 but became interracial over time. The organisation related to many white social and political entities and had networks with elites whose influence was useful for accessing resources and impacting public policy. It was these connections and contacts that led many Black women to become involved in the organisation and seize the opportunity to advance the Black freedom struggle. Collier Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice,* xxi.

Black freedom struggle. Indeed, several notable Black female activists, such as Septima Clark, began their activism within religious organisations such as the YWCA.[93]

With this context in mind, Biggers's portrayal of Truth as a preacher depicts not only her own heroism, but the activism of many other contemporary Black women, including those in the YWCA, whose commitment to God and civil rights often went hand-in-hand. Thus, Biggers's depiction emphasises Truth's malleability and demonstrates how she can represent different forms of heroic behaviours. Indeed, as the previous chapter showed, Biggers's portrayal is an important acknowledgement of the varying forms of activism and the resistance of "ordinary" Black women is a crucial challenge to the "superwoman" myth. However, Biggers's depiction of Tubman as Moses supports the "superwoman" stereotype by emphasising her exceptionalism. Moreover, portraying Tubman as Moses frames her heroism through a masculine lens, which somewhat undermines Biggers's intention to celebrate Black women's activism and heroism. The importance of the Exodus narrative to Black Christians during the fight for civil rights and the organisation for which this mural was created no doubt influenced Biggers's decision to highlight Tubman as Moses. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that while Biggers's mural highlights Truth as a malleable figure who emphasises different forms of heroism, it also demonstrates how Tubman is a more rigid figure whose heroic behaviours largely conform to dominant understandings of heroism, which are greatly influenced by gender biases.

Tubman's confinement to the masculine lens of Moses is further demonstrated in Lawrence's series *Harriet and the Promised Land* from 1967, which was influenced by the importance of religion to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Throughout his career, the prominent Black artist created numerous artworks depicting Tubman, including two

[93] Septima Clark was an active member and chair of the African American branch of the YWCA in Charleston in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 184 – 186.

series, including the aforementioned and *The Life of Harriet Tubman* (1939 – 1940), and several individual paintings.[94] Interestingly, Lawrence's first series on Tubman, which is comprised of thirty-one panels, uses little imagery to emphasise her as Moses. While the series highlights Tubman's escape and her role as a conductor, it also depicts her role in the Civil War and her antislavery work with white abolitionists, such as John Brown. Conversely, Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* centres around Tubman's activism on the Underground Railroad and greatly emphasises her as the Moses of her people. Indeed, in an interview from 1968, the artist noted the differences between the two series and commented that he felt the 1967 series was superior to *The Life of Harriet Tubman*, remarking that "it's just a more subtle thing. And I think technically it's a better series."[95] Lawrence also stated that, although he had conducted much research on Tubman at the Schomburg Centre in New York City for the first series, he felt that he needed to conduct new research for *Harriet and the Promised Land*.[96] While Lawrence "knew the general outline" of Tubman's life story, he felt that "I have grown, my attitude would have been different, my choice of material out of the life of Harriet Tubman would have been entirely different."[97]

Lawrence's renewed research on Tubman in the context of the religious nature of the Civil Rights Movement and the series' juvenile audience, who largely understood Tubman as Moses at this time, likely influenced his decision to focus on her role as Moses. Throughout the series, Lawrence and Knight make frequent religious references that depict Tubman as Moses, mostly notably through the title that specifically references the Promised Land, the land that

[94] Lawrence created several individual artworks, namely *Harriet Tubman* (1948), *Ten Fugitives* (1967), *Daybreak: A Time to Rest* (1967), *Forward* (1968), *Harriet Tubman* (1975) and *Memorabilia* (1988).
[95] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Carroll Greene. October 26, 1968, transcript. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jacob-lawrence-11490#transcript.
[96] Patricia Hills writes how Lawrence conducted research at the Schomburg centre where he found photographs of Tubman, alongside Bradford's biographies from 1869 and 1886, and Hildegard Swift's *Railroad to Freedom: A Story of the Civil War* (1932). Lawrence adapted several quotations from these texts in his first series on Tubman. Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence as Pictorial Griot: The "Harriet Tubman" Series," *American Art* 7, no. 1 (1993): 45.
[97] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Carroll Greene. October 26, 1968.

was promised and given by God to Abraham and his descendants, and where Moses led the Israelites from Egypt. The idea of the Promised Land was adapted by many Black people and used as a metaphor for an escape from slavery, either through death with freedom in the afterlife, passage to free states in the North or (eventually) emancipation. Lawrence and Knight highlight this in the beginning of the book, which states that Tubman led "over three hundred of her people to 'The Promised Land'" as a conductor on the Underground Railroad.[98] This sacred land is referenced throughout Knight's ballad, which tells how "Harriet led them 'cross the snow, toward 'The Promised Land,'" that "they marched by day, now they marched by night, still 'The Promised Land' was not in sight," and that "Harriet rode the chariot to 'The Promised Land.'"[99] The chariot that Knight refers to and that Lawrence depicts in panels 16 and 17 is a reference to the song that Tubman tells Bradford she sang on her journeys North, which included the lyrics: "When that old chariot come,/ I'm going to leave you;/ I'm bound for the promised land,/ I'm going to leave you."[100] Indeed, this reference reflects Lawrence's research of Tubman of Bradford's biography and demonstrates how the religious imagery within this nineteenth century text influenced twentieth century depictions.

Lawrence and Knight also make specific references to Moses through the series, with panel four (figure 4.5) depicting a young Tubman learning about the story of Moses. The image depicts Tubman in a red dress sat next to her mother with mountains in the background, with the caption reading "Harriet here tell about 'The Promised Land,' how Moses led the slaves over Egypt's sand, how Pharaoh's heart was heart of stone, how the Lord told Moses he was not alone."[101] Through this depiction of Tubman learning about Moses from her mother, Lawrence highlights the importance of intergenerational memory that enabled Black people to

[98] Jacob Lawrence, book sleeve of *Harriet and the Promised Land,* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997).
[99] Lawrence and Knight, *Harriet and the Promised Land,* 24, 25, and 27.
[100] It is also a reference to the Black Christian song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," which tells of the glory that awaits in Heaven. Bradford writes how Tubman sang this song to her family and friends on the plantation when she made her escape from slavery. Bradford, *Scenes,* 17.
[101] Lawrence and Knight, *Harriet and the Promised Land,* 7.

learn about Black history, with the artist himself stating in a 1992 foreword to the book that "I recall learning of Harriet Tubman from my mother."[102] Lawrence also alludes to Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb from the story of Moses by depicting the two Black women sat on rocks with mountains in the background.

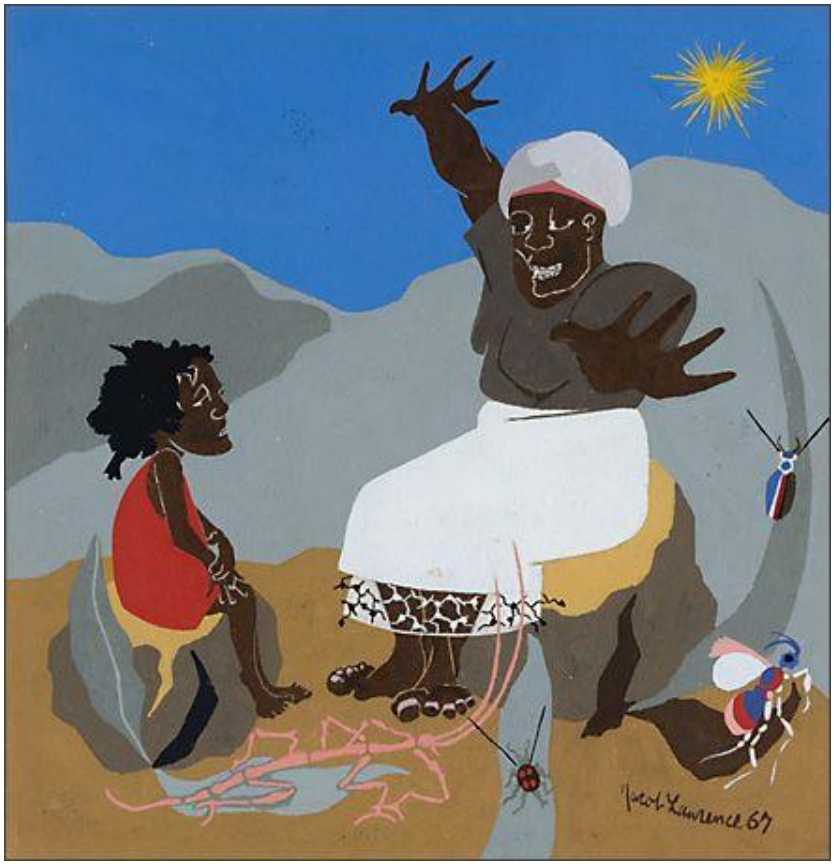

Figure 4.5. Jacob Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land,* 1967, in Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, 9.

The insects surrounding the two Black women are also significant. Lawrence uses the stick insect at their feet, which is a master of camouflage, to foreshadow Tubman's ability to hide on her journeys North. The scarab, or dung beetle, which climbs the rocks to the right of the older woman, was an important icon among the Ancient Egyptians, who viewed this insect as a symbol of rebirth and immortality.[103] As the beetle uses dung to lay its eggs and produce new

[102] Lawrence, foreword to *Harriet and the Promised Land*.
[103] William A. Ward, "Beetles in Stone: The Egyptian Scarab," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 57, no. 4 (1994): 186 – 188. Marcel Dicke, "From Venice to Fabre: Insects in Western Art," *Proceedings of the Netherlands Entomological Society Meeting* 15 (2004): 13.

life, the Egyptians saw the scarab as an image of resurrection and came to associate this insect with the "daily rebirth of their most powerful symbol, the sun."[104] Somewhat ironically, Lawrence uses this Egyptian symbol to highlight how Moses's journey to the Promised Land was a rebirth for the Israelites. Indeed, by depicting the scarab beetle in the scene in which Tubman learns about Moses and the Promised Land, Lawrence highlights how her journey to the North and indeed the emancipation of Black people was a form of rebirth and resurrection of the soul.

Moreover, alongside highlighting how Tubman led people to the Promised Land, Lawrence and Knight specifically compare Tubman to Moses in panel 15 (figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, 1967, in Lawrence, *Harriet and the Promised Land*, 24 – 25.

As explored in the previous chapter, this image depicts Tubman leading a group of Black people across a white landscape, with Knight's caption telling the reader that "Then the north wind howled, like a bloodhound pack; but none were afraid, and none turned back. Harriet led them 'cross the snow toward 'The Promised Land,' as Moses led his people 'cross the burning

[104] The Egyptians also used the image of the scarab beetle to represent Khepri, the God of the Sunrise, who embodies rebirth and immorality. Ward, 187 – 188.

sand."[105] Lawrence's image is reminiscent of artworks that depict Moses leading the Israelites to freedom and Knight's caption emphasises this comparison by highlighting the similarities between the actions of the two figures, which is significant considering "how the Lord told Moses he was not alone."[106] Indeed, in highlighting the communication between Moses and God and in stressing the similarities between Moses and Tubman, Knight and Lawrence emphasise Tubman's position as an exceptional "superwoman" whose communications with God enabled her success on the Underground Railroad.

Furthermore, Lawrence's use of the North Star in this image is also important in emphasising Tubman's position as a religious figure. Ten of the seventeen panels in the series include an image of the North Star, with Tubman pointing at or following the star in six of these images.[107] The North Star makes appearances throughout other artists and writers' representations of Tubman, as Bradford described how Tubman was "guided by the steady light of the north star."[108] Not only does the inclusion of this star demonstrate Lawrence's reading of Bradford's biography, but it also allows the artist to further highlight Tubman's close relationship with God. In religious artwork, the star is a symbol of divine guidance or favour, with God placing stars in the sky to communicate with worthy individuals, such as the wise men who were guided to Bethlehem.[109] Moreover, in Christianity light is seen as a symbol of God and, since light drives out darkness, which symbolises evil, it also represents good and God's presence. In this series, Lawrence uses the star to signal that Tubman was guided North by God and to demonstrate that God was ever-present on her journeys, therein emphasising Tubman's piety and her exceptionalism. Lawrence also stresses the danger and arduousness of Tubman's trips and the sacrifices that she made to save enslaved people by depicting her

[105] Lawrence and Knight, *Harriet and the Promised Land,* 23 – 24.
[106] Lawrence and Knight, *Harriet and the Promised Land,* 7.
[107] These ten panels that include the North Star are panels one, four, eight, nine, ten, eleven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen, with Tubman pointing at the star in panels eight, nine, ten, eleven, fifteen, and sixteen.
[108] Bradford, *Scenes,* 101.
[109] Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols,* 44 – 45.

wearing red, the colour worn by martyrs, and by portraying Tubman with bleeding feet.[110] Indeed, Lawrence emphasises Tubman's role as a martyr by contrasting the red with the white snow, ensuring the viewer understands the risks of the Underground Railroad.

Through the captions and the images, Lawrence and Knight depict Tubman as Moses and, like White and Biggers's artworks, frame her heroism through a masculine lens. By framing Tubman's heroism through such a lens, these artists and writers limit their acknowledgement of Black women's oppression and perpetuate the notion that Tubman was an exceptional "superwoman" whose extraordinary strength benefited others and who worked alone, with God as her only companion. Indeed, while Catlett's 1947 *Negro Woman* series honours Tubman and Truth equally without subscribing to the "superwoman" narrative, the same cannot be said for White, Biggers, or Lawrence. Although White's portrayal of Truth in *Five Great American Negroes* acknowledges varying heroic behaviours, the fact that his depiction can be confused as that of Tubman can lead to her prioritisation. Moreover, Biggers's Tubman in the role of Moses looms over Truth in his 1953 mural, and, although Lawrence created numerous artworks of Tubman, he created no known artworks of Truth.[111] Bernier argues that Lawrence evokes parallels between "Tubman's 'self-made woman' status" and "Truth's history of labour and activism" in *Harriet and the Promised Land,* contending that "for Lawrence, both Black female icons succeed in carving out a space beyond the dehumanising limits of their surroundings."[112] Bernier seems to base this argument on Lawrence's comment that the U.S. "is a great country because of people like John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman."[113] While Lawrence's statement certainly positions Tubman and Truth within the same Black and white,

[110] Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence,* 116.
[111] I recognise that Lawrence could have created artworks of Truth that were never published or made public.
[112] Celeste Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in The Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia press, 2012), 342.
[113] Lawrence, foreword to *Harriet and the Promised Land*. Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 340.

male and female heroic canon, there is nothing within the series that highlights Truth or links the two Black female activists. Indeed, Lawrence's prioritisation of Tubman is further demonstrated through the fact that he uses much religious imagery to depict Tubman as a Black female hero, yet does not create a depiction of Truth, perhaps the most prominent antislavery Black female preacher. Hence, analysing portrayals of Tubman as Moses is crucial, as it reveals how Tubman's heroism is largely confined to this masculine framing that subscribes to the exceptional "superwoman." Such analysis also uncovers a prioritisation of Tubman over Truth, which not only speaks to the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism, but also highlights how prevailing understandings of Black female heroism are intrinsically tied up with and limited by notions of exceptionalism.

The Preacher and Public Speaker

While much artwork from the 1950s and the 1960s situates Tubman as Moses, there is a significant shift from the 1970s onwards, whereby depictions of Tubman as a "superwoman" and Moses decline amidst the decreasing importance of the Exodus narrative to the Black freedom struggle and the proliferation of Black feminist thought. In comparison, artists and writers continue to highlight Truth's devotion in their depictions of her as a Black female hero, with representations taking on a variety of cultural forms, including poetry, such as June Jordan's "Sojourner Truth" from 1978, and theatre productions, including Shirlene Holmes's *Ain't I A Woman!* from 1982. Unlike White's artwork, Jordan and Holmes's representations stress the importance of orality to Truth's activism in their portrayals of her heroism, with the poem and play capturing the importance of orality, consciousness-raising, and performance to her activism. As the following chapter demonstrates, during this period artists and writers portrayed Truth as prominent militant Black feminist icon amidst the rise of the women's liberation movement and the proliferation of Black feminist thought. Indeed, many white and

Black feminists drew inspiration from Truth's women's rights activism and used Gage's report of the "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech in the fight for women's rights. This led Nell Irvin Painter to argue that this period witnessed a narrowing of Truth's significance, so much so that they relied almost exclusively on Frances Gage's report of the 1851 speech. Painter maintains that "in the work of secular-minded feminists resenting orthodox religion's power to oppress women, Truth's religion, always a puzzle for biographers, disappeared entirely."[114] Such feminists turned Truth from "a patient Christian, a rolling stone, an itinerant preacher, a quaint speaker" into a Black woman who "needed to be angry."[115] Noting the proliferation of one-woman plays, Painter contends that Truth no longer preached but demanded equal rights for women, stating that she had been recast as "a nineteenth-century female Black Panther, an Elaine Brown and Kathleen Cleaver rolled up into one and projected back in time."[116]

The following chapter supports Painter's argument that Truth became a Black feminist icon during the 1970s and 1980s, with many representations emphasising the Black feminism that Truth espoused in her Akron speech. However, Painter's premise that Truth's religion disappeared during this period is an overstatement. Although Black female artists and writers, such as Jordan and Holmes, emphasise Truth as a Black feminist public speaker, they did not completely disregard her devotion and continued to use religion in her portrayal as a Black hero. Indeed, they used religious imagery and referenced Truth's preaching to emphasise the importance of orality, with such representations highlighting the intertwining nature of her preaching and activism as a public speaker. This reflected in Jordan's poem "Sojourner Truth," which emphasises how Truth used her voice in the fight against oppression. While the following chapter discusses how this poem situates Truth as a militant Black feminist who used her voice to fight for equality, this chapter highlights how Jordan used Truth's preaching and devotion.

[114] Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 270.
[115] Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 271 – 272.
[116] Painter, *Sojourner Truth* 272.

