Chiseling Democracy: Meta Warrick Fuller and the Sculpture of Emancipation

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Abstract

This article explores American sculptor Meta Warrick Fuller's activism in her early works: *Emancipation* (1913), *In Memory of Mary Turner* (1920), and *Ethiopia Awakening* (or *Ethiopia*, 1921). In progressive America, hostility between races severely undermined democracy. Lynching threatened African American lives on a daily basis. Amid racial violence, black intellectuals, such as Henry Tanner and Paul Dunbar, earned international fame and destabilized the racial hierarchy. W. E. B. Du Bois called them the Talented Tenth and expected them to "save" the race from plight. I argue that Fuller, one of the Talented Tenth, was not only a civil activist who renewed stereotyped black images, but also a sculptor who challenged dysfunctional American democracy by reconstructing a narrative of African American freedom and inspiring later generations through art. Based on archival research, this article examines how her art attempted to create a new black narrative at the apex of racial antagonism.

Keywords: Meta Warrick Fuller, democracy, slavery, matriarchy, Africa, transatlantic, narrative

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My work is of the soul rather than the figure.[1]
—Meta Warrick Fuller

Introduction

In the early twentieth century, Americans fought for *democracy* inside and outside the country. In progressive America, hostility between races severely undermined democracy, which here can be defined as "the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief."[2] In the May 1919 issue of *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), African American leader W. E. B. Du Bois celebrated brave black soldiers returning from World War I. He called them to another fight in their own land—a fight for democracy:

> We return.
> We return from fighting.
> We return fighting.
> Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah,
> we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.[3]

What Du Bois demanded was the fair, equal treatment for all members, a foundation essential to a democratic society. In those days, not only social inequality, but also violence, plagued nonwhite people. Lynching and mob rule threatened African American lives at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The highest number of reported victims in one year was 241 in 1892, and the summer of 1919 witnessed the "worst spate of race riots and lynchings in American history."[4]

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* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 51st annual convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association at Boston, MA.

1. Joy L. Gordon, *An Independent Woman: The Life and Art of Meta Warrick Fuller* (Framingham, MA: Danforth Museum of Art, 1984), 8.
2. "Democracy," Cambridge English Dictionary, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/democracy.
3. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis* 18, no. 1 (May 1919): 14, https://library.brown.edu/pdfs/1295987016703125.pdf.
4. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 201; Cameron McWhirter, "Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America," November 18, 2011, https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/red-summer-1919-mcwhirter/.

For African Americans, combating racism—lynching, disfranchisement, and discrimination in education and labor—was central to achieving democracy in their mother country.

Du Bois suggested that art would offer a "real solution of the color problem" because art is appreciated regardless of its origin.[5] For instance, the African American geniuses of the time, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) and Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), who achieved worldwide fame in the field of art, conceptually served as a weapon to attack American color discrimination. Du Bois called these elites the "Talented Tenth" and expected them to "save" the rest of the people in the fight against racism.[6]

Among the "Talented Tenth" was Meta Warrick Fuller (1877–1968), one of the earliest female American sculptors.[7] Like Du Bois, Fuller trusted the "human appeal" of art, which would work on an individual's mind, regardless of race/ethnicity, color, religion, gender, or national origin. She writes in the essay "The Negro and Art" the following: "What we admire in Oriental art, or what satisfies us in the art of Europe, is not because of its origin, but its human appeal."[8] Fuller's articulation of African American causes began in Paris. Born and raised in a middle-class family in Philadelphia during the post-Reconstruction years, Fuller had the privilege of three years of art training in Paris, France, at the turn of the twentieth century. In Paris, she heavily applied literary and religious themes to her sculpture. For instance, her early, small piece *Silent Sorrow* (ca. 1900), also called *Man Eating His Heart*, inspired by Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* and Stephen Crane's poem "In the Desert," acquired considerable reputation in Paris.[9] One event gradually transformed "the sculptor of horrors"—a name

5 . W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926), in *W. E. B. DuBois: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 997–1000. Du Bois used art and (the) arts interchangeably in his essay. To demonstrate that art had "no color line," he listed distinguished authors of the Harlem Renaissance like Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, and Walter White.

6 . Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro art," 997–1000.

