

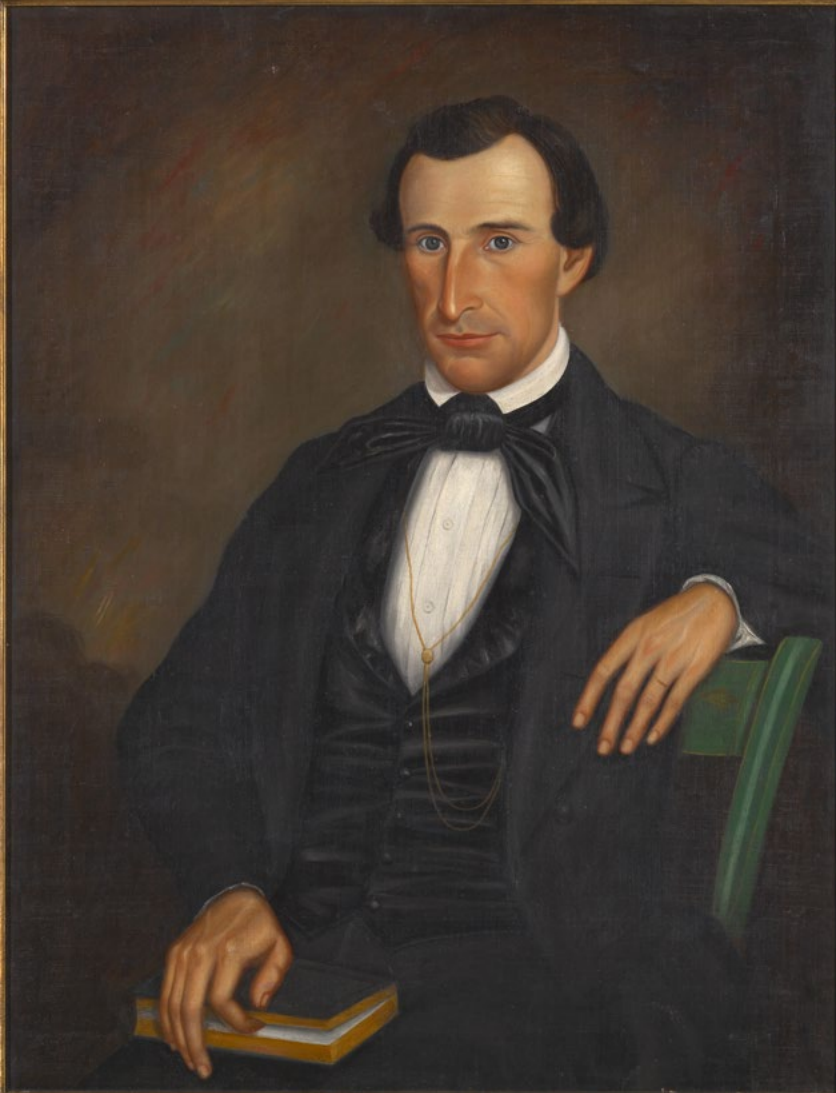


Looking Glass Alliance

Contributions by Tatjana Rebelle



Tatjana Rebelle



In response to *Portrait of Dr. Lewis D. Lyons*

Portrait of Dr. Lewis D. Lyons

About 1855

Barton Stone Hays (American, 1826–1914)

Oil on canvas

51.48

Public Domain

Gift of Roger Gould Wolcott

Barton Stone Hays was an American painter born in Ohio who migrated to Indiana in 1850. August 4, 1851, Indiana voters passed Article XIII by an overwhelming majority. Article XIII prohibited new Black settlement, voided all contracts with Black Americans, and fined whites for conducting business with settling Black Americans. Article XIII also required Black Americans to register with local government clerks. The Indiana Supreme Court declared Article XIII invalid in 1866.

Tatjana Rebelle's poem, "What is Freedom?" offers a reflection on the Black American experience in Indiana at the time that Barton Stone Hays created this painting.

“What is Freedom?”

By Tatjana Rebelle

There's a stillness that comes when you know you can handle anything.
That the worst of your days are behind you.
You've seen death enough to know her name intimately.
Your heart has been broken.
You've caused heartbreak in others so much that you know the recesses of its darkness.
You've learned that love is meant to be given and received.
You're not afraid to risk things because you know the reward is always greater than you could have ever dreamt of.
Conversely, there are things in your life that are not worth losing and you'll let a dream go just to witness it grow outside of you.
That's what freedom gives you.
The ability to breathe.
To be present in the place you are and not the far away place someone else wants you to be.
Freedom of movement is a true gift.
One we often take for granted.
One our ancestors were denied.
Freedom is deciding for yourself.
Where to live.
Where to love.
Where to grow.
Where to simply just be.
Freedom.

Sources

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Further Reading

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In response to *Hauptmann Must Die*

Hauptmann Must Die

1935

Reginald Marsh (American, 1898–1954)

Egg tempera on Masonite

79.167

© Reginald Marsh / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Bequest of Felicia Meyer Marsh

The headline in, and title of, the painting *Hauptmann Must Die* refers to the sentence given to the convicted kidnapper of aviator Charles Lindbergh's baby. The kidnapping and sensational trial, which has been referred to as the "crime of the century," has captured people's attention since it occurred in 1932.