Written in 1978, Jordan dedicated the poem to civil rights activist and singer Bernice Johnson Reagon and included it in a reading of her work at the Library of Congress on 12th February 1979.[117] Between the 1960s and 1990s, Jordan used her talent as a writer to highlight the multitude of issues facing Black people and especially Black women, writing how "as a Black woman, as a Black feminist, I exist, simultaneously, as part of the powerless and as part of the majority of peoples of the world."[118] Jordan's 1978 poem was inspired by an incident that happened during Truth's life, whereby she was pushed from a streetcar by a conductor who refused to recognise the desegregation of streetcars.[119] Jordan adapts this instance of violent racism and uses the trolley car as a metaphor for white oppression, depicting Truth as a Black female hero who used her voice and her body to challenge oppression just as she did throughout her life. When the conductor does not stop for Truth's held-out hand, "Sojourner yelled, 'It's me!'/ And put her body on the track./ 'it's me!' she yelled, 'And yes,/ I walked here but I ain walkin back [sic].'"[120] Through these lines, Jordan stresses how Truth used her voice to challenge white people who were either ignoring Black women's oppression (such as the trolley car conductor) or chose not see it (such as the driver).[121] Jordan further emphasises the crucial role that Truth's voice played in her activism by telling the audience how "Sojourner had to be

[117] Bernice Johnson Reagon was a founding member of SNCC's Freedom Singers in the Albany Movement. Reagon and other members realised the power of collective singing in uniting groups for one common cause, and the Albany Singing Movement was a key catalyst for the use of music in the Civil Rights Movement. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 279 – 283. Jordan read eight selections from her *Passion* collection and two readings from her collection *Things that I do in the Dark.* June Jordan, William Meredith, Gertrude Clarke Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund, and Archive Of Recorded Poetry And Literature. *June Jordan reading her poems in the Coolidge Auditorium*. Read by June Jordan. February 12, 1979. Audio. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mbrsrs/poetryarch.91740691.

[118] June Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (New York: Basic/Civitas Books, 2002), 270.

[119] In a letter from 1865 (dictated to Laura Haviland), Truth described how "the conductor pushed me" and that "'I'll put you off' said he furiously, clenching my right arm with both hands." Christina Accomando's research demonstrates how Truth used her knowledge of the law to sue this conductor for assault and battery, resulting in his dismissal from the streetcar company. Truth in Christina Accomando, "Demanding a Voice among the Pettifoggers: Sojourner Truth as Legal Actor," *MELUS* 28, no. 1 (2003): 76 – 77.

[120] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979, Box 65, Folder 38, Papers of June Jordan, 1936 – 2002 (inclusive, 1954 – 2002 (bulk). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/archival_objects/2558965.

[121] Jordan writes that "the driver did not see her/ the conductor would not stop." June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.

just crazy/ tellin all that kinda truth [sic]" and how she was "plain crazy" for "talkin loud to any crowd/ talkin bad insteada sad [sic]."[122] The poet also highlights Truth's importance by stating she had "a righteous mouth," with Truth stating that "A righteous mouth/ ain nothin you should hide [sic]" and that "jim crow or no," the Black female activist would continue to "talk" against Black oppression.[123]

Although Jordan's portrayal of Truth's heroism centres around her unique public speaking rather than her piety, she nevertheless brings religion into the poem by mentioning God and hell. Significantly, this appears to counter Jordan's belief that religion should not play a role in politics, as she stated that "religious belief must stay separated from political power because, otherwise, the *secular* human potential of democracy will itself be compromised, or snuffed out."[124] Indeed, Jordan believed that equality could only be achieved through "a secular democracy."[125] Nevertheless, Jordan recognises the role that religion played in Truth's activism by depicting her stating:

> I'm a woman and this hell has made me tough
> (Thank God!)
> This hell has made me tough
> I'm a strong Black woman
> and Thank God![126]

In using the phrase "Thank God," Jordan expresses Truth's pleasure at being a Black woman who has survived the horrors of the hell she has been through. This reference also reminds the

[122] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.
[123] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.
[124] Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die*, 14.
[125] Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die*, 14.
[126] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.

reader of Truth's piety and recognises the fact that her activism against Black women's oppression was grounded in preaching. Moreover, the style and repetition that Jordan uses mimics a sermon, with the sense that the audience will repeat the phrase "Thank God," to further emphasise Truth's role as a preacher. Hence, although Jordan does not forefront Truth's religion in this poem, she nevertheless references God to recognise the religious underpinnings of Truth's activism. Indeed, the emphasis Jordan places on Truth's role as a public speaker ultimately recognises her preaching because of the fundamental link between these two aspects of Truth's life.

Contrastingly, Holmes's one-woman play *Ain't I A Woman!* from 1982 uses religion as a central marker of Truth's heroism and greatly emphasises the importance of religion to her activism. Debuted in Queens, New York City, Holmes wrote the play when she was twenty-three years old, with the actress and playwright taking inspiration from Truth's biography *Narrative*, which the character holds tightly in the opening scene to tell "the audience how much she values it."[127] Holmes performed her one-woman show throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in schools, universities, community centres, and churches at various locations, including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington D.C., Aiken in South Carolina, Atlanta in Georgia, Tulsa in Oklahoma, and Carbondale in Illinois.[128] The play is set in 1882 and recounts Truth's life to the audience, with the character continually praising God for her strength and survival, stating that "I knew the power of GOD was in me [emphasis in original]."[129] Holmes also emphasises Truth's devotion by using the metaphor of the Promised Land when describing Truth's escape from slavery. She writes of Truth's close relationship with God, describing how

[127] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982, Box 20, Folder 8, Shirlene Holmes papers. Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta – Fulton Public Library System, Atlanta. https://aafa.galileo.usg.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/43123.
[128] Jitu Weusi, "Ain't I a Woman" and Libby Jenkins, "One-Woman Play Explores Struggles of Social Reformer," *Tulsa World*, March 6, 1987 in Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (newspaper clippings)," 1981 – 1991, Box 20, Folder 4, Shirlene Holmes papers. Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta – Fulton Public Library System, Atlanta. https://aafa.galileo.usg.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/43119.
[129] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.

Truth "walked out of 'Egypt.' I didn't know where I was going or who would help me […] but I raised my head, and I called on the name of the LORD and asked Him to lead me […] He made a way out of no way for me. He's a Good GOD! [emphasis in original]"[130]

Holmes's focus on Truth's piety is perhaps a reaction to the New Christian Right and the support it received from the Republican Party and White House. During the 1980s, America's religious landscape underwent momentous change, with Evangelicals reacting to the social changes of the past two decades and Ronald Reagan promising to uphold their demands to restore morality in public life, end elective abortions, and reduce the government's power over its citizens.[131] Randall Balmer also highlights how the desire to keep schools segregated motivated the religious right, with many outraged at the IRS' decision that all-white Christian schools were not entitled to tax exemption and concerned about government interference in the affairs of Evangelical institutions.[132] Indeed, Holmes's portrayal of Truth provided a counter to the Evangelicals preachers of the 1980s who used the mass media, and especially television, to spread their beliefs, with Jeffrey K. Hadden noting how they stirred up "prejudice and hatred toward religious, cultural and racial minorities."[133]

Moreover, Holmes's emphasis of Truth's devotion underscores how religion was an important part of the playwright's life, with newspaper articles recalling how her own church "has been her central survival mechanism during her stay in Carbondale" and that "faith, in fact, is what Shirlene and 'Ain't I a Woman' are all about. A profound faith in God is her driving

[130] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.
[131] Erling Jorstad, *Holding Fast/Pressing On: Religion in America in the 1980s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 58.
[132] The new IRS policy post-Brown stated that "racially discriminatory private schools are not entitled to the Federal tax exemption provided for charitable, educational institutions, and persons making gifts to such schools are not entitled to the deductions provided in case of gifts to charitable, educational institutions." Randal Balmer, "The Real Origins of the Religious Right," *Politico*, May 27, 2014, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133.
[133] Jeffrey K. Hadden, "The Rise and Fall of American Televangelism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527 (1993): 128.

force."[134] Holmes states that "through Sojourner, I have learned how to stand, and to celebrate my woman-ness. I have come closer to the God that is within me."[135] Indeed, Truth's influence over Holmes inspired the playwright to write scenes where Truth's character directly addresses the audience, giving them an experience that was akin to one of Truth's sermons or speeches. Towards the end of the play, Holmes's character turns to the audience and states "CHILDREN let me talk to you. All you babies out there. The LORD say honor your mommies and daddies and he means it. Get your lessons and pay attention to what's going around you […] Get smart and turn to your families and God for salvation [emphasis in original]."[136] The character also speaks directly to the women in the audience, encouraging them to continue the fight for equality and telling them "Any man you love more than your freedom, Any man you love more than your GOD and yourself, My God! My God! He ain't worth it [emphasis in original]."[137] Through these final scenes, Holmes recreates Truth's speeches on women's rights and equality, and highlights how religion underpinned much of this activism. While the following chapter argues that Holmes's play was significant in portraying Truth as a militant Black feminist, it is important to recognise the playwright's use of religious language and imagery in establishing Truth as a Black female hero.

Jordan's poem and Holmes's play demonstrate that Truth's piety did not disappear in the 1970s and 1980s, as Painter suggests, but remained important in the portrayal of Truth's heroism during this period. The religious underpinnings of Truth's activism continue to play an important role in her representations in the 1990s, with Tina Allen's sculpture *Sojourner Truth* (figures 4.7 and 4.8) recreating a scene of Truth preaching.

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[134] Carrie Pomeroy, "Performer to depart from SIU-C," *Daily Egyptian*, July 14, 1989, 3 and Linda Asantweaa Johnson, "Ain't I Sojourner Truth?," 13 in Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (newspaper clippings)," 1981 – 1991.
[135] Shirlene Holmes, "Sojourner: A one woman show," 2 in Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (newspaper clippings)," 1981 – 1991.
[136] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.
[137] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.

Figure 4.7. Tina Allen, *Sojourner Truth,* 1999, bronze, 12', Monument Park, Battle Creek Michigan.

Figure 4.8. Tina Allen, *Sojourner Truth,* 1999.

The Black sculptor created one of the first public, permanent sculptures of Truth in 1999 for Monument Park in Battle Creek, Michigan.[138] The sculpture *Sojourner Truth* was created as part of a community project run by the National Association of Negro Business and Professional

[138] Ruth Inge Hardison created a sculpture of Truth was displayed in exhibitions in 1968 and, as explored in Chapter Two, Elizabeth Catlett created a public, permanent sculpture dedicated to Truth in 1999, titled *Sojourner*. Allen's *Sojourner Truth* is the first public, permanent sculpture that was erected at a monument site for the public to visit and the first realistic depiction of Truth, with Hardison and Catlett creating more abstract sculptures.

Women, who raised funds through community outreach and with the support of the Sojourner Truth Archive in Battle Creek. In *Sojourner Truth,* the Black activist stands as a thirteen-foot bronze statue before a lectern in the centre of an amphitheatre-like park. Truth wears her distinguishable bonnet and shawl, with a long plain skirt and simple boots, reflecting her modesty and piety. Her right hand is placed on the lectern and her left hand is slightly lifted at her side, giving the impression that she is moving and animated.

On Saturday 25th September 1999, hundreds of people gathered for a three-hour choir and drama production of Truth's life prior to the unveiling of the sculpture.[139] Observers included Truth's descendant Barbara Allen, who commented that the sculpture "just blew me away. It's unreal and so beautiful, and she'll be here forever more […] it's such an honour to know we came from such a great woman."[140] Throughout her career, Tina Allen created numerous abstract and realistic sculptures of Black people, including Frederick Douglass and *Roots* author Alex Haley, commenting that "I'm looking at myself as speaking about the heart and soul of a people, and making sure they're not forgotten."[141] In an interview, the sculptor stated that she creates "useful pieces of art as opposed to just decorative" ones and that when she creates sculptures, "I'm trying to infuse a soul into these objects."[142]

Through multiples aspects of the sculpture, Allen reminds the visitor of Truth's piety. Just like Catlett's 1947 *The Negro Woman* series, Allen depicts Truth standing at a lectern with one hand resting on the Bible. The plaque on the lectern informs visitors that Truth was "empowered by a deep religious faith to carry her message of social reform and individual rights across the country."[143] On the wall behind Truth, three plaques further emphasise her

[139] Lisa Singhania, "Battle Creek honours Sojourner Truth," *The Detroit News,* September 26, 1999, 31.
[140] Barbara Allen is a sixth-generation descendant of Truth and is not related to the sculptor. Barbara Allen in Singhania, "Battle Creek honours Sojourner Truth."
[141] Tina Allen in Mary Rouke, "L.A. sculptor whose subject was African Americans," *LA Times,* September 12, 2008, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-sep-12-me-allen12-story.html.
[142] Allen in Rouke, "L.A. sculptor whose subject was African Americans."
[143] Tina Allen, *Sojourner Truth* 1999.

commitment to her faith: the left plaque reads "…and Truth shall be my abiding name," the centre depicts the only known signature by an illiterate Truth written into a book in 1880, and the right plaque states "Lord, I have done my duty and I have told the truth and kept nothing back."[144] The first plaque references the Black female activist changing her name from Isabella Baumfree to Sojourner Truth in the 1840s. In an article by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Truth is quoted stating that "the Lord gave me Sojourner, because I was to travel up and down the land, showing the people their sins" and "the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people."[145] By referencing this aspect of Truth's life, the sculptor emphasises the importance of religion to Truth and the crucial role that God played in shaping her into a religious preacher and civil rights activist.

The placement of Truth's sculpture in Battle Creek with such religious imagery and references is also significant. Truth lived in Battle Creek for around twenty-seven years after moving there in the mid-1850s and when she died in 1883, the activist was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, just under one mile away from the sculpture's location in Monument Park.[146] In the mid-nineteenth century, Battle Creek was an important location for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose members condemned proslavery legislation and supported the Underground Railroad.[147] Although no records show that Truth became a member of this church, her religious beliefs intersected with those of the Adventists, as she also prepared for Christ's Second Coming by challenging social evils.[148] There is also evidence that she came into contact with several notable members, including Ellen G. White, who was one of the church's co-founders,

[144] Allen, *Sojourner Truth*.
[145] Sojourner Truth in Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Sojourner Truth: The Libyan Sibyl," *Atlantic Monthly,* April 1863.
[146] Monument Park is a triangle-shaped park with three monuments at each point. Aside from Truth's sculpture, one corner contains a sculpture of C. W. Post (an American businessman who founded Postum Cereal Co.) that was erected in 1917 and the other corner has History Tower, which was built by James Brown in the 1930s and welcomes visitors when they arrive in downtown Battle Creek.
[147] Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 178.
[148] Although the church was co-founded by a woman, Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally excluded women from pastoral or leadership positions, and this may have influenced Truth's decision not to join the church. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 178.

and Dr John Harvey Kellogg, who became Truth's physician in Battle Creek.[149] The staging of the sculpture is also important in further emphasising Truth's role as a religious preacher. The amphitheatre-like park with its Roman style pillars invites visitors to sit on the steps in front of Truth and become a part of her audience as they consider the importance of the quotes behind her. Indeed, the three-hour choir and drama production that occurred before the unveiling of the sculpture reflects how this space is ideal for captivating an audience. On the centre of the stage, Truth's animated stance makes it seem as though she is in mid-speech and allows the viewer to imagine what it would have been like to listen to one of her sermons. By creating a thirteen-foot figure, Allen also highlights Truth's powerful presence and charisma, attributes that were intrinsic to her preaching. Thus, Allen emphasises Truth the preacher and celebrates the religion that was the foundation for much of her activism.

Allen's sculpture, Jordan's poem, and Holmes's play all demonstrate how religion did not disappear from Truth's representations in the second half of the twentieth century. This is important to recognise, as in using religious imagery they emphasise the importance of orality and consciousness-raising to Truth's activism. Indeed, Allen's sculpture in the centre of an amphitheatre invites visitors to take a seat and imagine themselves listening to Truth preach, while Jordan and Holmes depict Truth speaking to an audience, with the repetition in Jordan's poem mimicking a sermon and the Truth in Holmes's one-woman play directly addressing the audience on the multiple ways in which they are oppressed. The emphasis that this artist and these writers place on orality and consciousness-raising was especially significant in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, as during this time great value was placed on the idea of consciousness-raising, with Black feminists striving to reveal the multiple layers of oppression hindering Black women. Furthermore, Allen, Jordan, and Holmes's references to Truth's preaching highlight

[149] Dr John Harvey Kellogg created the breakfast cereal that bears his name in the 1890s. Patricia L. Humphrey, "Pioneer of Freedom," *Visitor*, February 15, 1989, 4 – 5. Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America*, 178.

her malleability, as their portrayals recognise her manner of public speaking and consciousness-raising as alternative heroic behaviours. Jordan's description that contemporaries "say she was uncouth" emphasises how Truth's orality and consciousness-raising did not conform to prevalent understandings of heroic behaviours, with her poem rejecting Douglass's determination that Truth was too "wild" and "uncultured" to be deemed heroic.[150] Holmes and Allen further highlight how Truth's orality did not conform to middle-class white society's understandings of heroism by emphasising her illiteracy, with the sculpture including Truth's only-known signature and Holmes's play stating that "I ain't never had no book learning. Can't read or write, but that never shut my mouth!"[151]

The dedication of Jordan's poem also highlights the importance of orality to Black women's activism considering Reagon was a founding member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) Freedom Singers, who performed songs across the country to introduce and connect people "to the culture and energy of activism taking place in many Southern communities."[152] The Freedom Singers adapted songs they learned as spirituals and Reagon recalled "how well the old songs we knew fit our current situation," demonstrating the continued importance of religion and orality to activism, and highlighting how songs are a medium for transmitting memory.[153] Indeed, Reagon stated that she learnt about Tubman and Truth through the stories and songs she heard as a child, commenting that she feels herself "to be a twentieth-century daughter" of Tubman and Truth.[154] As Reagon and Jordan worked together on several projects, it is highly likely that Jordan knew of Reagon's admiration of Truth

[150] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979. Frederick Douglass in Esther Terry, "Sojourner Truth: The Person behind the Libyan Sibyl," *Massachusetts Review* 26, no. 2 – 3 (1985): 442.
[151] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.
[152] Reagon formed the Freedom Singers in 1962 with her husband Cordell Hull Reagon, Rutha Mae Harris and Charles Neblett. Bernice Johnson Reagon, *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2001), 100 – 101.
[153] Reagon, *If You Don't Go,* 104.
[154] Jones helped bring folk songs to wider audiences. Reagon's *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me* contains a chapter dedicated to Tubman, Truth, and Jones, where she highlights the important influence these three women had over her life and activism. Reagon, *If You Don't Go,* 105.

as someone whose life "taught me about singing and struggle," and felt such a dedication was fitting.[155]

Furthermore, Jordan's poem represents a continuation of earlier religious representations by following Catlett's determination to portray Truth as an "everywoman" without emphasising exceptionalism. Indeed, while the religious imagery in this representation emphasises Truth's close relationship with God and celebrates her heroism, it does so without subscribing to the "superwoman" stereotype. Although Jordan calls Truth a "strong Black woman," it is important to highlight that this poem was included in a collaborative performance project on Black female heroism titled "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth" from 1978, which was organised by Jordan, Reagon, and Ntozake Shangee. "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth" was a celebration of Truth's life and heroism, with songs and poetry about various historical and contemporary issues facing Black women written and performed by Jordan, Reagon, and Shangee. Bernier argues that this project tackles Black women's "psychological, physical, moral, and cultural oppression," with language that challenges racist and sexist stereotypes.[156] She also contends that this project offers a "literary equivalent" to Catlett's 1947 series, noting how "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth" and *The Negro Woman* attempt to regain control of Black women's histories from dominant white discourse.[157] Jordan, Reagon, and Shangee's project also follows Catlett's series by rejecting the myth of the "superwoman" and portraying Truth as an "everywoman" who was part of an alternative heroic lineage that included unrecognised Black women, with Reagon's "Every Woman" stating "mama – sister – daughter – lover/ Every woman who ever loved a woman/ You oughta stand up and call her name."[158] Hence, Jordan's

[155] Reagon and Jordan produced several projects together, such as *For Somebody to Start Singing* from 1980 and *Anybody Here?* from 1995. Reagon also performed Jordan's poem "Sojourner Truth" during a collaborative performance titled "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth," which was organised by Jordan, Reagon, and Ntozake Shangee. Reagon, *If You Don't Go,* 105.
[156] Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 241.
[157] Bernier, *Characters of Blood,* 241 – 242.
[158] Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Every Woman" in June Jordan, "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth" (envelope labelled "clean copy of working script"), undated, Box 99, Folder 3, Papers of June Jordan, 1936 – 2002

poem demonstrates how religious imagery was used to celebrate Truth as a Black hero without subscribing to the exceptionalism of the myth of the "superwoman."