7 . W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" (1903), in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 842–61; Booker T. Washington, *Booker T. Washington Papers Volume 11: 1911–1912,* ed. Geraldine R. McTigue, Louis R. Harlan, and Raymond Smock (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 142; Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *Negro Builders and Heroes* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 164. In 1903, Du Bois wrote in his essay, "The Talented Tenth," "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men," by which he meant those with talents such as teachers, clergymen, physicians, lawyers, artists, and other members of the black social elite. Paul Laurence Dunbar was a famed black American poet, novelist, and playwright of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Henry Ossawa Tanner, based in Paris, was the first African American painter who won international fame. Along with Dunbar and Tanner, Fuller won international recognition in the early twentieth century.

8 . Meta Warrick Fuller, "The Negro and Art" (n.d.), Folder 31 (Arts), Meta Warrick Fuller Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter referred to MWFP).

9 . Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1918), 114. More importantly, this drew the attention of the French master sculptor Auguste Rodin. After seeing

given to Fuller by French critics—into a *race* artist.[10] When James J. Calloway and Du Bois asked Fuller, who was at the time an art student studying in Paris, to repair the damaged diorama, the "Progress of the Afro-American Race," for the 1900 Paris *Exposition Universelle,* Du Bois suggested that she make "a specialty of Negro types."[11] After returning from racially tolerant France to her country of racial antagonism, Fuller began to apply ethnic motifs to her creations.

This transition was possibly because of her own experiences of prejudice.[12] In pursuit of an art career, Fuller had to overcome various kinds of prejudices—race, gender, and class.[13] First, she faced American racism, even on foreign soil. Because of her race, the American Girls' Club in Paris denied her the lodging that she had been promised before leaving the United States.[14] The sexism that she experienced as an artist was also daunting. Although women were no longer barred from U.S. art schools, they were encouraged to participate in decorative arts rather than fine arts or industrial arts.[15] Fuller's ambition to become a professional sculptor ran counter to nineteenth-century gender and class norms. At the time, paid labor, in general, was viewed as "an unfortunate necessity for women in the bottom strata of society," and art was regarded as a disgraceful way of making a living for middle-class women.[16] Racial discrimination, in particular, hampered Fuller's art career in the United States.

Silent Sorrow, as well as a photograph of her *Impenitent Thief* (ca. 1900), Rodin allegedly said to Fuller, "Mademoiselle, you are a sculptor; you have the sense of form."

10. Renée Ater, *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 73.

11. Ater, *Remaking Race and History*, 17–18; Meta Warrick Fuller, "Fuller, Meta Vaux Warrick (b. Philadelphia, Pa., 9 June 1878; d. 12 March 1968)" (n. d.), Folder 33, MWFP; Meta Warrick Fuller, "Project for Writers' Workshop: Celebrities I Have Known" (n. d.), 2, Folder 32, MWFP. The diorama tracing the race's history from slavery to freedom was originally created by Thomas W. Hunter and his students at the Armstrong Manual Training High School in Washington, DC. Fuller well remembered how she was inspired by Du Bois in France.

12. James A. Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 30–35, 64, 77–78. Art critic James A. Porter states that Fuller is a fourth-generation "Negro" artist who established herself despite race prejudice since the early nineteenth century, when Robert M. Douglass, Jr. (1809–1887), an African American pioneer in art, distinguished himself in Philadelphia. Born in Philadelphia, Douglass, Jr. was a portrait and miniature painter well-known to anti-slavery leaders such as William Lloyd Garrison and Benjamin Lundy.

13. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in A White World* (1940; Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005), 279–84. Their race was a common reason for denying African American women education. For instance, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, wrote in her memoir about Ruth, her acquaintance's daughter, who looked "white to the eye" but was repeatedly denied entrance to Northern academies for girls because of the African blood in her veins.

14. Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65. Fortunately, African American painter Tanner, the Fullers' acquaintance, helped her find her lodging.

15. Ater, *Remaking Race and History*, 13.

16. Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents,* 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 408.

