



Breaking Racial Barriers

African Americans in the Harmon Foundation Collection

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution,
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Mary Beattie Brady: Remembering the Legacy

By David C. Driskell

There are few African American artists of my generation for whom the name Mary Beattie Brady does not bring to remembrance a certain kind of art patronage that we no longer know. And with these remembrances come many colorful stories, some of which recall the peculiarities of an era in American art when black artists had few racially independent sources to turn to in their own communities for the support of their artistry. It is in the context of art patronage that “Miss Brady” as we affectionately called her, the first and only director of the Harmon Foundation from its inception in 1922 until it ceased operations in 1967, came to the aid of African American artists at a very critical time in history. Although Brady did not acknowledge in writing, or verbally to my recollection, the importance of the Harlem Renaissance as a self-made artistic and cultural movement among black writers, visual artists, dancers, and musicians in the 1920s, she nevertheless lent invaluable support to the painters and sculptors whom we now remember as major contributors to the renaissance movement.

Few black artists born after 1930 were the immediate beneficiaries of the Harmon Foundation’s select art patronage. In many ways, my own personal experiences as an artist who received limited financial support intermittently from the foundation from 1955 through 1967 are an exception to the rule when one takes into consideration the foundation’s history of financial giving, especially that which directly aided artists after the demise of the foundation’s Exhibition Program for Negro Artists in the 1920s and the 1930s. Yet a careful review of much of the correspondence that Brady conducted with African American artists teaching at historically black Colleges and universities in the 1950s and thereafter—until the foundation closed in 1967—reveals that

Brady offered little or no financial support to these institutions. She did selectively choose one artist here and there to test her theories on by offering a form of limited help. At times, the help came in the form of a small check. Seldom was more than three hundred dollars given by the foundation for what Brady called “pocket money.” It was to be used to conduct “research in social and cultural experimentation” (one of Brady’s own phrases). It was through odd circumstances that I became Brady’s listening ear and the one individual to whom a measure of support was given from 1955 through 1966.

My time during this eleven-year period was spent teaching art at Talladega College and at Howard University. I received volumes of correspondence from Brady over the first seven years while teaching at Talladega. The remaining four years were spent in the Department of Art at Howard University. It was at Howard that I first met Brady.

I first met Brady in the spring of 1955. It was my senior year at Howard. The occasion of our meeting was Brady’s presence at the opening of the William H. Johnson exhibition. I had worked to help install the exhibition as a student assistant to Albert J. Carter, curator of the Howard University Gallery of Art. Although I had read and heard much about Mary Beattie Brady of the Harmon Foundation, the William H. Johnson exhibition offered me the chance to meet her in person. She made an indelible impression on me with her simple style of dress—a black one with a small white collar. She wore no jewelry and no makeup, another trademark of this plain but remarkable woman. She also wore a matching felt hat that seemingly sat flatly on top of her head of lovely white hair.

I was introduced to Brady by James V. Herring, the venerable old scholar who founded the Department of Art at Howard and in whom Brady showed a measure of trust. Thereafter, Miss Brady and I engaged in an exchange of letters that continued over the next twelve years.

Upon my arrival at Talladega College in the fall of 1955, after Claude Clark had resigned his position of associate professor of art there, Miss Brady proceeded to write to me on a weekly basis offering unsolicited advice about how to run the Art Department at Talladega. Much of her advice was helpful, and it laid the groundwork for a more substantial form of help that I was to receive from the Harmon Foundation in later years, particularly after I joined the faculty of the Department of Art at Howard University in September 1962. Immediately upon my arrival at Howard, Brady began to offer advice on a course of action for my teaching art there in the same manner as at Talladega. Much of what Brady offered was sound pedagogical information about principles of art education that she had garnered from reading Viktor Lowenfeld's book *Creative and Mental Growth*. Professor Herring had taught me to be a good listener. And it took many listening hours for one to converse with Miss Brady.

It was after my arrival at Howard University that Brady decided it was time for the foundation to offer me a limited form of financial assistance to further my own career. This assistance came about in the summer of 1964 in the form of a Harmon Foundation Fellowship to do independent study in Europe, a place I had longed to visit. The Harmon Foundation Fellowship amounted to the sum of \$1,500. This represented a sizable amount of money, as financial giving goes, from the foundation. But Brady clearly defined the use of the money I received. Six hundred dollars were to be spent on air travel from New York to Athens and from London back to New York. I was issued a first class Eurailpass for three months' travel at a cost of \$400. The remaining \$500 was given in the form of

a check. It was issued to cover living expenses as I traveled for three months from Greece to England, visiting most of the art historical sites and museums, first in Greece, then Italy, Spain, Holland, France, Denmark, and England, before my return to the United States.

