

Aaron douglas. bio essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Aaron Douglas ?" Aaron Douglas was an African American painter and graphic artist who played a leading role in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. His first major commission, to illustrate Alain Leroy Locke's book, *The New Negro*, prompted requests for graphic from other Harlem Renaissance writers. By 1939, Douglas started teaching at Fisk University, where he remained for the next 27 years (Biography 1). " He made numerous contributions at Fisk University. ? On May 26, 1899, Aaron Douglas was born in Topeka, Kansas. During his time in the Harlem Renaissance, Douglas helped to guide the artistic and literary movement. He is sometime referred to as the ' Father of Black American Art. Douglas developed an interest in art early on, finding some of his inspiration from his mother's love for painting watercolors (Biography 1). " Proceeding graduation in 1917 from Topeka, Kansas, Douglas enrolled in the University of Nebraska, which is also known as Lincoln. " There he pursued his passion for creating art, earning his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1922 (Biography 1). " At the same time, he connected with students of Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri to share his interest of art with them.

After two years of bonding with his pupils, Douglas decided to migrate to New York City. New York's Harlem neighborhood had a thriving art scene; therefore it would not take any time for Douglas to get use to New York.? Reaching New York in 1925, Douglas swiftly became familiar with the Harlem's cultural life. He began his career in New York as an apprentice for Winold Reiss, a German artist whom he met through Charles S. Johnson. Being an apprentice for Reiss only lasted two years before he continued on to become the editor of *Opportunity*, the National Urban League's magazine.

Through his covers for Opportunity and The Crisis, Douglas set forth a new vision for the black artists. His strong, geometric forms and Egyptian profiles resulted in a style later described by cultural critic and educator Richard Powell as ' Afro-Cubism (Aiga 1). " In 1926, Douglas finally stepped up to the plate and married Alta Sawyer. Mrs. Alta was a teacher as well. Their home became a social Mecca for the likes of Langton Hughes and W. E. B. Du Bois. " Around the same time, Douglas loaned his talents to the first and only issue of Wallace Thurman's magazine FIRE!! nd later designed the cover of Thurman's short-lived magazine Harlem (Aiga 1). " With Douglas reputation for creating compelling graphics, he became an in-demand illustrator for many writers (Biography 1). " A few of Douglas popular illustrations consist of James Weldon Johnson's poetic work, God's Trombone (1927), and Paul Morand's Black Magic (1929). " In addition to Douglas illustration work, he explored educational opportunities; after receiving a fellowship from the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania, he took time to study African and modern art (Biography 1). This experience led him to creating some of his best-known paintings in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Douglas was hired to produce a mural for the library at Fisk University. Continuing to broaden his horizon, Douglas spent time in Paris, where he studied with Charles Despiau and Othon Friesz. " Back in New York, in 1933, Douglas had his first solo art show. Soon after, he started one of his most legendary works - a series of murals entitled " Aspects of Negro Life" that featured four panels, each depicting a different part of the African-American experience.

Each mural included a captivating mix of Douglas's influences, from jazz music to abstract and geometric art (Biography 2). " ? Returning to Fisk

University in the late 1930s, Douglas served as an assistant professor, and shortly after he founded the school's art department. Because Douglas was valued his educational responsibilities, he attend Columbia University's Teachers College in 1941, and completed three years earning a master's degree in art education. " He also established the Carl Van Vechten Gallery at Fisk and helped secure vital works for it collection, including pieces by Winold Reiss and Alfred Steiglitz (Biography 2). Outside of his works in his classroom, Douglas remained committed to learning and growing as an artist. " He received a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation in 1938, which funded his painting trip Haiti and several other Caribbean islands. He later won other grants to support his artistic endeavors (Biography 2). " Douglas had several solo exhibits over the years from his continuation to produce new works. ? Douglas received countless honors during his later years. " In 1963, he was invited by President John F.

Kennedy to attend a celebration of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, held at the White House. Douglas also earned an honorary doctorate from Fisk University in 1973, seven years after his retirement from the school (Biography 2). " He still remained an active painter and lecturer until the end of his life. On September 2, 1979, Douglas passed away at the age of 79, in a Nashville hospital. According to some reporters, he died of a pulmonary embolism. " Pulmonary embolism is a sudden blockage in a lung artery. The blockage usually is caused by a blood clot that travels to the lung from a vein in the leg (NIH 1). ? After Douglas death, a special memorial service was held for him at Fisk University, where he taught for nearly 30 years. " At the service, Walter J. Leonard, the university's president at the

time, remembered Douglas with the following statement: ' Aaron Douglas was one of the most accomplished of the interpreters of our institutions and cultural values. He captured the strength and quickness of the young; he translated the memories of the old; and projected the determination of the inspired and courageous (Biography 2). "