Despite the high praises she had received from French galleries and critics, the young sculptress had to endure harsh treatment from the American art world in her home country.[17]

Fuller has been considered an artist who rose against racial antagonism. According to Lisa Farrington, Fuller is one of the "determined artists [who] did manage to carve out careers despite the political climate that existed after Reconstruction."[18] Renée Ater portrays Fuller as "an active agent of her life story and her art-making," which was "firmly rooted in her race and gender."[19] Ilene Susan Fort calls Fuller "one of the first and most important African American sculptors to counter the traditional black image."[20] Instead, I argue that Fuller, who had experienced fair treatment in Europe, was a civil activist who metaphorically *chiseled* democracy by reconstructing a transatlantic narrative of black freedom inspired by Africa—the land that emerged as the source of African American's racial pride with the rise of African anticolonial movements in the early twentieth century. My study on her transatlantic, ancestral saga zeroes in on the works of the black motifs she created in the 1910s and early 1920s—*Emancipation* (1913), *In Memory of Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence* (1919) (hereafter *Mary Turner*), and *Ethiopia Awakening* (1921). These works were Fuller's black articulation for her family and people in the years after the nadir of racial relations.[21] Later, she became less radical, creating more "acceptable" themes such as portraiture and religious pieces because of the repeated rejection and ignorance of the American art authorities.[22]

Through the analysis of archival documents and iconographic interpretation of Fuller's sculpted figures, this article examines how her sculptures tried to symbolize democratic values during seem-

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17. Velma J. Hoover, "Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller: Her Life and Her Art," *Negro History Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (April 1977): 679. Fuller knew her race hampered her career as a sculptor. Hoover, a friend of the Fullers in Massachusetts, once heard her say that "she would have been easily successful here [in the United States] if she had been white."

18. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image,* 50–64. The others are her predecessor, Mary Edmonia Lewis (ca. 1843–ca. 1911) and Fuller's friend, Mary Howard Jackson (1877–1931). Born of a Native American mother and a free Afro-Caribbean father, Lewis was introduced to fine arts while studying at Oberlin. After being dismissed for repeated false charges, she moved to Italy to pursue a career a in art and produced a series of neoclassical sculptures. Whereas Lewis, working in Rome, continued to produce figures "bereft of any definitive ethnic features," putatively to enhance her marketability to European customers, Fuller willingly embodied blackness in her creations, especially after she went back to the United States. Jackson also portrayed African American subjects, as in the work titled *Mulatto Mother and Child* (n.d.).

19. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 6–7. A book-length study by Ater examines Fuller's commissions for three fairs and expositions and their impact on the "Negro problem" and popular concepts of the "black body."

20. Ilene Susan Fort, *The Figure in American Sculpture: A Question of Modernity* (Los Angeles, CA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 146.

21. Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life And Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), 79–96.

22. Hoover, "Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller," 679–80.

ingly liberal yet intolerant American progressive days. It explores how each of these works constitutes a narrative of black freedom and how her creations embody egalitarian ideals, confront the dominant hierarchies, and attack American democracy with broader, transatlantic perspectives.

I. *Emancipation*: Broken Promises of American Ideals

Emancipation was Fuller's earliest attempt to express the black experience in early-twentieth-century America. Commissioned by Du Bois for the National Emancipation Exposition in 1913, which was commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Fuller's work cast new light on the meaning of emancipation. Although Du Bois had initially asked her to enlarge her Paris work *Silent Sorrow* (also called *Man Eating His Heart*), Fuller, who felt unable to "attempt a renewal of [her] work," instead created a new piece which would soon become a monument displayed in the middle of New York's Twelfth Regiment Armory at Sixty-Second Street near Broadway.[23]

Emancipation was Fuller's original work. Instead of depicting the celebration of African Americans' liberation from slavery, the sculpture captures the moment of a new tribulation, a forced, unprepared, or uncertain future in a foreign land. For instance, she expresses this historical moment without relying on conventional and more simple motifs, such as broken shackles and slaves kneeling in prayer.[24] Moreover, contrary to the prevailing positive perceptions of emancipation, the figures in Fuller's piece express negative sentiments such as reluctance, sorrow, and fear. Unlike earlier sculptures on the same theme such as *The Freedman* (1863) by John Quincy Adams Ward and *Forever Free* (originally entitled *Morning of Liberty,* 1867–1868) by Mary Edmonia Lewis in the years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Fuller's *Emancipation* conveys former slaves' ambivalence toward their newly proclaimed freedom. The serious and meditative features of the figures in *Emancipation* contrast the happy and carefree features congenitally attributed to African Americans, as displayed by black performers in minstrel shows.[25] Fuller's depiction of troubled, conflicting emotions reflects African Americans' reality in an age characterized by rampant hate crimes and unbridled discrimination.

Emancipation contains three figures: two human beings and a mythical character. Fuller explains the work as follows: "Humanity [is] weeping over her suddenly freed children, who, beneath the

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23. Fuller, "Project for Writers' Workshop," 2; Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 73; Porter, *Modern Negro Art,* 78. In 1910, she lost nearly all of her early period works to fire.

24. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 81–82.

25. Marc A. Bauch, *"Gentlemen, Be Seated!": The Rise and the Fall of the Minstrel Show* (Munich, Germany: GRIN Verlag, 2011), 5. According to Marc Bauch, the minstrel show is "the only uniquely American genre within American theater" and "popular stage entertainment" in which actors with blackened faces performed "decayed, superstitious, happy and musical characters."

gnarled fingers of Fate, step forth into the world, unafraid.... I represented the race by a male and a female figure standing under a tree the branches of which are the fingers of Fate grasping at them to draw them back into the fateful clutches of hatred, etc."[26] The two figures face outward with their backs against a shelter composed of a big, gnarled tree trunk. An emancipated boy (or man) stands erect, wearing only a loincloth. He holds out his vulnerable palms to the world, with his arms still touching the tree in trepidation over his sudden liberation and uncertain days ahead. With his eyes uneasily scanning the horizon, he looks hesitant about stepping forward. The second figure, an emancipated girl (or woman), also wearing only a cloth wrapped around her waist and thighs, moves forward with a nervous but resolved expression. Unlike the boy, the girl hides the palm of her hands, suggesting that she is shielding her inner feelings. She attempts to step into an unknown, wider world, into which the boy seems reluctant to advance. The anxiety in their expressions indicates future hardships they would soon have to encounter as supposedly free Americans. The scant clothing predicts their handicap in a materialist society. The third figure, Humanity, an allegorical female clothed in a gown and visibly crying with her face covered by her left arm, looks like an omniscient deity. Fuller's sculpture epitomized the half-century black experience following the Emancipation Proclamation, one that was characterized by emotional turmoil despite constitutional freedom. The weeping figure can represent the continuing suffering of the emancipated.

Importantly, *Emancipation* created a new narrative of emancipation from slavery. The sculpture connected itself with Africa because Fuller allegedly modeled the male figure with reference to "a photo of Senegalese she had seen."[27] These African features attest to her intended linkage between American identities and African origins. At first, the two appear to leave one hell and enter another: emancipated from fate, the symbol of slavery, they are aware of their new tribulations in freedom. However, I offer a differing view of *Emancipation*. If the half-naked male and female under the tree were African *Adam* and *Eve* who are displaced by force from their "garden of Eden" into a new, unknown land, they might have been about to start a different history in the New World. Moreover, according to Fuller, the two are supposed to be strangers, not husband and wife, suggesting that the two figures are Africans kidnapped and brought from different regions.[28] If they are not meant to be the enslaved, the statue needs neither the "accessories" or "claptrap" that would indicate their past

26. Freeman Henry Morris Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study in Interpretation* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1916), 57, http://archive.org/details/emancipationand00murrgoog.

27. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 78.

28. Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture,* 62. Fuller overheard one expositor wrongly explaining to a gathering that they were a husband and wife in the exhibition room.

servitude, such as broken shackles, discarded whips, nor a benignant liberator.[29] The weeping goddess also symbolizes America itself because the deity resembles the Statue of Liberty, who usually welcomes newly arrived immigrants at the gate to America. This Lady Liberty is crying precariously for the man and woman, (descendants of those) who immigrated to the United States against their will. The Lady's lamentation hints at the unfulfillment of American ideals and promises, inscribed in the Declaration of Independence, certain unalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness, which "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle."[30] Therefore, in Fuller's new narrative, the boy's and girl's solemn yet sad expressions describe the loss of ancestral memories and forced displacement from their African homeland. It expresses the imaginary beginning of the *free* African race on American soil after two and half centuries of actual bondage.

Fuller's interpretation of the dramatic moment of African Americans' liberation—the Emancipation Proclamation—also hints at a soon-to-be-broken promise of freedom during and after the Reconstruction years. She visualizes the curse of slavery instead of the blessing of emancipation. In a letter to the writer and art historian Freeman Henry Morris Murray, she revealed her primary motive for creating the work: "The Negro has been emancipated from slavery but not from the curse of race hatred and prejudice. ... [However, it] was not Lincoln alone who wrote the Emancipation but the human side of the nation."[31] The group is Fuller's reminder of "the human side of the nation" that helped abolish the institution of slavery. Fuller's work appealed to the American conscience by redefining the moment of reconciliation a half century before. Thus, Fuller's sculpture, consisting of humans and a deity, allegorically demands renewed effort to fulfill the promises made by the founding fathers and to integrate the enslaved into American society. In a sense, *Emancipation* can mean the liberation of the whole nation from the curse of slavery.