The Return of Moses

The declining importance of the Exodus narrative to the fight for civil rights meant depictions of Tubman as Moses declined significantly during the latter half of the twentieth century, yet they began to resurface in the twenty-first century with Mike Alewitz's artwork *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman* (figure 4.9) and *Move or Die* (figure 4.10) both from 2000. As noted in Chapter One, Alewitz designed a mural for the exterior wall of the building of Associated Black Charities Inc. (ABC) in Baltimore as part of his mural series *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman*, yet ABC Inc. officials felt Alewitz's inclusion of a rifle was inappropriate considering the city's high gun crime rates. When they asked Alewitz to remove the rifle, he refused to disarm Tubman and told officials that if they would not accept his first design then he would find another wall for the mural. Alewitz transformed his initial design into a mural titled *Move or Die*, which was painted onto a banner before touring around America and internationally.[159]

Figure 4.9. Mike Alewitz, *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman,* 2000, graphic print, Mike Alewitz Collection.

(inclusive, 1954 – 2002 (bulk). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts. https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/archival_objects/2559446.

[159] Alewitz scaled down the original design (which was intended to be 25 "x 123") and worked with the Baltimore Clayworks to create the banner, which was painted on-site at the American Visionary Art Museum. "Dreams of Harriet Tubman" Murals to Tour U.S. and Internationally," *U.S. Education and the New Jim Crow*, April 28, 2014, https://usednewjimcrow.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2014/04/28/the-dreams-of-harriet-tubman/.

Figure 4.10. Mike Alewitz, *Move or Die*, 2000, oil paint on fabric canvas, 7' x 21', Museum of Visionary Art, Baltimore, Maryland.

The following chapter discusses the significance of the ABC Inc. officials' request to disarm Tubman and Alewitz's refusal to do so, while this chapter focuses on the artists' portrayal of Tubman as Moses. When discussing the design, Alewitz said that the mural would "depict Harriet Tubman as she was known: Moses."[160] Significantly, Alewitz's design bears striking similarities to Biggers's 1953 *Contribution* mural. Both artists depict Tubman holding a rifle, with Alewitz commenting that "her staff is the musket that she carried."[161] Biggers and Alewitz also portray Tubman lifting a light source, with the former using a burning torch, and the latter using a lantern in the initial design and a burning bush in the final mural, all of which are references to Moses. These elements highlight connections between the iconography of Tubman as Moses, yet Alewitz's artwork also demonstrates significant departures from Biggers's mural. While Biggers portrays Tubman leading an endless stream of enslaved people, Alewitz depicts Tubman parting the sea, with silhouettes of individuals behind her representing "the living activists of today."[162] Interestingly, this is one of the few representations that portrays Tubman parting the Red Sea, which is one of the most famous elements of Moses's

[160] Mike Alewitz, "What Are the Dreams of Harriet Tubman," *Hartford Web Publishing*, May 1, 2000, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/304.html.
[161] Alewitz, "What Are the Dreams of Harriet Tubman."
[162] When discussing the mural design, Alewitz wrote that "Harriet's skirts will be a quilt of silhouettes formed by tracing the outlines of visitors to the site, who will climb the lower rungs of the scaffold and stand against the wall. In this way the living activists of today will become a part of the mural...literally the body of Harriet Tubman." Alewitz, "What Are the Dreams of Harriet Tubman."

story. In both designs, Alewitz depicts the Red Sea in red and yellow, almost as fire flames that represent the danger that pervaded Tubman's activism. He also uses a slave ship on the left-hand side to depict Tubman parting the Middle Passage and leading "the living activists of today" through the centre of oppression towards freedom. In doing so, the artist produces a representation that deals with various layers of history and memory, with Tubman portrayed as the Black hero who led people to freedom in the past and continues to be a guide and inspiration for today's activists.

This layering of history and memory is emphasised by the inclusion of a slave ship, which not only tells the viewer that Tubman is parting the Middle Passage, but also highlights the historical origins of enslaved people. Cheryl Finley argues that the slave ship "stands as the most prominent visual metaphor for the historical memory of the Middle Passage," demonstrating how it has been used since the nineteenth century across the African diaspora for numerous justice and equality movements.[163] Finley notes how the slave ship symbolises death and rebirth, representing those who died on the Middle Passage and those who survived the horrors of slavery to eventually become free.[164] This symbolism of death and rebirth is clearly depicted in Alewitz's first design, with the artist portraying dead enslaved people with wings flying into the sky towards the sun, the symbol of life. Considering the Moses imagery that pervades his artwork and the dual meaning of the Promised Land, Alewitz not only portrays Tubman leading people away from oppression, but also depicts these winged Black figures escaping to freedom through the afterlife. Alewitz also portrays "the living activists of today" as representing the descendants of those who survived white oppression. Significantly, the scene of the slave ship is mirrored by the factory containing Black figures on the right side of the mural. With this image, Alewitz highlights how American capitalism was built on the

[163] Cheryl Finley, *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5.
[164] Finley, *Committed to Memory*, 5 – 6.

exploited free labour of Black people alongside drawing comparisons between this and the exploitation of the working people today. Indeed, with both the ship and the factory depicting dead Black figures, Alewitz highlights how capitalism kills people both literally and metaphorically, with the exploitation of workers crushing people's souls. This criticism of capitalism reflects Alewitz's political views, with the artist participating in socialist, anti-war, and labour movements since the 1960s. Indeed, Alewitz commented that "my art is inseparable from the international struggle of the working class," stating that "artists have an important responsibility to bring this history [of the working class] back to working people."[165] By depicting Tubman in the centre of these two scenes, Alewitz recognises the class oppression Tubman faced and highlights her as the Moses not only of Black people, but also of the working class.

Alewitz's use of religious imagery alongside socialist commentary is significant considering the largely anti-religion stance of American socialism and highlights the importance of the Moses image to Tubman's memory. Indeed, the re-emergence of this image in the twenty-first century emphasises how the exceptionalism of Moses is deeply intertwined with Tubman's heroism, with artists continuing to use this religious image to frame her heroism through a masculine lens and foreground rescue missions as a crucial heroic behaviour. Thus, while artists and writers highlight varying heroic behaviours through religious representations of Truth and emphasise her malleability, the same is not true for Tubman, whose heroism is largely confined to this masculine framework that employs elements of the "superwoman." This is further demonstrated in the 2019 biopic *Harriet*, which repeatedly refers to Tubman as Moses and highlights her devotion to God. The film's screenplay was written by Black screenwriter Gregory Allen Howard and the movie's Black director Kasi Lemmons. The religious imagery

[165] Mike Alewitz in Joe Auciello, "Interview with Muralist Mike Alewitz," *Socialist Action,* July 3, 2005, <https://socialistaction.org/2005/07/03/interview-with-muralist-mike-alewitz/.

that Howard and Lemmons use was largely inspired by Bradford's biography, with both stating how they used this text, alongside the historical research of Tubman biographer Kate Clifford Larson, to create a narrative that was "as true to [Tubman], to the spirit of history" as possible.[166]

Throughout the film, Howard and Lemmons highlight Tubman's piety by depicting her as having visions that tell her when to escape and where to go, and she constantly prays to God for guidance and protection. There are also frequent references to Tubman, who is played by Cynthia Erivo, as Moses, with "wanted" signs for the "slave-stealer" called "Moses" appearing on trees and Tubman revealing to her mother that "I'm Harriet Tubman, mama. I'm Moses."[167] Alongside these references, the film emphasises Tubman's heroism by portraying the conductor as performing seemingly impossible tasks with the help of God. During Tubman's first experience as a conductor leading people North, they come to a river with no way to cross. When one member of the group asks, "what now," Tubman simply says "we cross."[168] She raises her arms above her head and begins to walk across the river and, much to the group's amazement, she can walk across the river, with the water never rising above her head. This scene evokes images of Moses parting the sea or Christ walking on water, suggesting that Tubman's faith and determination gave her the strength and power to overcome any obstacle.

Throughout the film, Howard and Lemmons also use songs in the style of spirituals to emphasise Tubman as Moses and portray her as an exceptional Black female hero. Indeed, in an interview, Lemmons commented that the film included several songs from Bradford's biography to highlight their importance as a form of "coded communication," stating that these

[166] Kasi Lemmons in Maria Sciullo, "Harriet director Kasi Lemmons tried to be true to the famed abolitionist," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 1, 2019, https://www.post-gazette.com/ae/movies/2019/11/01/Harriet-movie-Kasi-Lemmons-Cynthia-Erivo/stories/201910290088.
[167] These "wanted" posters are torn down by free Black people. Kasi Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*. (2019; Focus Features: Universal Pictures UK, 2020), DVD.
[168] Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*.

songs were "incredibly tied into the story" of Tubman.[169] In one scene, Tubman and a group of enslaved individuals are escaping a plantation and they sing the famous spiritual "Go Down Moses," which includes the lyrics:

> So the God said: go down, Moses,
> Way down in Egypt land
> Tell all pharaohs to
> Let my people go![170]

This reference to Moses highlights how Tubman and many other enslaved individuals felt they were escaping to the Promised Land and emphasises the importance of the Exodus narrative to enslaved Black people. The song *Goodbye*, which is played when Tubman first escapes, also contains Moses imagery with references to the Promised Land. *Goodbye* is an adaptation of the song which Tubman told Bradford she sang to tell her family that she was making her escape, with the white author writing how Tubman sang "I'm bound for de promised land/ I'm going to leave you/ I'm sorry I'm going to leave you/ Farewell, oh farewell." In the film, Erivo sings similar lyrics: "I'm bound for the Promised Land/ On the other side of Jordan/ Bound for the Promised Land/ I'm sorry I'm gonna leave you/ Farewell, Oh farewell."[171] Considering the dual meaning of the phrase Promised Land, this song has a double meaning, whereby freedom either means a new life in the free North, or peace in the afterlife. Just as Lawrence and Knight's *Harriet and the Promised Land* references to this religious land of freedom and adapts a song from Bradford's biography, so do Howard and Lemmons in their portrayal of Tubman as the Moses of her people.

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[169] Lemmons in Sciullo, "Harriet director Kasi Lemmons tried to be true to the famed abolitionist."
[170] Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*.
[171] Bradford, *Scenes*, 17 – 18. "Goodbye Song," featuring Cynthia Erivo, Spotify, track 5 on Terence Blanchard, *Harriet (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, Back Lot Music, 2019.

Furthermore, *Harriet* highlights how many white contemporaries did not expect a Black woman to be Moses. In a scene after one of Tubman's successful trips, white slaveholders and lawmen gather to see "what's going to be done about Moses?! This fiend is threatening our very existence!"[172] One man replies that "he's as black as the night!" while another man shouts that "if he was a black, we would'a caught 'im. He's one of those white abolitionists in blackface! [sic]"[173] In a following scene, the character Bigger Long tells Gideon that "the gal that led your slaves off – one you lookin' so hard for – is the slave they call Moses [sic]," to which Gideon laughs and replies "Moses ain't a nigger and he certainly ain't no woman. He's an abolitionist in blackface."[174] These scenes, where white contemporaries cannot believe a Black person, let alone an enslaved Black woman, was responsible for freeing people are significant. While it is difficult to assume the audiences' opinion, one can suppose that the viewer identifies with Tubman as the central protagonist and sees Gideon as the central villain. Hence, with Gideon unable to imagine Tubman as Moses, these scenes offer some dramatic irony and provide the viewer with some satisfaction. On the one hand, these scenes entrench the more enlightened view that women can do anything and disrupt dominant gender, race, and class biases that limit Black female heroism. However, on the other hand, these scenes further demonstrate that Tubman was seen to be so exceptional by her contemporaries that they likened her to a divine saviour. Indeed, these scenes highlight how exceptionalism is a key thread in depictions of Tubman as Moses and thus emphasise how such portrayals subscribe to the myth of the "superwoman." Hence, Howard and Lemmons's film further demonstrates how Tubman's heroism continues to be confined to the masculine framework of Moses in the twenty-first century.

[172] Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*.
[173] Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*.
[174] Gideon Brodess is the son of Edward Brodess, who exploits Tubman, her family, and other Black individuals as enslaved people. Bigger Long is the name given to a free Black man who is paid to capture escaped enslaved people. Lemmons, dir., *Harriet*.

Conclusion

Through analysing representations of Tubman as Moses and Truth as a preacher, this chapter highlights how religion plays a vital role in their portrayal as Black female heroes. By comparing the various ways in which artists and writers use religious imagery in portrayals of Tubman and Truth, I highlight how exceptionalism is an important yet limiting lens for understanding Black female heroism. I demonstrate how artists from the 1950s to the 1960s, such as White, Biggers, and Lawrence, depict Tubman with elements of the lone "superwoman" in their portrayals of her as Moses, with such representations emphasising her exceptionalism. In doing so, I highlight how this masculine framing is problematic for Black female heroism and, considering the gender bias within dominant understandings of heroism, leads to the prioritisation of Tubman's heroism over Truth's. While noting a decrease in portrayals of Tubman as Moses in the latter half of the twentieth century, this chapter emphasises the re-emergence of such representations in the twenty-first century in Alewitz's mural and Lemmons's film, demonstrating how the exceptionalism of the Moses framework is inherently intertwined with Tubman's heroism. By comparing these portrayals to religious representations of Truth, with the preacher becoming a Black feminist icon from the 1970s onwards, I illustrate Truth's malleability as a Black female hero. With Tubman's heroism largely confined to the masculine framing of Moses, Black female artists and writers, such as Jordan, Holmes, and Allen, turn to Truth and use religious imagery to emphasise orality and consciousness-raising as vital heroic behaviours, thus creating opportunities for other Black women to enter an alternative heroic lineage. Thus, analysing religious representations of Tubman and Truth is crucial to further understanding Black female heroism, as it reveals the issues of exceptionalism, which often perpetuate the problematic "superwoman," and allows for reconsideration of Black women's heroic behaviours.

Chapter Four

"The ever present cleaning up of history to make it more gentle"[1]

Militancy and Black Female Heroes

In 1951 the militant Black feminist organisation the Sojourners for Truth and Justice published *A Call to Negro Women*, asking Black women across the U.S. to join them in a march to Washington D.C., where they would demand "absolute, immediate, and unconditional redress of grievances" and insist that the government prohibit white supremacy.[2] The committee, which included Shirley Graham, Alice Childress, and Charlotte Bass, called upon Black women to "dry your tears, and in the spirit of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, arise," stating that their march on Washington "will carry forward the tradition of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth and will give inspiration and courage to women the world over."[3] Through this proclamation, the organisation heralded Tubman and Truth as militant Black women, highlighting how Tubman kept "on stinging 'till I arouse the conscience of America" and Truth travelled "the country showing the people their sins."[4] This chapter analyses how artists and writers across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries similarly portrayed Tubman and Truth as

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[1] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000, transcript, The Phillips Collection Archives. https://stagelawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/sites/default/files/Jacob-Lawrence-2000-interview-transcript.pdf.

[2] Sojourners for Truth and Justice, *A Call to Negro Women*, (New York: Initiating Committee of the Sojourn for Truth and Justice to Washington, 1951), 2.

[3] The members of the Initiating Committee of the Sojourn for Truth and Justice to Washington are listed as Charlotte Bass, Alice Childress, Shirley Graham, Josephine Grayson, Dorothy Hunton, Sonora B. Lawson, Amy Mallard, Rosalie McGee, Bessie Mitchell, Louise Patterson, Beulah Richardson, Eslanda Robeson, Pauline Taylor and Frances Williams. Sojourners for Truth and Justice, *A Call to Negro Women*, 2 – 3.

[4] The quote attributed to Tubman on the front cover of the proclamation reads "I am going to keep on stinging 'till I arouse the conscience of America" and the quote attributed to Truth reads "The name has come. Sojourner, that's it. Because I am going to travel up and down the country showing the people their sins and being a sign unto them." There is no reference for the origins of these quotes. Sojourners for Truth and Justice, front cover to *A Call to Negro Women*.

militant Black female heroes, with a focus on the former's use of armed self-defence and the latter's public speaking. Through such analysis, this chapter nuances scholarship that argues Tubman's militancy has been sanitised, with Vivian M. May contending that Tubman's activism has often been made "safer" and undergone "taming," resulting in her "lifetime of insurgency [being] made over into a life defined by selflessness and caregiving."[5] I demonstrate how Tubman's militancy was heightened by artists from the 1940s to the 1960s amidst the fight for civil rights, yet declined during the latter half of the twentieth century. when Truth's militancy comes to the fore. I explore how artists in the 1940s and 1950s, such as William H. Johnson and Elizabeth Catlett, emphasise Tubman's militancy by portraying her as an armed activist, maintaining that such analysis is crucial in examining Tubman's position as a Black female hero. Indeed, this chapter contends that complicating our understanding of Tubman's militancy beyond simple sanitisation is crucial in revealing the ways in which representations of Tubman's heroism have been impacted by race, gender, and class dynamics. In examining controversies surrounding John Biggers's 1953 mural, Jacob Lawrence's 1967 painting series, and Mike Alewitz's 2000 artwork, I argue that Tubman's role as an armed conductor on the Underground Railroad was not always viewed as "acceptable" because of prevailing race, gender, and class expectations of Black women.