Tatjana Rebelle's spoken word poem, "George Tompkins," encourages us to expand our attention to include crimes that have not always been as readily recognized. Written from the perspective of Tompkins's great aunt, the poem gives us a glimpse into Tompkins's life and death in the early 20th century.

This poem contains references to lynching, racial violence, and suicide.

 [Listen to Tatjana Rebelle performing their poem, "George Tompkins."](#)

Read the poem on the following page.

“George Tompkins”

By Tatjana Rebelle

They call it the “Crime of the Century”
Forgetting they took my grandparents from their homes
Stuffed them in the bottom of their ships
Stripped us of our identity and culture.
Tore our families apart.
Forced us to tend to their lands, raise their children and even feed them from our
bodies.
They took everything from us.
Yet, one rich family’s baby is taken from their home and every headline is about
the horror the family must be going through.
They don’t just talk about the life stolen or the ransom but the future that never
will be for that baby.

What about my nephew?
My family’s horror?
His body was found in the woods too.
Body and name dragged through the mud.
My George wasn’t given grace or shown compassion for his future.
They took him away from us and wouldn’t even call it what it was.
No one cared about how his feet barely touched the ground.
His hands were bound behind his back and the coroner had the nerve to call it
suicide.
George’s body was still warm when they found him, near the very statue they
resurrected to honor their soldiers who fought for our freedom.
The articles talked more about the branches those murderers took from the tree
than the life they snatched away from us.

You should have seen the way his face lit up when we’d walk down the Avenue and could hear the music our sadness and joy
forged.
You could see how his pride for his people and self grew knowing he could live for himself and not just what they told him he’d
amount to.
His shoulders would pull back just oh so slightly when we’d step into the corner store and pick up a copy of the *Recorder* or the
Crisis.
Seeing our words in our papers brought him so much life.
He would talk for hours about “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and how he wanted so badly to see the world Langston wrote about.
I think that’s why he spent so much time in Riverside Park.
We wanted him to see that he could be more than what they say about us.
Experience what it is like when we come together and do stuff on our own.
To witness what can happen when you given the chance.

A chance is all we wanted for him.
We were so scared all the time for him in Kentucky.
When we found out about the promising life we could get in Indianapolis, we just had to see what could come of it.
Robert and I just wanted the best for him.



Indiana Daily Times, March 17, 1922, Home Edition, pg. 13. Library of Congress Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.

Always have, even before the day we took him in after his momma died.
We wanted to show him what life could be like without all the fear.
All the hate.
We thought it would be different here.
He deserved more than that.

His life and future was just as precious as that baby's.
I can't bring up the courage to even go by that park anymore.
Langston once spoke of rivers but who will speak of the trees? Trees don't look the same to me.
They don't just give life but take away breath.
Their shadows are monuments to lives lost and dreams of futures never known.
I just pray that people speak about my George like they do that baby.
His life deserved a chance too.
I know that his soul wasn't just deep like the river but worth more than all the branches of all the trees upon the Earth.
The crime that stole his life and all the others whose names will never reach a headline, that's the crime of the century and they deserve to be remembered and honored too.

Sources

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Indianapolis Sanborn Map #88, 1915, showing the location of the thriving Black community centered on Indiana Avenue, <https://indianamemory.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/SanbornJP2/id/1938>.

Recommended Reading

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In response to *Herman and Verman*

Herman and Verman

1924

Hugh M. Poe (American, 1902–1973)

Oil on canvas

38.28

© Hugh M. Poe

Gift of Mrs. John N. Carey

Herman and Verman, by Indiana-based artist Hugh M. Poe, depicts characters from Hoosier author Booth Tarkington's trilogy of Penrod stories published between 1914 and 1929. Although Tarkington's Penrod books have been praised as charming depictions of growing up in the Midwest, his books also use racist stereotypes and language.

Tatjana Rebelle's poem offers another perspective of these characters that confronts Tarkington's racist depictions of the two boys.

“Herman and Verman”

By Tatjana Rebelle

Existence tied to labor
Mechanism used for growth
Name and size diminished
Lineage erased
Silence parodied
Features turned characteristics to fit profiles
Reduced to color to exacerbate influence
Intelligence depicted as simple
Affliction laying groundwork for comedy
Life diminished for fable
Exploitation for profit
Burdened by bloodline mistakes
Perspective loss for entertainment

Language deemed incoherent
Livelihood cast as curiosity
Curated savagery diminished of dignity
Cast in a story you were never able to truly be a part of.

What a tragedy it is to never be given the chance to know the bittersweet taste of humanity.
Worth more than entertainment value.
A gift, deserving of depth and uniqueness
Beautiful, majestic and complicated
Strongest in the gentle moments
Kindness amassed in acceptance
Forged from more than tragedy.
You are the past.
You are the present.
You are the future.