Despite the sculptor's professional intentions, *Emancipation*, which was placed in the center of the section of an exhibition called "The Temple of Beauty," provoked a strong reaction. To some, Fuller's sculpture seemed "crude and unpleasing," incomplete, and inelegant because of its rough contours and partial nudity of the emancipated man and woman.[32] Nevertheless, the work had a powerful impact on audiences of any color.[33] In addition to expressing the fear, unfulfilled promises, and betrayal of trust that African Americans experienced after their "emancipation," the sculpture communi-

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29. Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture,* 65.
30. "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.
31. Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture,* 56.
32. Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture,* 58.
33. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 96.

cates a universal theme of apprehension amid uncertainty. Fuller's modeling technique and her use of a circular, outward-looking design effectively portray a whole people who unpreparedly face an unknown destiny and unexpected trials. It visualizes conflicted emotions, such as hope and fear, which all of us can feel in the face of an unexpected destiny.

II. *Mary Turner*: Reclaiming a Lost Family

Mary Turner is another activist work by Fuller. She models an articulate woman who publicly protested against illegal violence in the South. In May 1918, Mary Turner, a twenty-one-year-old black woman, was brutally lynched by a white mob in the state of Georgia. She was eight months pregnant, but her attackers made no allowance for her age, gender, or physical condition. Walter White, the NAACP's then-assistant secretary, investigated the case and published a detailed report in *The Crisis* in September 1918.[34] According to the report, Mary Turner publicly demanded legal punishment for the murderers of her husband, Hayes, who had been lynched for allegedly conspiring in the murder of a white farmer, Hampton Smith. Upon hearing her remark, a white mob decided to "teach her a lesson."[35] The mob took two lives: Mary and her unborn child. She was hanged from a tree and burned alive with her abdomen cut open, her fetus removed and crushed under the lynchers' heels.[36] Partaking in the nationwide rise in lynchings that would climax in the so-called "Red Summer" in the following year, the local whites suppressed Turner's voice with mob rule.[37] This atrocity attracted national attention because of her gender. According to "The Shame of America," a 1922 NAACP advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times* and other newspapers, women accounted for 2.4 percent of those who were lynched between 1889 and 1922.[38] Historian Kerry Segrave also estimates that females accounted for roughly two percent of all lynching victims around the turn of the twentieth century.[39] The scarcity of female victims itself suggests that to lynch a woman was nothing but a "taboo" to white mobs.

This callous incident inspired Fuller to express her indignation through art. *Mary Turner* is her

34. Walter White, "The Work of a Mob," *The Crisis* 16, no. 5. (September 1918): 221–23, http://www.maryturner.org/images/White.pdf.
35. White, "The Work of a Mob," 222.
36. White, "The Work of a Mob," 222.
37. Jan Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 1–2.
38. NAACP, "The Shame of America" (advertisement), *New York Times,* November 23, 1922, Amistad Digital Resource: Image Archive, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6786. The NAACP counted eighty-three women among the 3,436 victims in this period.
39. Kerry Segrave, *Lynchings of Women in the United States: The Recorded Cases, 1851–1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 8.

antithesis to the white suppression of the voice of black women. During this period, Southern white society widely viewed mob violence against blacks as a legitimate means of solving (or preventing) race problems; as a result, most perpetrators escaped legal sanctions.[40] Fuller's depiction of the incident constituted a pictorial warning about an ongoing genocide.

Mary Turner, which is a statue of a mother and child, is an imaginative work because in real life, the mother was killed without giving birth to the child. Fuller creates a new narrative, one in which the mother is reunited with her baby. Embracing a tiny baby and attempting to protect her/his life from outside evil, the mother stares down at the flames scorching her dress, which appear to be the hands and faces of their attackers. Her twisted posture conveys the dramatic last moments of the life-and-death struggle Fuller envisions. The statue decries the fact that even fifty years after the official abolition of slavery, a "free" black woman was still subject to white violence.[41] The dominant image of doomed rather than sacred motherhood in Fuller's sculpture demands the audience to question why this innocent, expecting woman had to be killed.