Moreover, while demonstrating that Lawrence's 1968 painting of an armed Tubman confronts the supposed masculinity that was tied to armed self-defence in the late 1960s, this chapter also highlights the limitations of this challenge and notes that armed self-defence was not always available to Black women at this time. Indeed, this largely explains why Black

[5] Milton Sernett notes how the image of Tubman as a female military leader remains "controversial" and Joy James argues that Tubman's survival in political memory has been rooted in her revolutionary tactics being "forgiven" because of their humanitarian goals. Vivian M. May, "Under-Theorised and Under-Taught: Re-examining Harriet Tubman's Place in Women's Studies," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 12, no. 2 (2014): 37. Milton Sernett, *Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory, and History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 75 – 76. Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 76.

feminists in the 1970s and 1980s turn to Truth, not Tubman, as a militant Black hero, with her orality and consciousness-raising representing the activism of many Black women during this period. While the previous chapter demonstrated that some artists from the 1940s to the 1960s portrayed Truth as an anti-slavery preacher, this chapter emphasises how the militancy of her activism came to the fore from the 1970s onwards, when many Black writers, such as June Jordan and Shirlene Holmes, depicted Truth as a militant Black feminist amidst the proliferation of Black feminist thought. This chapter argues that artists, such as Faith Ringgold, and writers, such as Mahogany Browne, continued this into the twenty-first century, using artwork and poetry to emphasise the militancy of Truth's orality by highlighting how she used her voice to challenge race, gender, and class conventions. Such analysis demonstrates Truth's malleability as a Black female hero and furthers the creation of an alternative heroic lineage, with the attributes that Jordan, Holmes, and others highlight broadening our understandings of Black female heroism and inevitably allowing other Black women to enter the heroic pantheon. Hence, this chapter highlights the importance of exploring representations of Tubman and Truth as militant Black heroes, with such analysis revealing much about the race, gender, and class dynamics that influence our understandings of Black female heroism.

Defining Militancy

When analysing representations of Tubman and Truth's militancy, it is important to determine what we mean by the term "militancy." This word has been used to describe different movements, people, and events at countless times in various locations, with activists using numerous strategies and tactics, with varying aims and goals. Laura Nym Mayhall and Sandra Stanley Holton note that militancy is not a singular phenomenon, but one that is constantly

changing and evolving in response to wider cultural, social, and political contexts.[6] Indeed, Nym Mayhall argues that we should speak of militancies in the plural to account for the various strategies and tactics that come under this concept.[7] Alicia Gaspar de Alba also highlights the importance of militancies. In her study of the depiction of "bad women" across different places and times, De Alba argues that what unites them is the fact that they are "all rebels with a cause."[8] Their failure to comply with the social discourses by which "good women" are constructed through challenges to white patriarchy and refusals to submit to the social hierarchy as fashioned by white men leads many to determine that they are "bad women."[9] De Alba notes how "bad women" rebel against the race, class, and gender constraints that are placed upon them by capitalist white patriarchy, therein determining that militant women are those who fail to conform and abide by the political and social status quo. This is especially true for women of colour, who are not only persecuted for being women, but for being different in terms of race, language, religion, and place of origin.[10]

De Alba's notion of "bad women" relates to the late Congressman John Lewis's comments about "good trouble," which he used to describe his nonviolent civil rights activism. Lewis dedicated much of his early life to the Black freedom struggle by organising protests, such as voter registration drives and sit-ins, and was often beaten and arrested for presenting such challenges to segregation. He became chairman of SNCC in 1963, was a keynote speaker at the 1963 March on Washington, and led over 600 nonviolent protestors across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma on the notorious "Bloody Sunday" of 7th March 1965. While Lewis

[6] Laura E. Nym Mayhall, "Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908 – 1909," *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 343. Sandra Stanley Holton, "The language of suffrage history," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 7 (2019): 1228.
[7] Nym Mayhall, "Defining Militancy," 371.
[8] De Alba's three texts on these women are *Sor Juana's Second Dream* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1999), *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2005) and *Calligraphy of the Witch* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2012). Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels with a Cause* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 5.
[9] De Alba, *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman"*, 7 – 9.
[10] De Alba, *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman"*, 16.

recalls how his mother told him to stay out of trouble, the Congressman stated that meeting civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. inspired him "to stand up and speak out" and "to get in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble."[11] Although Lewis largely employed nonviolent tactics, his resistance to segregation existed outside the realm of accommodation, with his activism causing great disruption to white supremacy. Hence, Lewis's comments highlight how militant activism challenges the established social order through a variety of forms that disrupt the political and social status quo that supports white supremacy. Moreover, "good trouble" emphasises how varying forms of activism within the same movement are viewed differently, with armed resistance and nonviolent direct action coexisting yet often presented rhetorically as antithetical. This will be developed further within this chapter, noting how differing ideas about armed resistance influenced Tubman's portrayal as an armed conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Ashley Farmer discusses militancy in relation to Black women in her study on Black Power and Black radicalism. While Black women have consistently been expected to submit to white society's demands and subjugation, Farmer argues that militant Black women rejected demeaning definitions and gendered stereotypes of Black womanhood, such as the mammy, and refused to submit to white society's attempts to define and dehumanise them.[12] Analysing the activism of militant Black women, such as Claudia Jones and Mae Mallory, Farmer argues that Black female activists' ideas on militancy centred around the eschewing of traditional gendered stereotypes, with Jones contending that militant Black womanhood was predicated on the principles of self-determination, self-reliance, and self-defence.[13] Treva Lindsey supports this, arguing that "the rebellious and revolutionary acts" of Black women against "white

[11] John Lewis, "Why Getting Into Trouble is Necessary to Make Change," *Time*, January 4, 2018, https://time.com/5087349/why-getting-into-trouble-is-necessary-to-make-change/.
[12] Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 21 – 22.
[13] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 21 – 22.

supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were pervaded with militancy.[14] In analysing the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, Lindsey argues that the Collective pinpointed militancy as an important thread in Black women's activism in the Black freedom struggle. She argues that this militancy survives in the activism of Black women beyond 1977, maintaining that "Black women freedom fighters of the 21st century consistently engage tactics rooted in personal sacrifice and militancy," using examples of activists from movements such as Black Lives Matter.[15] Therefore, in analysing militant representations of Tubman and Truth, this chapter focuses on the former's armed self-defence and latter's public speaking, both of which challenge the political and social status quo and defy gender, race, and class conventions.

Arming Moses

The notion of an armed Tubman first emerged in Bradford's biography, which not only tells the reader that the conductor carried a "revolver" on her journeys North, but also contains an image of an armed Tubman.[16] The front-piece (figure 5.1) was created by white artist J. C. Darby and depicts Tubman as a scout in the Civil War. She stands in the middle of a field, with army tents and trees in the background, wearing Civil War-era clothing, with a long coat, pleated skirt, and a calico-style scarf around her head. That Darby's depiction of Tubman is from the Civil War is confirmed by the fact that he presents her holding a rifle, the signature weapon of this conflict, and not the revolver that Bradford described. Although Tubman did not carry a rifle on the Underground Railroad, this weapon has become an important part of her memory, with artists and writers depicting the conductor with a rifle instead of a pistol or revolver. Indeed, several artists across the twentieth and twenty-first century were inspired by

[14] Treva B. Lindsey, "Negro Women May Be Dangerous: Black Women's Insurgent Activism in the Movement for Black Lives," *Souls* 19, no. 3 (2017): 316.
[15] Lindsey, "Negro Women May Be Dangerous," 317.
[16] Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W. J, Moses, 1869), 25.

Darby's image of Tubman and imitated his portrayal to create representations that would be easily recognisable among the Black community.[17] As previously mentioned, establishing recognisable images of Black figures through the use of common characteristics was especially important in the first half of the twentieth century considering the low literacy rates, the lack of Black figures in textbooks, and the shortage of such books in Black schools.[18] By creating established images of Black heroes, such as Tubman and Truth, artists ensured the dissemination of their activism and heroism throughout the Black community.

Figure 5.1. J. C. Darby, *Harriet Tubman,* 1869, wood engraving on paper, 7" x 4 1/8", in Bradford, *Scenes of the Life of Harriet Tubman.*

[17] Examples of visual representations that imitate Darby's design include William H. Johnson's *Harriet Tubman* (1945), Elizabeth Catlett's *Harriet Tubman* (1953), Wilfred Stroud's *From Africa to America – Panel 4* (1988) and Maurice Myron's *Last Supper* (1990).

[18] In 1952, the illiteracy rate for Black people aged 14 years and older was 10.2%, which was five times that of white people at 1.8%. Howard Fuller, "The Struggle Continues," *Education Next*, June 30, 2006, https://www.educationnext.org/the-struggle-continues/#:~:text=In%201952%2C%20the%20illiteracy%20rate,see%20Figures%201%20%26%202.

The first artist to create a recognisable image of Tubman based on Darby's front-piece and thus the first to create a depiction of an armed Tubman in the twentieth century was William H. Johnson, who "had one absorbing and inspired idea" to portray "the story of the Negro as he has existed."[19]

Figure 5.2. William H. Johnson, *Harriet Tubman*, 1945, oil on paperboard, 27 7/8" x 23 3/8", Smithsonian American Art Museum.

As figure 5.2 shows, Johnson drew inspiration from Darby's artwork when creating *Harriet Tubman* in 1945, with the Black artist portraying Tubman in a similar position and clothing. As

[19] William H. Johnson in Nora Holt, "Primitives on Exhibit," *New York Amsterdam News*, 9 March 1946 from William H. Johnson, "News Clippings, U.S." 1943 – 1946, Box 1, Folder 14, William H. Johnson papers, 1922 – 1972 (bulk 1926 – 1956). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/william-h-johnson-papers-6889/series-2/box-1-folder-14.

in Darby's front-piece, Johnson depicts Tubman in a full-length skirt and long, dark overcoat, with a bag resting on her hip and rifle on her right side, the end of which she holds in both hands. He brings the image to life with bright colours, which were crucial to Johnson's creative process, with the artist commenting that "I need apparently to have vivid colour and contrasts before me to make me paint."[20] As in the aforementioned *Three Great Freedom Fighters,* the red and white skirt and blue coat create an image of the American flag that reminds the viewer of Tubman's devotion to the freedom that this flag supposedly represents. The crucifix on Tubman's bag reminds the viewer of her devotion, with the North Star in the sky representing God's constant presence on her journeys North. While Johnson imitates the clothing that Darby uses to note her participation in the Civil War, Johnson emphasises Tubman's role on the Underground Railroad by depicting the conductor on a journey North. Johnson replaces the army tents and trees in the background with two separate landscapes that highlight the different terrains that Tubman traversed on her journeys North. The dark blue on the right above the unknown figure represents lakes and rivers, while the wide strips of yellow, white, and green on the left symbolise the sand, mountains, and grassland that Tubman navigated. Johnson uses one shotgun house to symbolise an Underground Railroad station, which provided goods and shelter to those travelling North. The artist makes further references to the Underground Railroad by bordering the lower half of the image with a railway track, with lines shooting off this main track into the centre and running on either side of Tubman towards the North Star, a symbol of freedom.

Johnson's experimentation with shapes, colours, and lines, alongside his favouring of the abstract over realistic representations in *Harriet Tubman* indicate his use of modernism. Johnson studied art in Paris for three years, where he was in "close contact with the French

[20] William H. Johnson, "Exhibition Panels," c. 1950s, Box 2, Folder 14, William H. Johnson papers, 1922 – 1972 (bulk 1926 – 1956). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/william-h-johnson-papers-6889/series-5/box-2-folder-14.

modernists" and, when he won the Harmon Foundation's gold award in 1930, prominent artists George Luks and Victor Semon Pérard commented that "he is a real modernist. He has been spontaneous, vigorous, firm, direct. He has shown a great thing in art – it is expression of the man himself."[21] Indeed, Johnson commented that "since painting is an expression of an emotion and not a mechanical interpretation, it demands inspiration."[22] Johnson's modernism is further demonstrated through his use of art to explore contemporary struggles, with the artist using an armed Tubman to draw comparisons between Black people's fight against slavery and white oppression in the nineteenth century and their participation in the U.S. military in World War Two, which was used by many activists in the push for civil rights. Indeed, the rise of fascism in Europe had a great personal impact on Johnson and his Danish wife Holcha Krake, with much of her family, including her mother, two sisters and brother, coming under Nazi occupation when German troops invaded Denmark on 9th April 1940.[23] Although the artist did not enrol in the armed forces for fear of leaving Krake or interrupting the momentum of his career, Richard Powell contends that Johnson felt that he should contribute to the war effort in some way.[24]

Johnson's opportunity came in 1942, when the government announced a national open art competition for a travelling exhibition that would inform the public about the war.[25] While Johnson's submission *Training Camp* has since disappeared, other artworks from 1942 reveal that Johnson likely focused on Black soldiers' experience of World War Two. Johnson created *Lessons in a Soldier's Life, K. P., Off to War, Ten Miles to J. Camp* and *Soldiers Training,* all

[21] William H. Johnson, "William H. Johnson Scrapbook," 1920s – 1947, William H. Johnson papers, 1922 – 1972 (bulk 1926 – 1956). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/william-h-johnson-scrapbook-6633.
[22] William H. Johnson, "Exhibition Panels," c. 1950s, Box 2, Folder 14.
[23] Richard J. Powell, *Homecoming: The Art and Life of William H. Johnson* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 155.
[24] Powell, *Homecoming,* 155 – 156.
[25] The competition was organised by the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Section of Fine Arts of the Public Buildings Administration. In one month, the competition drew over 2,500 entries from 1,189 artists nationwide. Powell, *Homecoming,* 156.

of which highlight the experiences of Black soldiers during the war.[26] In the same year, Johnson also contributed to a second Office of Emergency Management exhibition that focused on the American Red Cross, with paintings such as *Soldier's Morning Bath, Operating Room* and *Station Stop, Red Cross Ambulance* highlighting Black men and women's volunteerism.[27] As previously mentioned, Johnson's *Fighters for Freedom* series from 1945 also included paintings that concerned World War Two and America's allies, with several referencing conferences between world powers in the fight against fascism.[28] Although Johnson's artwork does not contain overt criticisms of the racism within the armed forces or the government's double standard when it came to Black lives, the images serve as a reminder of the crucial role that Black people played in the war.[29]

Unfortunately, there are scant testimonies from Johnson and scarce information about the creation of his artwork, including their reception. Nevertheless, newspaper clippings from the 1940s reveal that Johnson's work received mixed reviews, with Nora Holt from the *New York Amsterdam News* writing that "the average adult looks askance at the delineations of the Negro."[30] One writer described his work as having "a peculiar sad sincerity," while another critic praised the "sophisticated primitives" that are "appealing for the sense of quiet dignity and spiritual depth which pervades them."[31] Although Holt revealed that "children seemed

[26] *Lessons in a Soldier's Life* and *K.* shows Black soldiers performing tasks, while *Off to War* depicts a young Black man dressed in a military uniform leaving his family in the rural South. *Ten Miles to J. Camp* shows a seemingly never-ending line of Black soldiers marching in the rural South with their rifles to "J. Camp". *Soldiers Training* portrays eleven Black soldiers with rifles, with three American flags and three shotgun houses in the background.
[27] *Soldier's Morning Bath* depicts eight Black men entering a Red Cross bath house, *Operating Room* shows a Black person cleaning surgical equipment and *Station Stop, Red Cross Ambulance* portrays four injured Black male soldiers on stretches with Black female paramedics carrying them out of Red Cross ambulances.
[28] Powell maintains that at least five of the series" paintings re-enact these conferences, including *Three Allies in Cairo.* This painting depicts President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek at their 1943 meeting in Cairo, where they discussed how to defeat the Japanese. Powell, *Homecoming,* 207.
[29] The one exception, Powell argues, is *K.*(or *Kitchen Patrol*), which "makes a subtle social comment on the demeaning chores that were often assigned to black enlisted men." Powell, *Homecoming,* 156 – 159.
[30] Nora Holt, "Primitives on Exhibit," *New York Amsterdam News,* 9 March 1946 in William H. Johnson, "News Clippings, U.S." 1943 – 1946, Box 1, Folder 14.
[31] Howard Devree, *New York Times,* December 17, 1944, and "Johnson at Marquie," *New York World-Telegram,* December 23, 1944, in William H. Johnson, "News Clippings, U.S." 1943 – 1946, Box 1, Folder 14.

especially interested" in an exhibition of twenty-five paintings, sources from the 1950s reveal that overall Johnson "was disappointed in the reaction from the Negro public" to his *Fighters for Freedom* series.[32] Nevertheless, Johnson's *Harriet Tubman* is important, as it is the first twentieth century painting to depict an armed Tubman. Indeed, this artwork is significant in the context of the 1940s and Johnson's World War Two paintings for the parallels it draws between Black people's fight against slavery during the Civil War, and their struggle against oppression at home whilst fighting fascism abroad in the 1940s.

Through these parallels, Johnson not only emphasises the vital role that Black people played in the war effort, but also highlights how Black people's service in both the Civil War and World War Two was used to push for civil rights, therein drawing similarities between the activism of the nineteenth century and the experience of Black people in the 1940s. However, it is important to highlight that by likening Tubman to World War Two soldiers, one could argue that Johnson tempers Tubman's militancy. Indeed, one could see Johnson's imitation of Darby's front-piece, with the Civil War clothing and rifle, as emphasising her participation in the military, which is significant. Serving in the armed forces can be read as less militant than working on the Underground Railroad, as while both involved resistance to slavery, the former required obedience to the Union army, yet the latter allowed Tubman to decide her own aims and how she would achieve them. Hence, Johnson's blending of Tubman's activism on the Underground Railroad and in the Civil War, and the parallels such a portrayal drew between anti-slavery activism and Black people's participation in World War Two could be viewed as a sanitisation of her heroism, with both roles equated to one another despite their inherent differences. This is crucial considering how heroes are traditionally admitted to the heroic pantheon if they support the construction of "America," rather than challenge it. Nevertheless,

[32] Nora Holt, "Primitives on Exhibit," *New York Amsterdam News,* 9 March 1946 in William H. Johnson, "News Clippings, U.S." 1943 – 1946, Box 1, Folder 14. William H. Johnson, "Exhibition Panels," c. 1950s, Box 2, Folder 14.

Johnson clearly prioritises Tubman's activism as a conductor, with the artwork containing various symbols to represent the Underground Railroad, including the bordering train tracks and the North Star. Indeed, Johnson's decision to depict Tubman amidst a journey North on the Underground Railroad, rather than on the battlefield as in Darby's front-piece, is important in highlighting her role as a conductor who employed armed self-defence and in placing her in a broader tradition of armed revolutionary militancy.

