John Wesley Hardrick’s *Little Brown Girl* depicts ten-year-old Nellie Henderson looking out from a bright, colorful, lush background. When Kyng Rhodes looked at this painting, he wondered, “What was the reality of Nellie’s experiences—beyond the painted backdrop?”

Rhodes created this artwork to depict what he sees as a reality Nellie faced as a little brown girl in the early 1900s: A system built to keep her confined or absent altogether from the joys that a little white child would experience. A system built on atrocities committed to people who look like her. A system that Rhodes, who was a little brown boy in the 2000s, continues to bear witness to today.

**Historical Note and Resources**

Kyng Rhodes’s artwork encourages viewers to confront historic legacies and current experiences of racism, racial violence, and trauma. Two years after John Wesley Hardrick painted *Little Brown Girl* in 1927, a group of African American citizens of Indianapolis purchased and donated the work to the Art Association of Indianapolis (now the IMA at Newfields). This group was part of the growing African American population building thriving communities in Indianapolis during the 1920s.

Also during the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan was experiencing a resurgence in Indiana—at least one-quarter or more of the state’s native-born white men, as well as thousands of women, were members. The Klan used masked robes, burning crosses, intimidating letters, vigilante law enforcement, and threats and acts of physical violence to target African Americans, as well as Jews, Catholics, and immigrants from eastern and southern Europe.
Although Indiana’s Klan infrastructure collapsed in the late 1920s, John Hardrick, Nellie Henderson, and others continued to live in a society shaped by systemic racism and threats of violence, factors which continue to shape experiences in America today.

See below for a list of resources to support ongoing conversations around these themes.

Rhodes also encourages guests to explore Newfields’ gardens, in which he finds inspiration and rejuvenation.

**List of resources**

**Books**


**Reports**


Walter Howard Smith, Jr. “*The Impact of Racial Trauma on African Americans.*” African American Men and Boys Advisory Board. The Heinz Endowments (February 16, 2010).

**Articles and Websites**


Campaign Zero. “*Mapping Police Violence.*”

Ta-Nehisi Coates. “*The Case for Reparations.*” *The Atlantic* (June 2014).

Cheryl Corley. “*Coping While Black: A Season of Traumatic News Takes a Psychological Toll.*” *Code Switch* NPR (July 2, 2015).

*Media portrayals of black men contribute to police violence, Rutgers study says,* Eurekalert.org (November 29, 2018).

NAACP, “*The Origins of Modern Day Policing.*”

**For Teens and Kids**


In response to *Dr. Kool*

Kyng Rhodes felt an immediate connection with *Dr. Kool*. But he also saw something missing in Hendrick’s portrait. Rhodes created this work to shine a light on what is not depicted in *Dr. Kool*—what happens to Black men who are seen as a threat for how they look.

The figure in Rhodes’s painting has been caught “red handed” being Black. Rather than being stoic, as *Dr. Kool* appears, or afraid, as one might be if targeted by police, the figure is self-assured. Rhodes uses a vibrant peacock feather to symbolize the man’s pride in his Black identity. Feathers, as aides for flying, also represent ways Black Americans have adapted to American society, in particular developing strategies to flee from danger.

He’s dressed well but could also be dressed for his funeral. For those who ask, “What has this man done to be targeted?” Rhodes responds, “That is a question for America.”