Augusta Savage
The Artist and the Activist
Abstract

For my project, I learned about Augusta Savage, a sculptor and activist who was greatly influential during the Harlem Renaissance. I examined the inspirations behind Augusta’s works, as well as how her prevalence during this time period impacted society. Through studying photographs of some of Augusta’s sculptures, and through reading articles about her influence, I learned about the ways in which Augusta Savage intertwined her passion for art with important messages regarding the fight for social equality and equity for Black people. Through her work, she helped to highlight and provide a platform for both the art and the voices of the Black community.
Augusta Savage was an immensely influential and inspiring sculptor and activist, whose prevalence during the Harlem Renaissance helped shine a light on Black artists and Black voices.

Growing up in Florida, she began creating art with clay from a young age, despite her father’s disapproval.

Eventually, Augusta went to study at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York, where she and her art became increasingly more prominent in the Harlem Renaissance.
Works

- One of Augusta Savage’s most well-known pieces.
- It is believed by many that the subject of this sculpture was Augusta’s nephew, Ellis Ford.
- For this sculpture, she won the Julius Rosenwald fellowship, which allowed her to travel, study, and create her art in Europe.
- This sculpture has been praised for the incredible expressiveness Augusta was able to portray through the depicted face.

Gamin (1929)
Works

- Inspired by the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, by James Weldon Johnson, a song considered to be the Black national anthem in the United States.
- Displayed in the 1939 New York World's Fair, World's Fair officials called the sculpture, The Harp.
- This sculpture beautifully depicts twelve Black Americans, who appear to form the strings of a harp, standing together and singing. It has been interpreted as a symbol of the unity, strength, and liberation of the Black community.
- One of Augusta Savage's inspiring and impactful works which shows the ways in which she expressed meaningful messages through her art.

Lift Every Voice and Sing (The Harp) (1939)
Activism

● Both Augusta Savage’s art and her activism worked together to spread messages of social justice and equality.

● After the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in Paris revoked her scholarship to the school due to the fact that she was a Black women, an open letter Augusta Savage wrote addressing the discrimination that she had faced, as well as the inequities faced by Black Americans as a whole, was publishsed publically in the New York World in 1923.

“One of the reasons why more of my race do not go in for higher education is that as soon as one of us gets his head above the crowd there are millions of feet ready to crush it back again to that dead level of commonplace thus creating a racial deadline of culture in our Republic. For how am I to compete with other American artists if I am not to be given the same opportunity?”

-Augusta Savage’s open letter published in the New York World in 1923
After studying in Europe, Augusta Savage returned to New York where she opened the Savage Studio of Arts and Craft in 1932. The Savage Studio of Arts and Craft provided arts classes with focuses on subjects such as painting and sculpting to people in Harlem, for free, or pay as-you-go. Through this, Augusta Savage increased the accessibility of art classes to oppressed communities. She made art classes available to everyone regardless of their economic status or ability to pay.
Activism cont

- Augusta Savage went on to create and direct the Harlem Community Art Center.
- Around 1,500 people in Harlem accessed art classes at no cost in the organization’s first 16 months.
- Additionally, she co-founded the Harlem Artists Guild, an organization that supported, uplifted, and highlighted the works and voices of Black artists.
Some more works

*Laughing Boy (1932)*

*Bas Relief of a Female Dancer (1959)*

*Bust of unidentified youth (1930-1939)*
Works Cited