Fuller's reconstructed narrative of a mother defending her baby eulogizes independent and autonomous womanhood originating in Africa. According to African American anthropologist Tarikhu Farrar, their ancestors brought to the New World African "maternal," if not matriarchal, culture, where women's presence was visible and not unwelcomed in the political, economic, and social spheres.[42] Melville J. Herskovits also suggests that "Negro families headed by women" was a tradition brought from Africa.[43] Turner embodies militant antilynching womanhood, represented by Ida B. Wells, an African American journalist and activist who spoke against mob violence a quarter century earlier than the incident.[44] In a new narrative, Turner, a carrier of Africa-oriented resilient womanhood, protested any social evil hampering her and her baby's fate. Fuller gave form to her and black foremothers' sup-

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40. Georgia Historical Society, "Mary Turner and the Lynching Rampage of 1918," 2014, http://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/mary-turner-and-the-lynching-rampage-of-1918/. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mary Turner became an anti-lynching icon.

41. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Women and Slavery: The Modern Atlantic* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 306.

42. Tarikhu Farrar, "The Queenmother, Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority in Precolonial West African Monarchy," *Journal of Black Studies* 27, no. 5 (May 1997): 594, https://doi.org/10.1177/002193479702700501.

43. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941), 179–81. Herskovits finds the African "tradition of the family organized about or headed by women" in West Africa and the West Indies, where women could leave their husbands with children whenever they chose because of their economic independence and the mother-centered family tradition.

44. Mary Jane Brown, "'Eradicating This Evil': Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892–1940" (Ph. D. diss., Ohio State University, 1998), 3–5; Jordynn Jack and Lucy Massagee, "Ladies and Lynching: Southern Women, Civil Rights, and the Rhetoric of Interracial Cooperation," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2011):

pressed voice of reclaiming a lost family, born and unborn, in the mother-child sculpture.

Its importance to Fuller is evident in her attitude toward the artwork. It remained her life's work. Reportedly retaining a clear memory of the Mary Turner incident years later, she never stopped modifying the sculpture.[45] Fuller had kept it in her studio for decades, allowing it to be seen only by her neighbors and art students, probably because she was aware of its "radical" message. In 1922, the *Boston Herald* admired Fuller's artworks, which were exhibited in the Boston Public Library's Fine Arts Department, but also expressed concern for her safety, listing possible attackers such as Klansmen and White Knights.[46] The reviewer's tone hints at the bitter racial atmosphere of the early 1920s. Fuller's reluctance to exhibit *Mary Turner* suggests a desire to avoid confrontation with oppressors because some viewers would find her egalitarian message upsetting. It secretly served as a silent protest against the violation of human dignity until she dedicated it to the American Museum of Negro History in the year before her death, finally opening her endeavor to the public.[47]

III. *Ethiopia Awakening*: The Moment of Resuscitation

Ethiopia Awakening (also called *Ethiopia*) was another creation to indicate Fuller's quest for racial and gender equality in her country. This work features black Americans' linkage to Africa, their ancestors' homeland. She used this linkage not only to invoke a sense of racial pride among her people, but also to demonstrate the legitimacy of their origin as a free-born race.

In the early twentieth century, African Americans came to view Africa in a new light, not as a land of stigma but as a source of pride. Six generations after his forefathers had left Africa, Du Bois expressed his strong ties to Africa: "I felt myself African by 'race' and by that token was African and an integral member of the group of dark Americans who were called Negroes."[48] He further wrote, "We

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495–97; Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells,* ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 184; "Ida Well's Mistake" (quoted from a Memphis Paper, *Commercial-Appeal,* July 30, 1894), *Sun,* July 31, 1894; Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900,* ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 62–66. According to Mary Jane Brown, Well's campaign mobilized countless women, white and black, who emotionally reacted to "the intrinsic evils of mobbism," despite public censure of lynching as an "unladylike" issue.

45. Judith Nina Kerr, "God-Given Work: The Life and Times of Sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, 1877–1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1986), 251–52.

46. Sylvia G. L. Dannett, *Profiles of Negro Womanhood* (Yonkers, NY: Educational Heritage Inc., 1964), 39–40, https://archive.org/details/profilesofnegrow01dann.

47. Kerr, "God-Given Work," 254; Meta Warrick Fuller, "To Whom It May Concern (January 29, 1967)," Folder 27, MWFP. Her shaky signature on the bequeathal latter shows the extent to which she had valued the sculpture.

48. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Concept of Race" (1940), in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 638–39.

believe that the Negro people as a race have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity which no other race can make."[49] Buoyed by this conviction, Du Bois was a beacon of African American pride in and spiritual affinity with the continent of their ancestors.