As the fight against segregation and racism amplified in the 1950s, depictions of an armed Tubman also proliferated and the rifle became an increasingly important part of her memory, with Black artists imitating Darby's front-piece of Tubman and her gun to ensure the dissemination of Tubman's image and heroism throughout Black communities. One artist who created such a representation was Elizabeth Catlett, who adapted her image of Tubman from the 1947 *Negro Woman* series to include a rifle in her 1953 artwork *Harriet Tubman* (figure 5.3). This linocut was created as part of Catlett's series *Against Discrimination in the United States* in collaboration with the Taller de Gráfica Popular, the Mexican artist print collective with whom Catlett worked closely from the 1940s onwards after her move to Mexico. She wanted the series to highlight a range of Black men and women from across time, including Crispus Attucks, George Washington Carver, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Nat Turner, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.[33] The prints were designed to be included as supplements in Paul Robeson's *Freedom*, with Catlett drawing inspiration from Francisco Pancho Villa's distribution of Taller's series through the magazine *El Maestro Mexicano.*[34] Contrary to the

[33] In her book *El Taller de Gráficia Popular*, Helga Prignitz states that there were sixteen prints in the series: *Frederick Douglass* by Pablo O"Higgins, *Nat Turner* by Alberto Beltrán, *Harriet Tubman* by Elizabeth Catlett, *Sojourner Truth* by John Wilson, *Denmark Vesey* by Roberto Berdecio, *Isaac Meyers* by Francisco Luna, *Blanche K. Bruce* by Francisco Mora, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett* by Celia Calderón, *Dr. George Washington Carver* by Erasto Cortés, *Dr W.E.B. Du Bois* by Guillermo Rodríguez, *Paul Robeson* by Leopoldo Méndez, *Crispus Attucks* by Ángel Bracho, *Frances Ellen Watkins* by Fanny Rabel and *Benjamin Davis* by Oscar Frías. Helga Prignitz, *El Taller de Gráficia Popular 1937 – 1977* (México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1992), 418 – 419.

[34] Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 102.

1947 linocut (figure 3.9), *Harriet Tubman* depicts Tubman facing the viewer instead of looking over her shoulder and provides a detailed background of mountains and grassland.

Figure 5.3. Elizabeth Catlett, *Harriet Tubman,* 1953, linocut, 32.39cm x 25.72cm, National Gallery of Art.

Catlett imitates Darby's front-piece to present a recognisable Tubman in the same headscarf, long overcoat, and pleated dress with the bag over her shoulder and rifle in her hand, thus noting Tubman's involvement in the Civil War. However, like Johnson, Catlett highlights Tubman's role as a militant, armed conductor by portraying her amidst a journey North on the Underground Railroad, with one hand pointing three Black men to freedom amid a mountainous terrain.

While the context of the 1940s means that Johnson's portrayal draws comparisons between antislavery activism and Black participation in World War Two, leading to a potential

sanitisation, the leftist context in which Catlett's series was created is important to consider when analysing the militancy of her linocut. As previously discussed, Catlett did not belong to the Communist Party, but she associated with many people who did and throughout her life was involved with organisations that espoused leftist politics. Indeed, both the Taller collective and *Freedom* appealed to Catlett because of their leftist politics, with many Taller artists belonging to the Mexican Communist Party and Robeson's Harlem-based newspaper becoming a magnet for Black leftist activists. Although Robeson denied his membership to the U.S. Communist Party, he was closely associated with many of its leaders and described himself as "a Marxist," "a convinced socialist," and "a radical."[35] Published between 1950 and 1955, *Freedom* supported the working class, the labour movement, and various international issues, including anti-colonialism, with James Smethurst arguing that Robeson's newspaper was "the most visible African American Left cultural institution during the early 1950s."[36] Hence, Catlett's intended audience for the 1953 series was largely left-leaning, making her creation of a militant armed Tubman significant. Indeed, the difference between this portrayal and her 1947 print suggests that Catlett wanted to provide this specific audience with an armed Tubman. With Robeson characterising himself as "a militant anti-fascist," Catlett's militant, armed Tubman fits well with his readership.

The significance of Catlett's adaption of her earlier print is further demonstrated by the fact that the artist claimed Tubman's image for herself. When discussing the creation of the series, Catlett told Melanie Anne Herzog that "I thought it would be nice if we would do a series on African American heroes… I did all the research. I got photographs of all the people […] I

[35] Paul Robeson in Gerald Horne, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 4 and 100.
[36] Financial difficulties and anti-communism ultimately led to *Freedom's* demise, with Gerald Horne noting that newsstands" refusal to sell the newspaper guaranteed "its abortive destiny." Horne, *Paul Robeson*, 132. James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 45.

wrote a little something on each one."[37] She said that "everybody did something that they wanted to do," but commented that she claimed Tubman for herself.[38] Catlett remarked that "everybody was so enthusiastic […] everybody wanted to do Harriet Tubman, and I said no, I'm doing Harriet Tubman."[39] This statement clearly shows that Catlett felt a strong claim over Tubman's image and that she wanted to play an important role in her memorialisation. Indeed, throughout her career Catlett created several artworks featuring Tubman and, as previously noted, she expressed a desire to create a sculpture of her in the 1990s, although this never materialised.[40] Alongside Tubman, three other Black women were included in the *Against Discrimination* series, namely Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Sojourner Truth. Helga Prignitz attributes these artworks respectively to the Mexican female artists Celia Calderón and Fanny Rabel, and Black male artist John Wilson.[41] However, Herzog maintains that the print of Truth was created by Black female artist Margaret Taylor Burroughs when she visited Catlett in Mexico and was either misattributed to Wilson or omitted by Prignitz.[42] I have been unable to clarify if Burroughs took part in the series and locate either her or Wilson's print of Truth. Nevertheless, this confusion suggests that Burroughs was not an official part of the collective and thus that Catlett was the only Black female artist working on the 1953 series. This makes Catlett's decision to claim Tubman over the three other Black

[37] Catlett in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 102 – 103.
[38] Catlett in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 102 – 103.
[39] Catlett in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 103.
[40] In an interview with Glory Van Scott in 1981, Catlett expressed her desire to create sculptures of Tubman and Truth, stating that "I want to do so badly Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. I haven't seen any sculptures of them. They have housing projects named for them, cultural centres named for them, but I haven't seen any figures of them." Catlett in Glory Van Scott, "Elizabeth Catlett: Sculpture, Printmaker, Interview #1," in *Artist and Influence 1991 Volume X,* ed. James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1991), 10.
[41] Prignitz, *El Taller de Gráficia Popular,* 418 – 419.
[42] In the 1950s, Wilson and Taylor Burroughs became guest members of the Taller after both artists travelled to Mexico. Wilson intended to use his John Hay Whitney Fellowship to study muralism under José Clemente Orozco. When the Mexican artist suddenly died, Wilson enrolled at the La Esmeralda art school, where he was taught by Catlett and soon began creating artwork with the Taller. Taylor Burroughs was an associate of Catlett's from their time at the Chicago Art Institute in the early 1940s and, under the guidance of Catlett, she enrolled at La Esmeralda before being invited to join the Taller. Alison Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos: African American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 364 – 367. Herzog, 203.

female activists significant, as it demonstrates that the artist felt that of these four Black women, Tubman was the one who should be portrayed by a Black female artist. This not only speaks to Tubman's importance as a Black female hero and a figure for Black womanhood, but also highlights Catlett determination to adapt her 1947 portrayal and present a militant, armed Tubman.

Unfortunately, *Freedom's* readers never had the opportunity to view Catlett's series, as its editors refused to publish the prints because they felt Pablo O'Higgins's print of Frederick Douglass was too "weak."[43] Catlett described how "they wanted a stronger Douglass," but she refused to omit or change this print because the artists worked as a collective and they had all agreed on the strength of the series.[44] This decision meant the series was not published in the U.S., but four of the images, including Catlett's *Harriet Tubman,* were published for Mexican audiences in the 1957 issue of *Artes de México* that celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Taller collective.[45] Conversely, a representation of an armed Tubman that did reach American audiences was John Biggers's mural *Contribution of the Negro Woman to American Life and Education,* also completed in 1953. As explored in the previous chapter, Biggers uses religious imagery, such as the torch of fire, to highlight Tubman as the Moses of her people, and he places a rifle in her hand to highlight her use of armed self-defence. Significantly, Biggers did not always envision Tubman holding a rifle in this mural.

[43] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 105.
[44] Catlett in Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 105. Rebecca Schreiber notes that four of the prints were published for Mexican audiences and included in an issue of *Artes de México* in 1957 that celebrated the Taller's twentieth anniversary. Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 50. Rebecca M. Schreiber, "Dislocations of Cold War Cultures," in *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame,* ed. Sandhya Shukla and Heidi Tinsman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 300 – 301. Herzog maintains that the series was exhibited around the world and states that Leopoldo Méndez's print of Paul Robeson was widely reproduced in 1998 as part of commemorations for the centennial of Robeson's birth. Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett,* 103.
[45] Alongside Catlett's print, *Artes de México* published Leopoldo Mendez's *Paul Robeson,* Angel Bracho's *Crispus Attucks* and Alberto Beltrán's *Nat Turner.* Raquel Tibol, "Veinte Años de Vida Del Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Artes de México,* no. 18 (July – August 1957): 85.

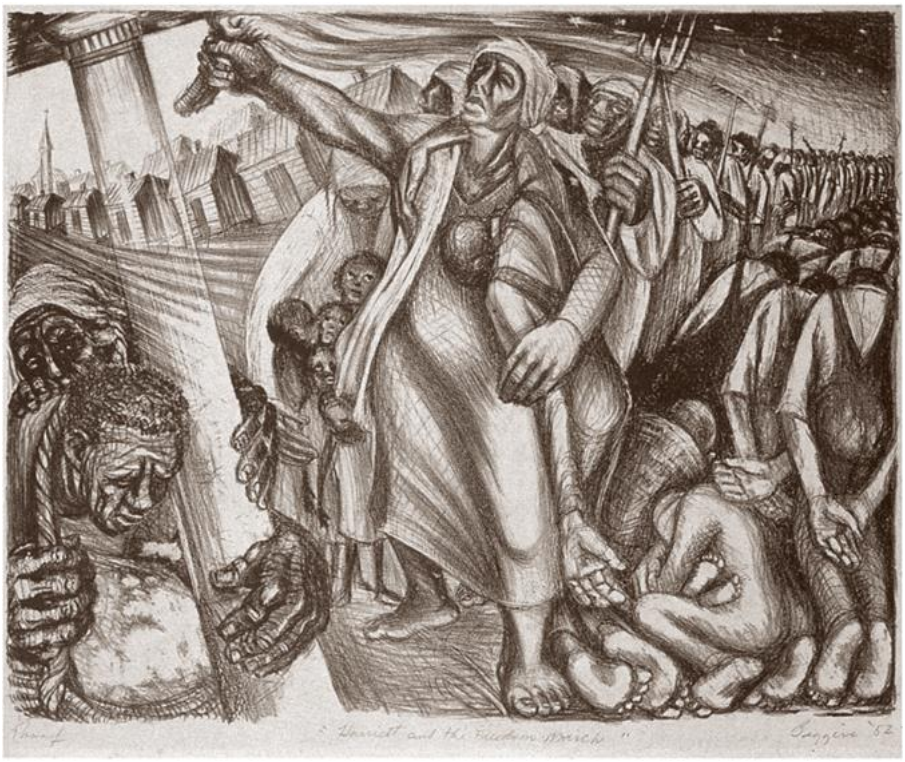

Figure 5.4. John Biggers, *Harriet and the Freedom March,* 1952, pencil drawing on paper, in Theisen, *A Life on Paper,* 44.

Figure 5.5. John Biggers, *Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education,* 1953, colour sketch conté crayon tempera on paper, in Theisen, *A Life on Paper,* 45.

A sketch from 1952, which Biggers titled *Harriet and the Freedom March* (figure 5.4), portrays Tubman as Moses leading an endless stream of people behind her, with an empty left hand and the torch of fire in her right to guide their way. However, a completed sketch of the mural from 1953 (figure 5.5) shows that Biggers decided to add the rifle to Tubman's left hand. It is unclear why Biggers decided to include a rifle in the final design, but his decision clearly demonstrates that the artist wanted to emphasise Tubman's use of armed self-defence and highlight her militancy. Indeed, in his doctoral dissertation, which was based on this mural, Biggers wrote that he wanted to create Tubman as "a female figure of Herculean strength and power, yet full of human emotion […] she would lead broken and enslaved humanity in a freedom march against barriers that restricted them all."[46] Moreover, when reflecting on the project in 1978, Biggers names the Tubman in his mural "General Moses," demonstrating his desire to portray her multi-faceted activism on the Underground Railroad and in the Civil War.[47]

Johnson, Catlett, and Biggers's depictions of an armed Tubman are important portrayals of her militancy, with these representations emphasising her use of armed self-defence. However, it is important to note that not everyone accepted such militant portrayals of an armed Tubman, as demonstrated by an incident that occurred while Biggers was painting his mural. In 1978, Biggers recalled that when he was "giving [Tubman] powerful hands and feet to fit the title General Moses," an observing Black woman "told Biggers he must stop the painting" because "the images of the slave and especially of Harriet Tubman disgraced Negro womanhood."[48] While progress on the mural was halted for one week "until YWCA officials convinced the group that the depiction of black women had value," this instance demonstrates

[46] Biggers undertook extensive research on the history of Black women when designing this mural, so much so that his mentor Lowenfeld suggested he use the project as the basis of his doctoral dissertation. John Biggers, "The Negro Woman in American Life and Education, A Mural Presentation," (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1954), 55. Alivia J. Wardlaw, *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, in association with Harry N. Abrams 1995), 43.
[47] John Biggers and Carroll Simms, *Black Art in Houston, The Texas Southern University Experience: Presenting the Art of Biggers, Simms, and their Students* (College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press, 1978), 62.
[48] Biggers and Simms, *Black Art in Houston,* 62.

the conflict surrounding the depiction of "General Moses," with several Black women determining Biggers's mural to be an "unacceptable" depiction of Black female heroism.[49] The criticisms of Tubman's portrayal reflect the nuances of Black activism during this period, with the Black freedom struggle consisting of a blend of litigation, nonviolent direct action, and armed resistance. Indeed, Biggers's mural explores these varying forms of activism through the mural, with Truth's list of demands representing litigation, Tubman's organised stream of enslaved people symbolising direct action, and her rifle reflecting armed self-defence.

Moreover, this conflict highlights the importance of respectability politics to many Black people, especially Black women, during this period. As noted in Chapter One, the politics of respectability was practised by many Black people in the early to mid-twentieth century to counter racist stereotypes and structures, with many using hegemonic standards of respectability, such as good education, hard work, and smart clothing, to stimulate racial uplift. However, the idea of assimilation that respectability politics promoted led to what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham determined as "an insistence upon Blacks' conformity to the dominant society's norms of morals and manners."[50] Indeed, this focus on respectability frequently led to divisions and tensions within Black communities, with middle-class Black people "policing" the actions of the working-class. Such tensions are evident in the Black women's criticisms of Biggers's mural, with his portrayal of Tubman, with her large, knotted hands holding a rifle, going against their idea of an "acceptable" and "respectable" Black woman. Indeed, while Biggers's portrayal highlights Tubman's militancy and the hardships she faced as an enslaved Black woman and an activist, this depiction contradicts the traditional gender roles espoused by respectability politics, whereby Black women did not perform manual labourer or become

[49] Biggers and Simms, *Black Art in Houston,* 62.
[50] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880 – 1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 186 – 187.

involved in armed conflicts, leading several to determine his depiction of Tubman's militancy as "unacceptable."

Concerns that depictions of an armed Tubman were contradicting respectability politics and "unacceptable" are also evident in Jacob Lawrence's portrayal of Tubman in the 1960s. During this period, Lawrence created several representations of Tubman, alongside many artworks that explored the fight for civil rights.[51] Ellen Harkins Wheat notes how Lawrence's artworks in the 1960s manifest his "most overt social protest," with the artist exploring issues such as school integration, police brutality, protest marches, and interracial marriages.[52] While Patricia Hills argues that Lawrence did not think of himself as a political organiser, his position as a prominent Black artist meant that he was naturally called upon to lend his name and support to civil rights organisations, such as SNCC for whom Lawrence led a fund-raising art committee in 1963.[53] Indeed, at an exhibit of *Harriet and the Promised Land,* Lawrence commented that the Civil Rights Movement "is a very good thing" and when asked about the relationship between Tubman's struggles and the injustices of the 1960s, he stated that "it's a continuous struggle. I don't see any separation between then and now."[54] Despite stating that he felt "very excited" about *Harriet and the Promised Land,* Lawrence received criticism for his portrayal of Tubman. In an interview with Jackson Frost in 2000, Lawrence commented how several people disliked the large, knotted hands that he gave Tubman in panel seven, but he stated: "I wrote back and said, 'Well, you must remember she was not on a picnic,

[51] Alongside the artworks discussed in this chapter, Lawrence created *Escape* (1967), which was a prelude to *Through Forest, Through Rivers, Up Mountains* that was included in *Harriet and the Promised Land.*
[52] Ellen Harkins Wheat, "Jacob Lawrence and the Legacy of Harlem," *Archives of American Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (1986): 23.
[53] Patricia Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," in *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence,* ed. Peter T. Nesbett and Michelle DuBois (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 181 – 182.
[54] Lawrence in Clayton Willis, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings on Exhibit," *New York Amsterdam News,* January 20, 1968, 16.

you know.'"[55] He also told one New England librarian that "if you had walked in the fields, stopping for short periods to be replenished by underground stations; if you couldn't feel secure until you reached the Canadian border, you, too, madam, would look grotesque and ugly."[56] Lawrence told Frost that some people wanted Tubman to have beautiful hands, like those of a middle class woman, rather than those of an enslaved woman whose labour was exploited. He stated that the individuals making these complaints would be the same people "at that time who would not have accepted Harriet Tubman," to which Frost remarked "we want to see things always comfortably," rather than for what they are.[57]

The criticisms that Biggers and Lawrence received over their depictions of Tubman are significant, as they demonstrate that her role as a militant armed conductor whose labour was exploited was not wholly accepted by Black communities, with respectability politics greatly influencing their view of how Black female heroes should be portrayed. However, it is important to highlight that these ideas of respectability are problematic, as they propose that Black heroes should look respectable, feminine, beautiful, and perfect, rather than masculine, ugly, and flawed. Such suggestions insinuate that Tubman's enslavement should be made over into something respectable and beautiful, rather than highlighted as the oppressive condition that it was. Lawrence criticised such thinking, remarking that although "my productions do not express the conventionally beautiful, there is always an effort to express the universal beauty of man's continuous struggle to lift his social position."[58] The sanitising of history also comes up again in the Frost interview when Lawrence discussed the censorship that he faced in the creation of *Harriet and the Promised Land.* Lawrence wanted to include an image of an armed

[55] Panel seven depicts Tubman as an enslaved woman scrubbing the floors of a house. Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000. Lawrence in Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 116.
[56] Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence*, 116.
[57] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000.
[58] Jacob Lawrence, "The Artist Responds," *The Crisis,* August-September 1970, 266.