The help Brady offered came about in other unusual ways. Occasionally she offered color reproductions of works by modern European masters such as Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, and Van Gogh—prints that she had bought wholesale from Shorewood Press or from the Museum of Modern Art. She wrote long letters of introduction highlighting the importance of color reproductions in places where students did not have easy access to museums. In many ways Brady's formula for art exposure through the study of reproductions in isolated parts of the country, particularly in the South, where many art museums were still segregated or off-limits to African Americans, was the only art exposure some black students received. There were a few times when artists teaching at African American institutions of higher learning were offered commercial mat boards to supplement what Brady called "basic exhibition materials for art appreciation." But it was she who always decided what the basics were. She would ask many questions of her listener, most of which she proceeded to answer before one could respond. Herring was a staunch critic of Brady's administrative policies, but he was pleased to learn that Brady had taken me under her wings and made me one of her star advisees.

Venturing under Brady's wings meant being willing to receive, on a weekly basis, volumes of letters that were almost always six or more pages long in single-spaced type. In these letters, advice about every conceivable thing going on in the art world, from the importance of joining the College Art Association of America, which I did in 1956, to how to cut proper mats for color reproductions, was to be found. According to Professor Herring, I was the only person living at that time who dared

endure the “pain and pleasure” of Brady’s engaging correspondence and listen, without interrupting, to her long personal conversations. But I benefited in other ways from my association with the Harmon Foundation over the years—ways that added measurably to my appreciation of art, to my own artistic growth, and to my understanding of the world at large.

My close association with Brady was perhaps the last form of patronage in which the foundation expressed real commitment to an individual artist/teacher working at an African American institution of higher learning. But the patronage I received in the form of a Harmon Foundation Fellowship in 1964 had many strings attached to it. Over the years I had proven my loyalty to Brady by turning a listening ear to her unending conversations on the subject of “using art as an instrument for social change” in American society. For Brady, the concept of social change was more about using art as a tool for propaganda than for recognizing the creative impulse of the artist. It was through art that Brady considered herself to be an enlightened crusader for social justice. Being a staunch Republican, she did not like being referred to as a liberal, but she personally perceived herself as being interested in the equality of the races through the plan of integration. She sincerely believed that art could be used as a viable tool in integration.

It was also in this context, of using art as an instrument for social change, that Brady underwrote most of the exhibitions that the Harmon Foundation sponsored for Negro artists from 1926 and the intervening years until 1934, except in 1932 when no exhibition was held. Yet what appears to have been the foundation’s most successful exhibition was not the series sponsored in the 1920s and 1930s but one entitled “Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin.” It opened at the National Museum in Washington in 1944 and generated the kind of response from the public that Brady had hoped for. The exhibi-

tion toured the country during the next ten years with success, and according to Brady, it fostered relevant dialogue “across the unyielding lines of race.”

The portraits that were commissioned for the exhibition were executed within the canon of fine portraiture by Laura Wheeler Waring, an African American, and Betsy Graves Reyneau, a European American artist. Both Waring and Reyneau knew Brady’s philosophy of art, and they leaned less towards an aesthetic formula when doing the portraits than they did toward creating art with a political reference. Brady did not see her vision for art—that of being used as an instrument for social change—as being anything other than a creative measure of goodwill on her part. The idea that she might be accused of dictating to, or being patronizing to, artists of another race never entered her mind. If such were the case, she would have felt terribly misunderstood. In this sense, Brady may have been somewhat out of touch with reality even though her thought process, one that ideally echoed the saying that “her heart was in the right place,” was what most people saw in her dedicated efforts.

Most of the artists of my generation were appreciative of Brady’s efforts to confront racism on any level and come to the aid of the cause of integration through all possible ways. But there were those among us who were suspicious of being used by Brady to have their art pursue certain social goals, goals that were not commensurate with a known formula for success in the larger art world. Even I, who never gave up on Brady’s ability to help black artists, was somewhat ambivalent about the notion of creating images that addressed the ills of society when other styles in art seemed more marketable. Yet seldom did Brady confront any artist I knew about the relevance of his or her subject matter in her crusade to use art as a tool for social change. But she was unrelenting in her efforts to explain to artists how important it was to their professional careers for them to “keep their

ears to the ground,” a phrase she often used, meaning that they should listen to the voice of the people rather than follow prevailing styles and fashions in art. In her own influencing voice, Brady managed to dictate taste and style in art while appearing to adhere to a hands-off policy when it came to the subject matter an artist chose to depict.

On numerous occasions, I received voluminous letters from Brady in one week advising me on how artists could improve their public image if they simply “let down their buckets where they are.” This saying was one in which Brady paraphrased Tuskegee educator Booker T. Washington, whom she greatly admired as an American icon. She used the portrait exhibition of African Americans, whom she noted had made significant achievements as role models for the Negro race, to validate her belief in racial equality. She had a portfolio of these portraits reproduced for those she called “the common people,” believing that any art that found its way into the hearts of ordinary people represented the greatest form of artistry a nation could produce.