This shift began in March 1896 when Menelik II of Ethiopia defeated Italian forces at the Battle of Adwa, marking the first victory by African forces over a European power during the colonial era.[50] By 1914, European powers such as Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal had colonized virtually all of Africa, save for a few areas, including Liberia, Morocco, Libya, and Ethiopia.[51] With this victory, Menelik II of Ethiopia, known as "the Napoleon of Africa," consolidated the previous semi-independent viceroyalties into a unified, powerful country. As a result, Ethiopia, one of only a few countries ever to successfully resist a Western power (although Italy would eventually occupy it from 1936 to 1941), became a source of pride for people of African descent.

The Pan-African movement also raised the African American consciousness of Africa as the land of their ancestors. Pan-Africanism was "a counterforce to imperialism," originating from African peoples' struggle against "the enslavement and the colonization of their people by extra-African forces."[52] In 1900, the first Pan-African Congress took place in London, with about thirty leaders attending from the United States, Canada, Ethiopia, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and most islands of the British West Indies. Their shared purpose was to counteract "European colonization and exploitation of the African continent."[53] The participants from various countries united themselves on behalf of the African *diaspora*, and Du Bois became the leading spokesperson for subsequent Pan-African conferences.[54]

Fuller felt a particularly strong affinity with Africa because her husband, Solomon Carter Fuller, Sr., was an African native. Born in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1872, Solomon came to the United States to further his education in 1889.[55] He obtained a medical degree in 1897 and became a respected psy-

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49. Du Bois, "The Concept of Race," 639.

50. Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia, *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory Against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 32.

51. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 65.

52. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, *Pan-Africanism: Politics, Economy, and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1–3.

53. Du Bois, "The Concept of Race," 639.

54. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13. Edwards defines the term *diaspora* as "cultural and political linkage only through and across difference." In this article, I instead emphasize ancestral or spiritual nostalgia to describe progressive African Americans' attitudes toward Africa.

55. Kerr, "God-Given Work," 157.

chiatrist in the United States. Raised in a leading Liberian family, Solomon remained intimately connected with his Liberian friends, even after he chose to live in the United States. One of his boyhood friends, Charles Dunbar Burgess King, who served as Liberia's president from 1920 to 1930, stayed at Fuller's house in Massachusetts shortly after assuming the presidency. Another friend, Nathaniel Cassell, president of Liberia College and rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Monrovia, also visited the Fullers in the United States.[56] Through these guests, Fuller must have found Africa no longer just a distant continent where her ancestors had once lived, but a place to which her family and friends were still connected.

In the 1910s, Fuller responded to the rise of Pan-Africanism in her art. She sculpted the statues of Menelik II (the Emperor of Ethiopia) and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, both of whom were sources of racial pride for her African American contemporaries.[57] Born in England in 1875, Coleridge-Taylor was an acclaimed mixed-race composer and one of the few British musical elite who willingly incorporated "Negro spirituals" into his compositions.[58] The death of this highly respected classical musician in 1912 and the Abyssinian emperor's passing in the following year may have inspired Fuller to create artworks dedicated to these two great heroes of African descent.

Ethiopia Awakening is Fuller's answer to the distressing "Negro problem." The sculpture was commissioned for America's Making Exposition in 1921.[59] The figure's head is wrapped in a headcloth usually worn by Egyptian queens, thereby suggesting that she has just acceded to the throne. Wrapped like a mummy from the waist down, the Egyptian queen appears to undergo a rebirthing process, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. Her right hand, placed on the center of her chest, holds the edge of the linen binding, indicating that she takes it off to free herself from fetters—as if the queen were breaking a centuries-old curse. The young Egyptian queen appears carefree yet full of life, and her serenity symbolizes the transformative process of death to life.

Ethiopia Awakening is also a part of Fuller's reconstructed narrative of reshaping African Americans as a legitimate race that deserved respect in the New World. It was commissioned by Du Bois

56. Meta Warrick Fuller, "Dr. Solomon Fuller's 75th Birthday Anniversary" (1947), Folder 12, MWFP.

57. Kerr, "God-Given Work," 204–9. These two works were exceptions because most of her works during the decade were personal depictions.

58. Paul Richards, "Africa in the Music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor," in *Sierra Leone, 1787–1987: Two Centuries of Intellectual Life,* eds. Murray Last and Paul Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 566.

59. Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 172. "America's Making: A Festival and Exhibit of Three Centuries of Immigrant Contributions to Our National Life," sponsored by the New York City and State Boards of Education, invited thirty-three immigrant groups to show what they had contributed to America. It was held in the Seventy-First Regiment Armory on Manhattan's East Side in the fall of 1921.

and James Weldon Johnson for the exposition celebrating three centuries of immigrants' contributions to America.[60] Fuller's sociopolitical protest is evident in her decision to create a royal statue in an Egyptian style and name it after Ethiopia. Ironically, half a century after their emancipation from nearly 250 years of bondage, African Americans had to enter the fair as "honorary immigrants," as if they were just one of the many other ethnic groups who had voluntarily immigrated to the United States.[61] The bandage represents a plethora of restrictions—prejudice, rejection, exclusion, repression, degradation, and second-class citizenship—that had effaced them as free and equal members of society. Fuller's Egyptian statue directly questions this premise by suggesting that African Americans are not immigrants but rather are "sleeping" captives carried from the other continent. Her royalty indicates that they are not a rootless people but an uprooted people who once belonged to some kingdom or sovereign state in Africa. Fuller's new narrative emphasizes women's leadership in confronting daily difficulties because Fuller's awakening figure is not a king, but a queen. Just as this queen or spiritual leader was awakened, so were African American men and women, with a renewed racial pride after an extended period of enforced amnesia about their ancestral heritage. In Fuller's narrative, a year after suffrage was granted to women, African American women were ready to assume a leading role in the pursuit of full citizenship. The half-slumbering and half-awake queen, who is unwrapping her constraints, shows that the real black liberation should be brought by themselves. The allegorical statue, *Ethiopia Awakening,* placed at the center of the African American pavilion, had preternatural power that commanded considerable public attention.[62] The extraordinary grace and godly calm displayed by the queen lets any viewers transcend historically constructed human bigotry.

Conclusion

At the peak of racial violence in early-twentieth-century America, Fuller took advantage of art as an instrument of sociopolitical expression, just as Tanner did in painting and Dunbar did with poetry. Fuller kept working for her people. The Boston branch of the NAACP recognized her long devotion to sociopolitical activities and awarded her a citation of merit "in recognition of her rich and continuous contribution to the cause of Civil Rights and Human Freedom through the art of sculpture beginning with her History of the Negro in 1907 and continuing until the date of the presentation of 1964."[63]

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60. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 101.
61. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 102. The white organizers of the fair invited black Americans as "honorary immigrants."
62. Ater, *Remaking Race and History,* 103.
63. "Meta Warrick Fuller Had long and Notable Career" (obituary), *Framingham-Natick,* March 14, 1968, Folder 34, MWFP.

Accepting Du Bois's suggestion to make "a specialty of Negro types," Fuller merged aesthetics and politics in her sculptures in these works, elevating black motifs into universal themes and depicting human fear, despair, and suffering in a tangible and appreciable form. Fuller racialized and deracialized democracy to express her people's pain and pride through the silent but eternal form of art. The sealed lips, repressed emotions, and graceful postures of Fuller's figures demand the reconsideration of universal beauty, regardless of ethnic origins. Her works reconstructed free African Americans, who had been born, lived, and died *free*.

The works discussed in the present article conceptualize a new narrative of black freedom, questioning the dehumanizing of American racist politics. The figures as agents in her narrative are, at least, far from abandoning the hope of becoming equals with whites. The *free-born* African boy and girl (*Emancipation*), though uneasy and disturbed, are determined to take a step forward to start a new life, the resilient mother (*Mary Turner*) reclaims unjustly lost lives of her family, and Queen Ethiopia (*Ethiopia Awakening*) demands full citizenship for the uprooted race and fulfillment of American ideals. Her works full of imaginations and allegories might elicit many different interpretations. Nevertheless, Fuller's sculpture addresses human prejudice and unites peoples with a human appeal. Incidentally, Fuller's genius itself challenged the white assumption of black inferiority of the time.

The current article only covers some early works of the sculptor whose career spread over seven decades, and Fuller's lifetime of social activism, though gradually restrained and muted, needs a thorough examination. However, Fuller's reconstructed narrative of black history in the midst of the surviving legacy of slavery and racial antagonism revises the otherwise lost genealogies of African American women's protest and dissenting voices against injustice and inequality, which would be succeeded by black women artists and cultural creators of the Harlem Renaissance and beyond.

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