Tubman in this children's book, but the publishers felt such a portrayal was inappropriate.[59] Lawrence commented that he "was advised not to use a gun, because somehow the profession [children's literature publishing] would not look upon this kindly because it was an aggressive instrument, that's how it was interpreted."[60] Lawrence explained that he "wasn't happy doing that, but I did it," and that as a result he "did another work on the same subject with a gun because she did carry a gun."[61] Frost commented that this censorship was part of white society's "ever present cleaning up of history to make it more gentle," to which Lawrence simply replied "that's right."[62]

The censorship that Lawrence faced when creating *Harriet and the Promised Land* led the artist to create three artworks of Tubman employing armed self-defence, namely *Daybreak – A Time to Rest* (1967), *Ten Fugitives* (1967) and *Forward* (1968).[63] Indeed, Lawrence's belief that Tubman's portrayal should reflect the hardships that she endured and not in an idealised, sanitised way is highlighted in *Daybreak* (figure 5.6). In this painting, the artist depicts Tubman laying on the ground with a man, woman, and baby laying at her head. As in *Harriet and the Promised Land*, Lawrence depicts Tubman with large, knotted feet, using fine light lines and shadows to show cracks and damage across the feet. By placing her feet at the centre of the painting, Lawrence demands that the viewer contemplate the suffering that these feet endured both during slavery and on the arduous trips North. The gruelling nature of these journeys is reflected in the three figures in the background, who appear exhausted after their long trip. As day breaks, Tubman looks up at these three figures protectively, with one hand clasping the rifle in her lap to suggest that she is prepared to defend herself and the group at a moment's

[59] Lawrence in Willis, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings on Exhibit," 16.
[60] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000.
[61] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000.
[62] Jacob Lawrence, interview by Jackson Frost, April 2000.
[63] Lawrence also created *Harriet Tubman* in 1975, which depicts an armed Tubman helping fugitives escape across mountains, and *Memorabilia* in 1988, which features a small image of Tubman raising a rifle above her head.

notice. Through this painting, Lawrence not only highlights Tubman's use of armed self-defence, but also forces the viewer to consider the physical toll that slavery and the Underground Railroad had on Tubman's body, therein challenging the idea that Black heroes should look conventionally beautiful.

Figure 5.6. Jacob Lawrence, *Daybreak – A Time to Rest,* 1967, tempera on board, 76.2cm x 61cm, National Gallery of Art.

Figure 5.7. Jacob Lawrence, *Ten Fugitives*, 1967, tempera on board, 62.2cm x 92.7cm, Private Collection.

Lawrence's second artwork depicting an armed Tubman from 1967, titled *Ten Fugitives* (figure 5.7), shows the conductor holding a rifle as she leads a group of enslaved people across mountainous terrain. Two shirtless men appear either side of the group, with the man on the left holding chickens that will provide the group with sustenance on their journey North. Babies are cradled in the arms of their mothers, while Tubman stands in the centre of the group holding the rifle and looking over her shoulder towards the shirtless man on the right. This man appears tense and anxious, with his arms stretched straight by his sides and his fingers splayed, almost as if he has been caught doing something that he should not have been. This feeling is exacerbated by Tubman's appraising stare and the anxious looks on the faces of the other individuals, with their worried eyes and downturned mouths, suggesting that something troubling is occurring. The next moments of this scene appear to play out in *Forward* (figure 5.8).[64]

[64] Patricia Hills states that *Forward* was to be included in *Harriet and the Promised Land*, yet the differing composition between the artworks in the series and this painting suggests that *Forward* was perhaps inspired by the discarded image from this series, rather than the image itself. Hills, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings during the Protest Years of the 1960s," 187.

Figure 5.8. Jacob Lawrence, *Forward,* 1967, tempera on Masonite panel, 60.6cm x 91.3cm, North Carolina Museum of Art.

The artist once again depicts Tubman on a journey North with a group of enslaved individuals against a mountainous landscape. However, contrary to the previous two artworks, this painting depicts Tubman actively using a pistol against one of her own. Tubman stands in the centre of the image, with members of her group behind her and one shirtless man in front. She pushes this man forward with her left hand and holds a pistol by her right side. This man, who is clothed identically to the man in *Ten Fugitives,* covers his face with one hand as if in despair and his body leans back towards Tubman, as if he is reluctant to journey forward. This image references a scene from Bradford's biography, whereby Tubman described how she would insist that members of her group continue the journey North. Bradford tells the reader how:

> Sometimes members of her party would become exhausted, foot-sore, and bleeding, and declare they could not go on, they must stay where they dropped down, and die; others would think a voluntary return to slavery better than being overtaken and carried back and would insist upon returning; then there was no remedy but force; the revolver

> carried by this bold and daring pioneer would be pointed at their heads. 'Dead niggers tell no tales,' said Harriet; 'Go on or die;' and so she compelled them to drag their weary limbs on their northward journey.[65]

Several articles from nineteenth-century newspapers also highlight this moment in Tubman's life, with the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* proclaiming in 1869 that Tubman "points her revolver unflinchingly at those of her party who, exhausted and footsore, lag behind disheartened."[66] However, this scene was not visually depicted until Lawrence created *Forward* in 1968. Indeed, while some representations, such as Mike Alewitz's *Move or Die* (2000), allude to this moment in Tubman's life, there are none that specifically depict this scene other than Lawrence's *Forward*. While Lawrence never stated an outright endorsement of armed self-defence, his support of SNCC in 1963 suggests that he was not opposed to this tactic, as from this year onwards SNCC began rejecting nonviolence and embracing armed self-defence.[67] His depiction of Tubman employing armed self-defence and his comment that "I don't see any separation" between the struggle against slavery and the Civil Rights Movement indicates his belief in a continuation of activism, including armed self-defence.[68]

Through *Forward*, Lawrence presents Tubman as someone who was willing to engage in armed conflict in the fight for equality. Indeed, Lawrence offers a more militant and dramatic portrayal of Tubman than those by Johnson, Catlett, and Biggers, as he not only shows Tubman using the gun, but depicts her employing it against a Black man from her own group. Several scholars, including Richard Powell and Celeste Marie Bernier, note that this artwork provided

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[65] Bradford, *Scenes*, 24 – 25.
[66] The article publicised the publication of Bradford's biography. It also highlights how Tubman helped a Black man escape enslavement and wrote that Tubman "cries to Nalle's rescuers in Troy, as she clasps him in her strong arms – "Drag us out! Drag him to the river! *Drown him*, but *don't let them have him!*". "Literary," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 23, 1869, 3.
[67] Akinyele O. Umoja, "The Ballot and the Bullet: A Comparative Analysis of Armed Resistance in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 4 (1999): 559.
[68] Lawrence in Willis, "Jacob Lawrence's Paintings on Exhibit," 16.

a "rallying cry to grassroots activism" in the 1960s, with the title *Forward* commanding Black people to continue their fight for equality.[69] Indeed, Lawrence's artwork highlights the rising tensions within the Black freedom struggle in the late 1960s and provides an important metaphor that some people need to be forced to recognise the multiple ways in which they were oppressed. Furthermore, the creation of this artwork in this period is significant when we consider the ideas of masculinity and femininity at play in the painting. Bernier contends that Lawrence contrasts "a weakened spectacle of black masculinity with an idealised vision of black female heroism," yet this analysis is limited, with Bernier failing to clarify what "an idealised version of black female heroism" is and for whom it is "ideal."[70] I argue that in depicting a Black woman threatening a Black man with a gun, Lawrence challenges traditional gender conventions espoused by respectability politics and confronts the notion that Black men are the sole protectors of Black people, and especially Black women.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Black men attempted to reclaim and assert their role as the protector of Black women that was denied to them by white men during slavery. Indeed, Jim Cullen notes that emancipation marked a "watershed for black manhood," as Black men gained the right to bear arms and defend themselves and their families.[71] The racial terror and lynchings of the 1880s and 1890s represented, as highlighted by Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "the subjugation of young [Black] manhood," with rising calls for Black men to arm and defend themselves against white violence.[72] These calls for Black male resistance continued into the twentieth century, with W.E.B. Du Bois criticising Black men for failing to defend themselves from lynchings and Marcus Garvey urging Black men to regain

[69] In a video talking about *Forward*, Powell describes Tubman's arms as "the symbols of pushing forward of propelling one who might be afraid into something that is the unknown." Richard Powell in The North Carolina Museum of Art, "Forward by Jacob Lawrence," Accessed March 1, 2021, https://learn.ncartmuseum.org/resources/forward-by-jacob-lawrence/. Bernier, 340.
[70] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 339 – 340.
[71] Jim Cullen, "'I's a Man Now:' Gender and African American Men," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 77.
[72] Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (Project Gutenberg, 2005) 17, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/14975/pg14975-images.html.

their manhood by responding to white violence with more violence.[73] Such views led Deborah Gray White to argue that the 1920s revealed that racial progress rested on Black men's willingness to fight for justice and their ability to protect Black women.[74]

As the fight for equality progressed into the mid-twentieth century, some Black men embraced nonviolence as a form of resistance, while others struggled to accept it and regarded it as degrading to their manhood.[75] Peter Ling highlights how King's nonviolence was denounced by some as "unmanly," with civil rights activist Robert Williams criticising this method as "turn-the-other-cheekism" that failed to protect Black women and instead endorsing a more masculinist defence of dependents.[76] Indeed, scholars note how militant Black activism, including armed self-defence, became a way for many Black men to affirm their masculinity and manliness. Tyson argues that manhood and violence became intertwined, with the latter affirming the former, and Farmer notes that during the early 1960s, there was great pressure on Black men to adopt militant tactics and violence when challenging white supremacy, rather than peaceful protests.[77] Moreover, Simon Wendt argues that armed resistance and violence during the 1960s became a symbolic form of defiance that served to affirm and nurture militant Black manhood.[78] In analysing the Deacons for Defence and Justice, Wendt demonstrates that Black men's rejection of nonviolence in favour of armed self-defence was grounded in ideas of masculinity, with Jonesboro Deacon co-founder Earnest Thomas stating that it was "not natural to let someone destroy your wife, your kids and your property and not prevent it. If this means

[73] Simon Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men": Violence, Non-violence and Black Manhood in the Civil Rights Era," *Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 547.
[74] Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defence of Themselves 1894 – 1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 140.
[75] Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men," 548.
[76] Peter Ling, "Gender and generation: Manhood at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement,* ed. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith (New York: Routledge, 2013), 113 – 114.
[77] Ashley Farmer, "All the Progress to Be Made Will Be Made by Maladjusted Negroes": Mae Mallory, Black Women's Activism, and the Making of Black Radical Tradition," *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 519. Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 128.
[78] Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men," 549 – 553.

battle, then that's the way it has to be."[79] Wendt also highlights that, although some Black women armed themselves to protect their families at home, they were not permitted to join Black protective units.[80] He maintains that this exclusion demonstrates that Black women arming themselves was only deemed "acceptable" in certain situations, such as prolonged periods of racist violence in which Black men could not provide protection for the whole community.[81]

In this context, Lawrence's painting presents a challenge to the notion that armed self-defence was only "acceptable" for Black women to perform in certain circumstances, such as to defend their homes, rather than in combative situations. In doing so, Lawrence confronts the idea that armed resistance was the sole prerogative of Black men, which confronts the extent to which this form of resistance affirmed their masculinity. By portraying an armed Black woman threatening a Black man, Lawrence disputes the supposed inherent masculinity of this activism and highlights the fact that Black women engaged in armed self-defence and violent resistance. Furthermore, by presenting a Black woman in the role of a militant armed leader, Lawrence's painting confronts those Black men who saw their activism and leadership in the Black freedom struggle as affirming their masculinity. In 1974, Angela Davis, a strong supporter of armed self-defence, criticised the fact that many Black men confused "their political activity with an assertion of their maleness."[82] She argued that these men saw "Black manhood as something separate from Black womanhood" and "Black women as a threat to their attainment of manhood," especially those who work to become leaders in their own right.[83] In highlighting

[79] Earnest Thomas in Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men," 550.
[80] Wendt references a Council of Federated Organisations volunteer who wrote of encountering a Mrs Fairly, who told him "you go to sleep; let me fight for you" while carrying a rifle and pistol. SNCC worker Jo Ann Robinson recalls that her host once slept with a gun under her pillow but replaced it with an axe when she nearly shot her neighbour's son. Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men," 551.
[81] Wendt, "They Finally Found Out that We Really Are Men," 552.
[82] In a speech that was replayed in a 2013 documentary, Davis stated that the violence enacted on Black people "forces us to exercise our constitutional right to bear arms and to use those arms to defend our community, our families, and ourselves." Davis in Shola Lynch, dir. *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners* (2013; Realside Productions). Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 162.
[83] Davis, *An Autobiography*, 162.

Tubman's militancy and her willingness to confront Black men, Lawrence disrupts the "unfortunate syndrome" that Davis identified and broadens understandings of Black women's activism and heroism in the Black freedom struggle.[84]

A Militant Black Feminist Icon

Davis's objections to the views of these Black men were common among Black women in the 1960s and 1970s, with many Black women during this period frustrated that their grievances and triple oppression were not being tackled by most Black organisations. Indeed, scholars such as Paula Giddings, Madhu Dubey, and Benita Roth highlight how the activism of the 1960s, especially Black nationalism, was imbued with masculinist ideals.[85] Dubey notes how many Black men, such as Eldridge Cleaver, Calvin Hernton, and Nathan Hare, accepted the Black matriarch as purported by the 1965 Moynihan report and criticised Black women for emasculating and controlling Black men.[86] Indeed, Roth and Dubey argue that many Black men reacted to the Moynihan report, which depicted them as the main victims of racial discrimination, by attempting to reinstate the patriarchal family and restrict the roles available to Black women in the movement.[87]

This emphasis on traditional gender roles garnered much criticism from Black feminists, who went on to form their own organisations, such as the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), to tackle the issues they faced head on.[88] These organisations were also

[84] Davis, *An Autobiography*, 162.
[85] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam, 1985), 314. Madhu Dubey, *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 16. Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.
[86] Dubey, *Black Women Novelists*, 17 – 18.
[87] Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 85 – 86. Dubey, *Black Women Novelists*, 18.
[88] The TWWA was founded in 1968 as a subdivision of SNCC, with Black women within SNCC (such as Frances Beal and Mae Jackson) establishing this organisation to tackle sexism within the Black freedom struggle. Ashley Farmer, "The Third World Women's Alliance, Cuba, and the Exchange of Ideas," *Black Perspectives*, April 7, 2017, https://www.aaihs.org/the-third-world-womens-alliance-cuba-and-the-exchange-of-ideas/.

established because many Black women felt that the emerging white women's liberation movement did not speak to their needs. In the 1970s, Black feminists criticised this movement's preoccupation with issues that largely affected middle class white women. In the 1970s, Elizabeth F. Hood argued that the white women's movement failed to identify the problems facing Black women and Toni Morrison maintained that Black women were distrustful of the movement because "they look at white women and see them as the enemy – for they know that racism is not confined to white men."[89] This distrust led Black women to forge their own movement, which, as Eric McDuffie argues, allowed Black women to formulate anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist transnational Black feminisms that rejected the universal "sisterhood" of the white women's movement.[90]

Amidst this proliferation of Black feminist thought, Truth emerged as a militant Black feminist hero. While depictions of an armed Tubman do not completely disappear from the 1970s and 1980s, their creation decreases as representations of the militant public speaker Truth emerge.[91] As Black feminism flourished during this period, Truth became a prominent militant Black feminist icon, with Black feminists emphasising the militancy of Truth's orality to explore the triple oppression that Black women faced. This embracing of Truth as a militant Black feminist hero over Tubman is significant, as it further demonstrates how Truth is a more malleable heroic figure than Tubman. Indeed, while Lawrence's *Forward* presents an important challenge to the notion that Black men are the sole armed protectors of Black people, the fact that armed self-defence was largely unavailable to Black women means this challenge is limited. This combined with the consistent framing of Tubman's heroism through the masculine

[89] Elizabeth F. Hood, "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation," *The Black Scholar* 9, no. 7 (1978): 54. Toni Morrison, "What the Black Woman thinks about Women's Lib," *New York Times,* August 22, 1971, 14.
[90] Eric McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 99.
[91] Depictions of an armed Tubman in the 1970s include Lawrence's artwork *Harriet Tubman* (1975), Catlett's linocut *Harriet* (1975) and Mary Patten's mural *Douglass Street Mural* (1976), and in the 1980s include Lawrence's artwork *Memorabilia* (1988) and Wilfred Stroud's mural *From Africa to America* (1988).

lens of Moses explains why many Black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s turned to Truth as a hero who represented Black women and their activism. Many Black feminists during this period highlight Truth's militancy by emphasising her use of orality and the consciousness-raising aspect of her activism, as these were crucial to Black feminist activism in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, one of the most striking and militant aspects of Truth's activism is that she was often speaking to white audiences who were sympathetic to Black people's cause and believed themselves innocent yet were complicit in an unjust system. Truth strove to enlighten these people and show them that their complicity only served to perpetuate Black people's oppression. From the 1970s onwards, many Black feminist activists, such as June Jordan, practiced consciousness-raising and used Truth's image and words to similarly disrupt the minds of those who believed themselves to be innocent in attempt to corrode the social order that oppressed Black women. Thus, representations from this period further demonstrate how Truth is capable of embodying different types of heroic behaviours and attitudes, which is crucial in enabling Black feminists to challenge dominant understandings of heroism and to create an alternative heroic lineage.

While the previous chapter noted how Truth was portrayed as a preacher from the 1940s to the 1960s, this role changed in the 1970s and 1980s, with greater emphasis placed on Truth's position as a Black feminist icon. Nell Irvin Painter argues that during this period, Truth's identity became centred around Gage's report of the "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech, with secular feminists resenting religion's historic oppression of women. She maintains that they turned Truth from a "patient Christian" into a Black woman who "needed to be angry," likening her to "a nineteenth-century female Black Panther."[92] While Truth's portrayal certainly changes during the 1970s and 1980s, categorising her as an "angry" Black woman is problematic, as such an image carries several negative connotations that determine Truth to be bad-tempered,

[92] Painter, *Sojourner Truth* 272.

hostile, and aggressive. Rather than turning Truth into an "angry" Black woman, I argue that feminists emphasise the militancy of Truth's orality by highlighting the ways in which her words disrupted the political and social status quo. They portray Truth as a militant Black feminist and use her image and especially her words to emphasise the continued oppression of Black women and their unrelenting fight for equality. Indeed, the "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech becomes a source of great inspiration during this period, with Truth's words about oppression and the denial of womanhood resonating with many Black women in the mid-to-late twentieth century, leading several Black women to highlight the continued race, gender, and class struggles from the nineteenth century to present day.