Assessing Brady’s role in the effort to define the plan of art in African American cultural history is both mysterious and inviting. The mystery of its historical nexus rests principally in the persona of this fascinating Vassar College graduate who chose the socially limiting idea of noblesse oblige over exploiting her own family’s wealth—a decision that endeared Brady to the hearts of some, while at the same time causing others to avoid conversation and personal contact with her at all cost.

But the salient role that Brady played in helping many young African American artists realize their creative potential as painters and sculptors is indeed noteworthy in the broad context of art philanthropy. The patronage the Harmon Foundation offered was the most valuable support black artists received prior to the advent of the Works Progress Administration. And while there re-

mained doubts in the minds of some of these artists about Brady’s sincerity in fostering the notion that art could be used as an important instrument for social change and to point the way to enlightened dialogue between the races, they nonetheless encouraged loyalty to her and treated her with great respect.

The special support that the Harmon Foundation offered African American artists of my generation and others before me was indeed crucial to our development as artists and teachers in a segregated art world where there were few support services in place to which artists of color could turn. That Mary Beattie Brady was there at the right time to lend a measure of support to African American artists at such a crucial moment in history is an enduring testimony to the legacy of her individual indomitable spirit.

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Breaking Racial Barriers

By Tuliza K. Fleming

A September 6, 1947, article in the *Minneapolis Star* on the Harmon Foundation's longest-running and most successful art exhibition, "Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin," carried the headline "Portraits of Outstanding Negroes Help Break Down Race Prejudice." The exhibition evolved from an experimental program initiated in 1926 by the New York-based Harmon Foundation's founder, real estate developer William E. Harmon, to recognize and promote the overlooked achievements of African Americans, and respond to the increase of racial tension in America. Although the foundation's philanthropic involvement in the promotion—through annual achievement awards and fine art exhibitions of some of the twentieth century's most influential African Americans—is well known within the fields of African American history and art history, precious little information is available about the foundation's portrait exhibition.

The project was initiated under the guidance of the Harmon Foundation's director, Mary Beattie Brady. Brady commissioned Caucasian artist Betsy Graves Reyneau and African American artist Laura Wheeler Waring to create a series of portraits of accomplished contemporary African Americans in the fields of education, art, music, business, science, armed services, law, and government. The exhibition premiered on May 2, 1944, at the Smithsonian Institution, and it then toured around the United States for ten years. Its purpose was to recognize and promote the significant achievements of African Americans, encourage racial tolerance among white Americans, and eradicate the practice of segregation. The Harmon Foundation discontinued the tour following the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling abolishing legal segregation. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Court held that the doctrine of "separate but equal"—first set forth in *Plessy v.*

Ferguson in 1896—was unconstitutional and therefore unlawful. The foundation's rationale for closing the exhibition stemmed from its naive assessment that racial tolerance and understanding within the United States had been successfully achieved with this ruling.

The foundation's action is critical in understanding the social purpose of its portrait exhibition. "Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin" was not simply an art exhibition. It was a social experiment to reverse racial intolerance, ignorance, and bigotry by illustrating achievements of contemporary African Americans. Although African Americans traditionally used positive visual images to counter racist stereotypes, these were usually distributed only within the black community and therefore did not foster their intended social change. The Harmon Foundation's radical innovation—in its intent to reach a much larger and diverse audience—was its commission of both a black and a white artist to create the portraits for its exhibition. With the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, whites began to become interested in the artistic achievements of blacks. These whites were termed "Negrotarians" by contemporary writer Zora Neale Hurston. Historian David Levering Lewis further elaborated on Hurston's terms by dividing Negrotarians into two distinct factions, "earnest humanitarians . . . motivated by an 'amalgam of inherited abolitionism, Christian charity and guilt, social manipulation, political eccentricity, and a certain amount of persiflage'" and those "merely fascinated with the wild abandonment and exotica associated with the 'untamed spirit' of the African American."¹ In the midst of this unique social revolution, in 1922, Caucasian real estate developer William E. Harmon (1862–1928) [Fig. 1] established the Harmon Foundation. Harmon shared many of



Fig. 1. William E. Harmon.
Schomburg Center for
Research in Black Culture,
New York Public Library,
New York City

the motivations included in Lewis's humanitarian type of "Negrotarian," and his organization displayed an interest in African American art and culture that directly paralleled the development of the New Negro movement in Harlem. Harmon's interest, however, really emanated from his childhood experiences and was not merely kindled by a decade-long trend. In Oklahoma, his father, who had been a general during the Civil War, accepted a reduction in rank to become a lieutenant in Indian country of the Tenth Colored Cavalry. Harmon spent a great deal of time with the black soldiers under the command of his father. Harmon, who apparently was not especially

close to his father, developed a sentimental attachment to the soldiers, who gave him guidance and support. The soldiers taught him how to shoot, and Harmon killed his first buffalo on his twelfth birthday.² These experiences had a lasting impact upon his life, instilling his belief that Americans of African descent could weave their way into the total fabric of American society through personal accomplishment.