As noted in the previous chapter, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed an increase in literary and performative representations of Truth, with these forms truly capturing the importance of orality and performance to Truth's activism. Black female writers, such as Jordan, recognised how Truth's activism was rooted in her preaching, alongside portraying her as a militant Black feminist icon. From the 1960s to the 1990s, renowned poet and essayist Jordan produced works that examined issues facing Black people and especially Black women, writing about her "status as a Black woman who is twice kin to the despised majority of all the human life that there is."[93] Jordan's 1978 poem "Sojourner Truth" explores ideas around the oppression of Black women, with the poem telling the story of Truth's determination to challenge white supremacy and campaign for freedom. Jordan writes that Truth "put her body on the track" and yelled "it's me […] 'And yes,/ I walked here but I ain walkin back [sic]" to stop the "all white" trolley car.[94] Jordan uses the train as a metaphor for white supremacy, demonstrating how Truth used her words and her body to disrupt its progress and force white society to take notice of her,

[93] June Jordan, *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (New York: Basic/Civitas Books, 2002), 270 – 271.
[94] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979, Box 65, Folder 38, Papers of June Jordan, 1936 – 2002 (inclusive, 1954 – 2002 (bulk). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/archival_objects/2558965.

therein raising their consciousnesses. Indeed, by depicting Truth as a determined, militant Black female activist, Jordan creates an alternative heroic lineage that includes Truth's consciousness-raising as a heroic attribute.

Jordan further highlights Truth's militancy by using repetitive rhyming and Black English vernacular to demonstrate how Truth defied traditional race, gender, and class conventions. She writes that Truth was "talkin loud to any crowd/ talkin bad insteada sad [sic]" and that "Sojourner had to be just crazy/tellin all that kinda truth [sic]."[95] Indeed, Jordan states that "If she had somewhere to go she said/*I'll ride/* jim crow or no/ she said *I'll go*/ just like the lady/ that she was in all the knowing darkness/ of her pride/ she said *I'll ride*/ she said *I'll talk*/ she said *A Righteous Mouth*/ *ain nothin you should hide* [sic, emphasis in original]."[96] In portraying Truth as a proud Black woman who had nothing to hide and who was willing to defy Jim Crow, Jordan depicts her as a militant Black female activist whose "righteous mouth" would protest the truth in the fight against white supremacy. Moreover, Jordan's use of Black English not only highlights Truth's position as an uneducated, working-class Black woman, but also emphasises the poem's militancy. While Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan notes how language can be used as a tool of empowerment, Charles Green and Ian Isidore Smart argue that the development of Black vernacular has been a crucial form of defiance and resistance.[97] Considering "Sojourner Truth" was included in "In the Spirit of Sojourner Truth," a collection of performances that aimed to regain control of Black women's histories from dominant white discourse, Jordan's use of such language is crucial in heightening Truth's portrayal as a militant Black feminist.

[95] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.
[96] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.
[97] Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Ebonics as an Ethically Sound Discourse: A Solution, Not a Problem," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 18 (1998): 140. Charles Green and Ian Isidore Smart, "Ebonics as Cultural Resistance," *Peace Review* 9, no. 4 (1997): 521.

Another Black writer who recognised Truth's role as a preacher and portrayed her as a militant Black feminist icon was Shirlene Holmes. In *Ain't I A Woman* from 1983, Holmes frequently references Truth's involvement in women's rights campaigns and implores the audience to continue the fight against Black women's oppression. She tells the women "don't let love chain your feet sisters and most of all don't let it chain your mind" and "don't give up the fight. Take off them rose-tinted glasses! Sisters, we got a war to wage let's not fight ourselves."[98] By stating "we got a war to wage," Holmes presents Truth as a militant Black activist who was willing to disrupt traditional gender, race, and class conventions and engage in conflict to overcome oppression. Moreover, Holmes further highlights Truth's militancy by discussing her "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech from 1851. Holmes explains how the audience at the Women's Rights Convention "didn't want me to speak" and that "they was scared I would start a ruckus."[99] Nevertheless, she describes how Truth turned to the audience and made her speech, in which she repeatedly declared "and ain't I a woman!"[100] Notably, Holmes turns Truth's question "Ar'n't I a woman," as recorded by Frances Gage, into the statement "ain't I a woman," drawing inspiration from bell hooks's 1981 book. In using the statement rather than the question, Holmes presents Truth as demanding her right to be recognised as a woman, rather than asking for it, and emphasises her militant public speaking.

Jordan and Holmes's literary works demonstrate the effectiveness of using performative forms to explore Truth's activism, with these representations highlighting her militancy and allowing consideration of how Truth's words translate to the lives of Black women in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, with literature and performances enabling Black women writers to truly capture the importance of Truth's orality to her militant activism and highlight the importance of the

[98] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982, Box 20, Folder 8, Shirlene Holmes papers. Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta – Fulton Public Library System, Atlanta. https://aafa.galileo.usg.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/43123.
[99] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.
[100] Shirlene Holmes, "Plays, "Ain't I a Woman!" (script)," 1982.

oral tradition in passing down memory, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a significant decrease in visual representations of Truth. While there are a few artistic representations of Truth during this period, these portrayals largely focus on the long history of the Black activism and include Truth's portrait alongside other Black activists (such as Tubman) as a symbol of this legacy, rather than highlighting her individual activism.[101] This trend partly continues into the 1990s, yet we begin to see a rise in artistic representations with *Sojourner Truth* by Tina Allen (1999), *Sojourner* by Elizabeth Catlett (1999), and *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* by Faith Ringgold (1991).[102] While Ringgold's quilt references how Truth "spoke up brilliantly for women's rights during slavery," the artist explores Truth's militant orality and her consciousness-raising in the artwork *And Women?* from 2009 (figure 5.9).[103] This image was created as part of Ringgold's *The Declaration of Freedom and Independence* series, which highlights the hypocrisies of the Declaration of Independence through six images by exploring "its gender-specific message of freedom and its hypocritical silence on the subject of slavery."[104] Ringgold dedicated the series "to the American People who in 2008 elected our first Black President," commenting that "my intention in these illustrations is to tell the story of the forefathers' declaration of independence […] along with the African American struggle for freedom and equality that one day we hope will become an undeniable reality."[105]

[101] Visual representations of Truth from the 1970s and 1980s include Charles Freeman's untitled mural (1970), Angelo di Benedetto's *Justice Through the Ages* mural (1978), Wilfred Stroud's *From Africa to America* mural (1988) and Mike Alewitz's *Pathfinder Mural* (1989).
[102] Murals that include Truth alongside other Black activists as a commemoration of the legacy of Black activism include Pontella and Deborah Mason's *Baltimore Wall of Pride* (1992), Selma Brown, Susan Cervantes, and Ronnie Goodman's *The Great Cloud of Witnesses* (1992), Pontella Mason's *Ancestral Roots* (1999) and Woodrow Nash's untitled mural (1999).
[103] Faith Ringgold, *The French Collection: Part One* (New York: Being My Own Woman Press, 1992).
[104] Ringgold dedicated the illustrations in this series to the political events of 2008, with the election of the President Barack Obama. Tanya Sheehan, "Faith Ringgold: Forging Freedom and Declaring Independence," in *Declaration of Independence: Fifty Years of Art by Faith Ringgold,* ed. Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin (New Brunswick: State University of Jew Jersey, 2009), 10 – 11.
[105] Faith Ringgold, "Declaration of Freedom and Independence Statement," in *Declaration of Independence: Fifty Years of Art by Faith Ringgold,* ed. Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin (New Brunswick: State University of Jew Jersey, 2009), 22.

Figure 5.9. Faith Ringgold, *And Women?* 2000, colour serigraph, 38.1cm x 55.88cm, Pennsylvania Academic of the Fine Arts.

Each of the six images, which Ringgold brought together into one large quilt, was divided into two halves. The left image depicts scenes from the American Revolution in the lead up to the Declaration of Independence and is juxtaposed by the image on the right, which illustrates Black history from slavery to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, with the comparisons highlighting the hypocrisy of this supposedly sacred document. *And Women?* is the second image in the series and depicts Truth's portrait on the right-hand side with the text from Gage's "Ar'n't I A Woman" report superimposed onto her monochrome image. As an almost mirror image of Truth, Abigail Adams is depicted on the left-hand side, with her portrait also covered with an extract from a letter that she sent to her husband in 1776. In this letter, she asks John Adams to consider the rights of women when drafting the Declaration of Independence, writing "I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors."[106] By placing these two female voices from different

[106] Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776, in *Adam Family Papers: An Electronic Archive. Massachusetts Historical Society*. https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa.

historical contexts side by side, Ringgold highlights how the Declaration of Independence disregarded all women, no matter their race or class, which Tanya Sheehan argues allowed the artist to interrupt "that 'sacred' text for her own political ends."[107] Moreover, in placing these texts side by side, Ringgold highlights the triple oppression of Black women by reminding the viewer that middle-class white women like Adams were often not fighting for the rights of enslaved or working-class Black women. When Truth asks "ain't I a woman," it is as though she is asking Adams if she, a working-class Black woman, is included in her request to John that he "remember the ladies." Indeed, by juxtaposing Truth's simple clothing and her statement that she "ploughed and planted and gathered […] and no man could heed me" with Adams' extravagant clothing and her use of the word "Ladies," Ringgold emphasises the historical and contemporary tensions between middle-class white women and working-class Black women, noting how the latter's womanhood is routinely denied.

The exploration of class and Black womanhood through Truth's image and words continues into the 2010s and was also explored in the *Ain't I A Woman* mural from 2015 by Jetsonorama and Jess X Chen (figure 5.10). As discussed in Chapter Two, this mural depicts Truth on the screen of a smartphone with an extract of her "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech circling her head like a halo. The mural also features the portraits of two Black women writers Mahogany Browne and T'ai Freedom Ford and extracts from their poems on Black womanhood. Browne's "Black Girl Magic" and Ford's "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance" discuss issues facing Black women and highlight how the oppression that Truth fought survives today. Browne's poem emphasises how Black women "ain't posed to have nothing to say" and can "carry a nation – but never an opinion," while Ford tells of Black women's invisibility, writing that "As black woman i am untitled – nameless."[108]

[107] Sheehan, "Faith Ringgold," 10.
[108] Mahogany Browne, "Black Girl Magic," in Browne, *Black Girl Magic: A Poem,* (Brooklyn: Penmanship Books, 2016). T'ai Freedom Ford, "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance," in *& more black,* ed. T'ai Freedom Ford, (New York: Augry Books, 2019), 14.

Figure 5.10. Jetsonorama and Jess X Chen, *Ain't I A Woman* 2015, wheat paste and acrylic on brick, 72 Franklin Street, Kingston, New York.

Chapter Two argues that this representation challenges the myth of the "superwoman" by highlighting the continued oppression of Black women, with mirror images of Truth and Browne demonstrating that Black women's struggles of the nineteenth century continue today. In doing so, *Ain't I A Woman* also highlights Truth's militancy by emphasising her role as a public speaker who disrupted race, gender, and class conventions in the fight for Black women's equality, therein depicting her as a militant Black feminist.

When compared to Jordan's "Sojourner Truth," this 2015 representation further demonstrates a continuation in the portrayal of Truth as a militant Black feminist who used orality and consciousness-raising to fight oppression and disrupt the social order. Unlike Jordan's poem from 1979, Browne and Ford do not focus on Truth. Nevertheless, all three poets use Truth as a symbol of Black feminism and a proponent of public speaking to explore themes of Black feminism, Black womanhood, Black women's militancy, and their triple oppression. Ford and Jordan highlight the subjugation of Black women's bodies, with the former asking, "What parts of me ain't for sale as woman" and the latter writing that "They said she's Black

and ugly and they said she's really rough."[109] These comments further highlight the denial of Black womanhood, with the ideal of womanhood being codified as white, middle class, and heterosexual. Moreover, Browne and Jordan's poems both emphasise the joys of being a Black woman, with Browne encouraging Black women to "shine," "bloom," "fly," and turn "into a beautiful blk woman [sic]," and Jordan writing "I'm a strong Black woman/ and Thank God!"[110] Both representations also highlight the legacy of Black women's militant orality, with the mirror image of Browne and Truth encouraging the viewer to see the former as continuing the latter's activism as "a beautiful blk woman [sic]" and Jordan's use of the word "I" in her poem applying to both herself in the twentieth century and the nineteenth century activist.

"It's his vision, but it's our wall"

While Truth is highlighted as a militant Black feminist hero, representations of an armed Tubman do not disappear, yet they decrease significantly from the 1980s onwards. In the 1980s, there are two portrayals of Tubman with a rifle, namely Lawrence's artwork *Memorabilia* and Wilfred Stroud's mural *From Africa to America* both from 1988, one depiction in the 1990s, namely Maurice Myron's mural *Last Supper* from 1990, and two in the 2000s, both murals by Mike Alewitz.[111] It is unclear why depictions of an armed Tubman decrease during this period, but it is important to consider the context of the time. With the growing anti-war activism of the 1970s and the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War in 1975, the public began to question the validity of martial heroism, with Simon Wendt arguing that there was a period of contemplation after the war, with people questioning rather than celebrating war heroes.[112] Indeed, Steve Estes

[109] T'ai Freedom Ford, "I Sell the Shadow to Sustain the Substance". June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979.
[110] June Jordan, "Poem: "Sojourner Truth"" 1979. Browne, "Black Girl Magic."
[111] In *Memorabilia,* Lawrence depicts Tubman as a small sculpture, with one arm lifting a rifle above her head, while Stroud's *From Africa to America* and Myron's *Last Supper* imitate Darby's front-piece and show Tubman standing in Civil War-era clothing with a rifle at her side.
[112] Simon Wendt, "Introduction: Reconsidering Military Heroism in American History," in *Warring over Valor: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,* ed. Simon Wendt (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 8.

contends that the My Lai atrocity called into question the image of the morally upright American soldier who defended democracy and freedom abroad.[113] Although this chapter does not discuss Tubman's portrayal as a military war hero, this context is important in thinking about the public's opinions of depicting heroes with guns, with such weapons being symbols of war and conflict. Moreover, a study conducted by Pew Research Centre showed that gun homicides were at an all-time high during the 1970s and 1980s, with research from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicating that between 1980 and 2008 most offenders and victims of gun homicides were Black people.[114]

With this context in mind, artists may have felt it too contentious to highlight Tubman's use of armed self-defence or her involvement in the Civil War through the inclusion of a gun. Such concerns were confirmed by the controversy surrounding Alewitz's 2000 mural design of an armed Tubman parting the Middle Passage in Baltimore, with people criticising the artist's inclusion of a rifle in a public memorial. *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman* was one of five murals that Alewitz created for Baltimore Clayworks, a community-centred ceramics institution that funded the mural project with a $25,000 grant from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation.[115] While the rifle is not directed at a specific individual, as in Lawrence's *Forward,*

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[113] Steve Estes, "My Lai: The Crisis of American Military Heroism in the Vietnam War," in *Warring over Valor: How Race and Gender Shaped American Military Heroism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,* ed. Simon Wendt (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 98 – 99.

[114] Cohn D"Vera, Paul Taylor, Mark Hugo Lopez, Catherine A. Gallagher, Kim Parker, and Kevin T. Maass. *Gun Homicide Rate Down 49% Since 1993 Peak; Public Unaware*. (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Centre, 2013), 2. A study shows that between 1980 and 2008, 51.4% of victims and 56.9% of offenders were Black, with 82.6% of victims and 92.1% of offenders being male. Alexia Cooper and Erica L. Smith. *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980 – 2008* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011), https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf, 12 and 10.

[115] All five murals by Alewitz were to feature Tubman and Baltimore Clayworks chose Alewitz from hundreds of artists across the U.S. Jamie Stiehm claimed that Baltimore Clayworks were awarded the $25,000 grant from the national Millennial Treasures campaign that was launched by Hillary Clinton. However, a letter written to the *Baltimore Sun* by Jannette J. Witmyer, who is a member of the board of Baltimore Clayworks, stated that this was not the case. John Yocca then reported that the grant came from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. Jamie Stiehm, "Tubman Mural with Musket is rejected: Associated Black Charities decides artwork conveys wrong image of office," *Baltimore Sun,* June 14, 2000, https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2000-06-14-0006140061-story.html. Jannette J. Witmyer, "Letter to the *Baltimore Sun," Baltimore Sun,* June 14, 2000. John Yocca, "Abolitionist's Rifle engulfs N. J. Artist in Fray," *Baltimore Sun,* June 13, 2000, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/305.html.

by placing the gun in Tubman's hand, with her finger on the trigger, Alewitz portrays Tubman as engaged in armed resistance. Indeed, through the arming of Tubman and use of Moses imagery, Alewitz blends Tubman into a revolutionary fighter. However, when Alewitz revealed this design for ABC Inc., officials rejected this revolutionary fighter, feeling "it is inappropriate for a piece of artwork depicting guns and violence to be displayed on our wall in Baltimore, which had more than 300 murders last year."[116] With high gun violence in the city in the 1990s, and the majority of gun homicide victims being Black men, Donna Jones Stanley stated that, while ABC Inc., was opposed to censorship, they felt their building's prominence "means we have a lot of responsibility and we take that responsibility very seriously."[117]

Figure 5.11. Mike Alewitz, *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman*, 2000.

Figure 5.12. Mike Alewitz, *Move or Die*, 2000.

[116] Donna Jones Stanley in Yocca, "Abolitionist's Rifle engulfs N. J. Artist in Fray." In the 1990s, murder was rife in the city, with an annual murder rate of over 300 in every year of the decade. Peter Hermann, "Death by Numbers," *Baltimore Sun*, January 3, 1999, https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1999-01-03-9904280932-story.html+&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk.

[117] Stanley in Yocca, "Abolitionist's Rifle engulfs N. J. Artist in Fray." Alize Aufrichtig, Lois Beckett, Jan Diehm, and Jamiles Lartey, "Want to fix gun violence in America? Go local," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2017/jan/09/special-report-fixing-gun-violence-in-america.

When asked to remove the rifle from his design (figure 5.11), Alewitz refused and stated that "I will not disarm Harriet Tubman."[118] In response to officials' objections to an armed Tubman, the artist said "it's like you want to see wolves in the wild – but without teeth."[119] After it became clear that an agreement could not be reached between ABC Inc. and Alewitz, the board officially rejected his mural, with Stanley maintaining "it's his vision, but it's our wall."[120] Baltimore Clayworks' community programs co-ordinator Blaise DePaolo stated that the organisation would continue to support Alewitz and his design and hoped to find another wall for his mural. However, Alewitz never found another wall and instead, turned his design into a portable mural titled *Move or Die* (figure 5.12) that toured the U.S. as part of his project *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman.*[121]

The Alewitz controversy is an important example of how Tubman's militancy and her use of armed resistance has been represented, sanitised, and deemed unacceptable, with Sernett contending that it demonstrates how Americans largely disagree over how Tubman should be remembered.[122] Indeed, the fact that Alewitz could not find another wall for his design suggests that others were also reluctant to depict an armed Tubman at this time. Nevertheless, while some people supported ABC Inc.'s rejection of the mural, such as white writer Jamie Steihm, others criticised the decision. Black writer and Baltimore Clayworks member Jannette J. Witmyer rejects Steihm's assessment that the mural design was "a racially loaded portrait of Harriet Tubman," instead arguing that Alewitz's mural "provoked thought, commentary and questions, and resulted in a rare and authentic dialogue."[123] In an article for *Reason*, Sara Rimensnyder notes the hypocrisy of denying Tubman a gun when "public parks across America

[118] Mike Alewitz, "Statement by Mike Alewitz: For Immediate Release," *Hartford Web Publishing*, June 14, 2000, http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/308.html.
[119] Mike Alewitz in Yocca, "Abolitionist's Rifle engulfs N. J. Artist in Fray."
[120] Stiehm, "Tubman Mural with Musket is rejected." Witmyer, "Letter to the *Baltimore Sun*."
[121] Alewitz's mural project *The Dreams of Harriet Tubman* featured *Move or Die*, *Education for All*, *Monument for Harriet Tubman*, and *The Creation of Wealth*, the latter of which also depicted Frederick Douglass.
[122] Sernett, *Harriet Tubman*, 74.
[123] Stiehm, "Tubman Mural with Musket is rejected."

are littered with larger-than-life statues of war heroes, most of them carrying guns."[124] Indeed, Julianne Malveaux comments that Black people are "woefully under represented in our nation's statuary" and, in comments that are similar to Lawrence's, argues that "there is nothing funny about this story, about society's tendency to whitewash black history, to make it warm, fuzzy, and comfortable, instead of as violent, confrontative, and resistant as it was."[125]

This controversy raises important questions about how militant Black women are remembered and ideas of acceptable militancy. Bernier argues that the murals' problematic reception highlights the "stranglehold of racist double standards within the national public imagination," noting how Alewitz's design "inspires controversies that have in no way been an issue for memorials of white public heroes similarly bearing arms."[126] However, while the rejection of the mural represents an important sanitisation of Tubman's militancy, it is crucial to highlight that there are key differences between Tubman and the white war heroes that Bernier and Rimensnyder reference. Considering the Moses imagery that pervades this mural, with Tubman parting the Middle Passage with the torch of light in one hand, Alewitz does not portray Tubman as a soldier fighting with the Union Army, but as a conductor on the Underground Railroad and thus, as a revolutionary fighter. Such a depiction carries greater militancy than memorials of war heroes with guns, as it portrays a Black woman defying race, gender, and class conventions in a battle against the unjust social order that built America. While soldiers' bearing of arms was sanctioned by the armed forces, Tubman's use of armed self-defence in the liberation of Black people was a direct confrontation to slavery and white supremacy. Hence, Alewitz's depiction of Tubman's insurgency carries great militancy. Indeed, this militancy is heightened when we consider Alewitz's criticism of capitalism in this

[124] Sara Rimensnyder, "Disarming Harriet Tubman," *Reason*, December 2000, https://reason.com/2000/12/01/disarming-harriet-tubman/.
[125] Julianne Malveaux in Sernett, *Harriet Tubman*, 73.
[126] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 300.

design, with the artist mirroring the slave ship and factory to draw comparisons between slavery and capitalism.

Interestingly, this debate surrounding the sanitisation of Tubman's heroism preceded an increase in depictions of an armed Tubman in the form of public, "official" sculptures. This was partly influenced by a decrease in gun crime in the U.S., with a plunge in gun homicides in the 2000s that continued steadily into the 2010s.[127] This increase was also likely the result of the Alewitz controversy, with such great criticism of this instance of sanitisation leading artists and communities to understand the importance of remembering the violent, confrontative, militant, and resistant nature of Tubman's activism. While the first public sculpture of Tubman was Fern Cunningham's *Step on Board* from 1999 in the Harriet Tubman Park, Boston, the first sculpture depicting an armed Tubman appeared in 2006 when James Gafgen created *Harriet Ross Tubman* for Bristol Lions Park in Pennsylvania. This was followed by Mario Chiodo's *Unwavering Courage in the Pursuit of Freedom* (2012) in Wilmington, Delaware, Brian Hanlon's *Harriet Tubman Commemorative Statue* (2018) in Auburn, New York and Dexter Benedict's *William Seward and Harriet Tubman* (2019) in Schenectady, New York. Unlike Alewitz's murals portraying Tubman with a rifle, these sculptures include a pistol, with Gafgen, Chiodo, and Hanlon placing the gun in a holster or belt at her waist, while Benedict positions it in Tubman's bag, with the muzzle visible at the bag's opening. Although Tubman is not holding the weapon in these representations, its presence is important in highlighting Tubman's use of armed self-defence against an oppressive system and in emphasising her role as a militant insurgent on the Underground Railroad. Indeed, these portrayals of an armed Tubman are especially significant considering they were commissioned and supported by state and city

[127] The rate of gun homicide deaths per 100,000 people fell from 7.0 in 1993 to 3.8 in 2000, and then to 3.6 in 2010. D"Vera, Taylor, Lopez, Gallagher, Parker, and Maass. *Gun Homicide Rate Down 49% Since 1993 Peak; Public Unaware*, 1 and 6.

officials.[128] Hence, although Alewitz's design was deemed inappropriate by ABC Inc. officials, these sculptures demonstrate that opinions of depictions of an armed Tubman in public "official" memorials are changing.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I analyse how Tubman and Truth are portrayed as militant Black female heroes in representations across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing on the former's use of armed self-defence and the latter's public speaking. While recognising the instances in which Tubman's militancy has been sanitised, with Lawrence's 1967 series and Alewitz's 2000 mural, I nuance our understandings of Tubman's heroism by exploring the ways in which her militancy has been emphasised in representations, including the artwork of Johnson, Catlett, and Biggers. By exploring these portrayals, I complicate our perceptions of Tubman's militancy beyond simple sanitisation and consider how race, gender, and class dynamics influence these portrayals through analysis of the controversies surrounding Biggers's mural and Lawrence's series. Indeed, examining such artworks reveals prevailing ideas of acceptable militancy and the influence of respectability politics, with several Black women challenging these artists' portrayals of an armed Tubman who contradicted traditional gender roles. Moreover, while analysis of Lawrence's *Forward* uncovers an important confrontation to the predominant idea that Black men are the sole armed protectors of Black people, this chapter recognises the limits of this challenge, with armed self-defence largely unavailable to Black women during this period. This, combined with the consistent framing of Tubman's heroism through the masculine lens of Moses, largely explains why Black feminists

[128] Gafgen's sculpture was commissioned by the African American Historical and Cultural Society after gaining approval from the Bristol Borough Council, and Chiodo's sculpture to the Underground Railroad was authorised by the Wilmington Mayor's Office. Hanlon was commissioned by the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, while Benedict's sculpture was created for the Schenectady County Public Library, the city's central library.

turn to Truth as a militant Black female hero from the 1970s onwards. Writers such as Jordan, Holmes, and Browne, and artists, such as Ringgold, emphasise Truth's militancy by highlighting her use of orality to challenge race, gender, and class oppression, and by relating Truth's nineteenth century consciousness-raising to the activism of contemporary Black women. Through such analysis, this chapter once again demonstrates Truth's malleability as a Black female hero, with her ability to embody varying forms of heroic behaviours that broaden our understandings of Black female heroism and further the creation of an alternative heroic lineage. Thus, this chapter's analysis of Tubman and Truth's militancy complicates our understandings of Tubman's sanitisations, with greater insights into acceptable forms of militancy, and reveals Truth's crucial role as a malleable militant Black hero.

Conclusion

"She is what today's kids call goals"[129]

Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth continue to play important roles as Black female heroes, with monuments from 2020 highlighting their enduring relevance. On 26th August 2020, Black artist Vinnie Bagwell spoke at the unveiling of the *Sojourner Truth* memorial in Poughkeepsie, New York, telling the audience that Truth "is relevant today because of her strength, discipline, clarity, vocals […] She is what today's kids call goals."[130] Similarly, in November 2020 Mayor Ras J. Baraka of Newark celebrated the decision to replace Christopher Columbus's monument in Washington Park with a statue of Tubman, stating that "her entire life speaks to us today, teaching us about unity and selflessness in time of struggle."[131] Bagwell and Baraka's comments highlight how Tubman and Truth still inspire people today, with these new monuments continuing a long history of memorialisation that cements these two women as Black female heroes. By providing the first in-depth analysis of Tubman and Truth's memory, with examination of how their lives and activism have been celebrated and honoured, this thesis makes crucial insights into Black female heroism. Through analysis of a variety of representations from the late 1930s to present day, this thesis is the first research project to consider how Tubman and Truth's portrayals influence our understandings of Black female

[129] Vinnie Bagwell in Ryan Santistevan, "Sojourner Truth statue unveiled on Walkway Over the Hudson in Highland," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, August 26, 2020, https://eu.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2020/08/26/sojourner-truth-statue-unveiled-walkway-over-hudson-highland/3441872001/.

[130] Bagwell in Santistevan, "Sojourner Truth statue unveiled."

[131] After holding a national open call, Nina Cooke John's design *Shadow of a Face* was chosen in June 2021 by a jury of art experts, historians, and community stakeholders, with the hope that Tubman's monument will be unveiled in the newly named Tubman Square in 2022. Major Ras J. Baraka in City of Newark Communication, "Mayor Baraka puts out call for artists to design centrepiece of new Harriet Tubman Square," *City of Newark*, November 19, 2020, https://www.newarknj.gov/news/mayor-baraka-puts-out-call-for-artists-to-design-centerpiece-of-new-harriet-tubman-square. "Harriet Tubman Monument Set to replace Christopher Columbus Statue in Newark," *Because of them We Can*, June 26, 2021, https://www.becauseofthemwecan.com/blogs/culture/harriet-tubman-monument-set-to-replace-chistopher-columbus-statue-in-newark.

heroism. Alongside expanding existing research on these two activists, this research is also the first to fully consider Tubman and Truth's frequent depiction together in representations, with analysis of how portrayals of their heroism interact and impact upon one another.

Exploring representations of Tubman and Truth's heroism is crucial, as it reveals how Black female heroism has largely been defined by features of white heroism and Black male heroism, with a failure to acknowledge Black women's experiences and their triple oppression. In highlighting how Tubman and Truth's memory struggles against or is sanitised by hegemonic ideas of heroism, this thesis argues for a re-evaluation of Black female heroism and provides an alternative model that prioritises Black women's experiences. The model of Black female heroism presented in this thesis argues that we must recognise Black women's oppression and honour the varying types of resistance, including the attributes of "ordinary" Black women, who have been neglected and forgotten by history in favour of the exceptional, such as Tubman and Truth. Through an introductory chapter that explores dominant ideas around heroism, I highlight how prevailing understandings of heroic attributes centre around whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class expectations, arguing for a shift away from these dominant interpretations of heroism. In this examination of how race, gender, and class dynamics influence our views of heroism, I maintain that we must consider alternative heroic behaviours, such as consciousness-raising, that focus on Black women's activism and experiences, maintaining that this is crucial for broadening our understandings of who is deemed heroic and expanding the heroic pantheon beyond white people and Black men.

Moreover, this thesis considers how Tubman and Truth have become *the* Black female heroes who emerge from the silences in the archives, with systematic racism and white supremacy too often erasing and obscuring the voices of Black women. Amidst this context of erasure, I note the importance of examining different forms of transmissions and sites of memory, arguing that this is vital for the re-evaluation of heroic behaviours, which inevitably

influence who we deem heroic. Indeed, Chapter One analyses transmissions of memory through oral culture, noting how Tubman and Truth relied on interviews with their biographers to tell their life stories and how representations were shaped by the stories that artists, such as Jacob Lawrence, heard from people within Black communities. It also highlights how family and inter-generational memory became crucial in the transmission of Tubman and Truth's memory, revealing how Faith Ringgold emphasises the importance of inter-generational memory in her quilting projects. This chapter also explores the issues with public "official" memorialisations of Black women, examining how hegemonic ideas of memorialisation leads to the sanitisation of individuals such as Rosa Parks. Through such analysis, this chapter discusses how representations of Tubman and Truth are underpinned by and challenge predominant notions of heroism, alongside developing a productive model of Black female heroism that honours Black women's triple oppression and the various means they used to fight such oppression, including those used by "ordinary" Black women.

Through this re-evaluation of Black female heroism, this thesis exposes the limitations of existing depictions and highlights how portrayals of Tubman and Truth as *the* Black female heroes can obscure as much as they reveal. The remainder of this thesis explores the different ways in which Tubman and Truth have been portrayed, with the following chapters highlighting how representations of their heroism have been shaped and limited by ideas of exceptionality and acceptability. With examination of how Tubman and Truth's representations interact with the myth of the "superwoman," Chapter Two discusses the artists and writers who support or challenge this problematic stereotype. I illustrate how William H. Johnson and Charles White employ elements of the "superwoman" in their portrayals of Tubman and Truth, with their artwork depicting the activists as lone Black women who possessed inordinate strength to overcome overwhelming oppression. I also argue that John Biggers and Lawrence's depictions of Tubman as Moses supports the "superwoman" stereotype, with this masculine framing of

Tubman's heroism overlooking Black women's oppression and maintaining the gender bias that exists within dominant understandings of heroism. In considering how depictions of Tubman and Truth as "superwomen" change over time, I note a shift away from this stereotype, with artists, such as Ringgold, and writers, such as Alice Childress and Mahogany Browne, continuing Catlett's rebuttal of this myth in her 1947 series, which recognised Black women's oppression, their varying forms of resistance, and "ordinary" individuals. In highlighting this shift away from the exceptional "superwoman," I maintain that these artists and writers create an alternative heroic lineage that acknowledges a variety of Black women's heroism alongside Tubman and Truth.

Chapter Three further notes the important, yet limiting, influence of exceptionalism in religious representations and emphasises the ways in which such portrayals additionally support Tubman's depiction as a "superwoman." In exploring Tubman's portrayal as Moses and Truth's depiction as a preacher, this chapter examines prioritisations of the former's heroism over the latter's in the mid-twentieth century, whilst also noting that representations of Truth shifted away from ideas of exceptionalism. By analysing how artists and writers continue to use religious imagery in representations of Truth, I argue that portrayals from the 1970s onwards by writers, such as June Jordan and Shirlene Holmes, emphasise Truth's orality and consciousness-raising, contending that the emphasis placed on these alternative heroic behaviours demonstrates Truth's malleability as a Black female hero. Conversely, I highlight how Tubman's portrayal continues to centre around ideas of exceptionalism, with the re-emergence of Moses imagery in the twenty-first century demonstrating how this image, which employs elements of the "superwoman" myth, is inherently intertwined with Tubman's heroism. Indeed, through such analysis I argue that Tubman's heroism is largely confined to a masculine framework, which makes her a less malleable Black female hero.

This difference in malleability is further explored in Chapter Four, which analyses representations of Tubman and Truth's militancy, with a focus on the former's use of armed self-defence and the latter's public speaking. In nuancing scholarship that argues Tubman's militancy has been sanitised, this chapter complicates our understandings of Tubman's heroism and highlights instances when artists, including Johnson and Catlett, emphasise her as a militant Black hero. Through this analysis, I highlight how middle-class expectations of Black women influenced ideas of how Tubman should be portrayed, with Biggers and Lawrence's depictions of an armed Tubman contradicting traditional gender roles and challenging the prevailing view that Black men are the sole protectors of Black people. Nevertheless, I note the limits to this challenge and argue that these predominant ideas of acceptable militancy, alongside the masculine framing of Moses, ultimately led Black feminists to herald Truth, not Tubman, as a militant Black feminist icon. In analysing this process, I argue that artists and writers, including Jordan, Holmes, Ringgold, and Browne, emphasise the importance of consciousness-raising as an alternative heroic behaviour and argue that these representations further highlight Truth's role as a malleable Black female hero who can embody forms of heroic behaviours that centre on Black women's experiences, rather than dominant understandings of heroism.

Analysing Tubman and Truth's representations throughout these chapters on the "superwoman," religious images, and militant portrayals demonstrates how ideas of exceptionalism and acceptability can limit Black female heroism. Such analysis reveals how elements of Tubman and Truth's lives, histories, and memories can be obscured, alongside erasing the behaviours of "ordinary" Black women. Indeed, examining acceptable heroic attributes uncovers the forms of resistance that are excluded and thus, the heroes who are ignored. Moreover, the discussion of the interaction of Tubman and Truth's memory is crucial in revealing the extent to which they are malleable Black female heroes, with the latter revealed as being more capable of embodying alternative heroic attributes than the former. Nevertheless,

through these chapters, this thesis highlights instances in which artists and writers, such as Catlett and Ringgold, challenge the masculine framing of Moses and reject dominant understandings of acceptable, respectable Black women's behaviour to situate Tubman within an alternative heroic lineage. Indeed, this thesis demonstrates how several Black artists and writers create this alternative heroic lineage that positions Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, instead of the white people and Black men with whom we frequently see them depicted. This expansion of our understandings of heroic behaviours is crucial, as it signals important shifts away from exceptionalism, which often side-lines the experiences of Black women because of its direct outgrowth from concerted efforts of suppression. Furthermore, in positioning Tubman and Truth alongside other Black women, artists and writers elevate "ordinary" and "everyday" behaviours to the heroic, which inevitably recognises varying forms of resistance, such as trade union organisation, political activism, and anti-lynching activism, and thus, acknowledges the race, gender, and class oppression of Black women.

Thus, this research on Tubman and Truth's memory reveals crucial insights into Black female heroism, with greater understanding of how these two women have been portrayed as Black female heroes and the complexities surrounding their memorialisation. In building the first database of Tubman and Truth's representations, this research offers an important groundwork for future research into their depiction as heroes, with the opportunity to add to this database and analyse how the trends that this thesis identifies develop over time. Indeed, it will be interesting to discover how the alternative model of heroic lineage that I identify develops and to see if Tubman becomes a more malleable Black female hero, or if she remains within the masculine confines of Moses. Moreover, I hope that the model of Black female heroism presented in this thesis will advance research into the memory of other Black women, such as Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, to further reveal alternative heroic behaviours that challenge dominant understandings of heroism. Indeed, it is

my hope that future research will continue to develop scholarship on Black female heroism as a separate entity from white heroism and Black male heroism, with a focus on Black women's experiences of challenging the triple oppression that they face.

Tubman and Truth's positioning as *the* figures who embody antislavery Black female heroism seems set to continue for years to come. Insights into Tubman and Truth's memory, with greater understanding of how Black women are moulded into heroes, are especially important in the context of current debates surrounding Civil War commemoration and Black memory. Indeed, it will be interesting to see how Tubman and Truth's memory will be used in the intensifying and contentious debate over the tone of American memorialisation, especially considering the reclaiming of Columbus's Washington Park in Newark as Tubman Square in 2022. Hence, this thesis expands our understanding of how Tubman and Truth became resilient and persistent Black female heroes across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I probe how changing social and political contexts shaped their representations, and consider the impact of race, gender, and class dynamics on their memorialisations. It is my hope that this research inspires further analysis of Black female heroism and a richer, deeper exploration of how we remember Black women, both the exceptional and the "ordinary."

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