He established the Harmon Foundation as a small, experimental philanthropic organization to interest his own children in their responsibility for improving America's social conditions. The foundation

operated under Harmon's credo that "a gift of service that stimulates self-help can be of as much or more value as a relatively larger gift of money."³

Harmon organized his foundation into four main divisions: Playgrounds, Student Loans, Awards for Constructive and Creative Achievement, and Social Research and Experimentation. The goal of the Division of Awards for Constructive and Creative Achievement was to seek out and encourage meritorious but relatively unknown individuals, rather than place additional laurels upon those who had already achieved success and recognition.⁴

The initiation of the Harmon Awards in 1925 was only the first of the foundation's many endeavors to recognize African American achievement. Programs such as the "Exhibition of Works by Negro Artists and Awards" (a by-product of the William E. Harmon Awards), and the much later "Portraits of

Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin," encouraged and publicized African American achievements in business, education, farming, fine arts, literature, music, race relations, religious service, and science.⁵

Although William E. Harmon died in 1928, his foundation continued to function under the careful direction of Mary Beattie Brady [Fig. 2], who—as director of the foundation from 1928 to 1967—preserved his principles of self-help and equality. Brady's devotion to Harmon's vision, coupled with her own unique ideas about racial uplift, proved to be a vital force, enabling the foundation to continue its work with the African American community well into the late 1960s.

Harmon had invited Brady to join the foundation in 1922. Brady was born and raised in Sitka, Alaska. After graduating from Vassar College in about 1910, she returned to Sitka, where she taught with her



Fig. 2. Mary Beattie Brady (seated, left) with Laura Wheeler Waring (seated, right). National Archives, Washington, D.C.

mother at a school for Native American children. She eventually received a degree in journalism from Columbia University, and shortly afterward began her work at the Harmon Foundation.

Mary Brady often recalled the genuine admiration and respect she and Harmon shared for one another. She noted, "He liked me and gradually had confidence in me so he left the foundation for me to run. . . . I liked his approach that he wanted to help people help themselves." Brady quickly learned the internal workings of the foundation, and within four years she became the organization's driving force. After Harmon's death, Mary Beattie Brady would carefully direct the foundation's many diverse programs until its dissolution in 1967.

During World War II and the postwar years, interest in African American integration and assimilation within American society spread at a record pace.

Bolstered by the intensive African American participation in the war effort both at home and overseas; the reversal of federal executive policy of racial segregation, as in the 1941 creation of a Fair Employment Practices Commission; and the continued judicial undermining of the "separate but equal" doctrine, African Americans began earnestly challenging the racial system in the United States.⁶ These new social developments, combined with the socially damaging effects of racial stereotypes that had migrated from vaudeville, posters, and trinkets into the extremely popular and powerful arena of Hollywood films, initiated the widespread integrationist and assimilationist movement.

One woman who was especially touched by the United States's incongruous racial policies and proved influential in initiating the portrait exhibition was artist Betsy Graves Reyneau (1888–1964) [Fig. 3]. Born in Battle Creek, Michigan, Reyneau



Fig. 3. Betsy Graves Reyneau, circa 1945. From Harmon Foundation photogravure set in the Library of the National Portrait Gallery and National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

came from a political family. In their activist tradition, Reyneau became involved in various social causes, and by 1931 she had been arrested on three separate occasions for her radical political activity.⁷ In addition to being a crusader, Reyneau was also a professional artist. She received the bulk of her artistic training at the Boston Museum School, under the tutelage of painter Frank Duveneck. In 1928 she moved to Europe, where she resided for approximately eleven years. During her years in England, she wrote magazine articles and perfected her quick drawing technique through her work for *The Bookman*.

Reyneau returned to the United States in 1939. She vowed never to paint again, having decided that portrait painting was of little use in a world that was becoming swiftly engulfed by fascism. She soon realized that the United States was just as torn by social inequality and racism as the countries she had fled in Europe.

Reyneau's resolution to abandon painting was short-lived, however. During a visit with an old friend in Florida, she noticed a young African American boy working in the garden. Reyneau became immediately taken with the young man, whom she described as "the most beautiful person I've ever seen, a Negro boy."⁸

Reyneau's penchant for the dramatic, coupled with her genuine concern for social injustice, reflects an interesting blend: a surface fascination that many radical liberals had with African Americans, combined with a genuine concern for their socio-economic welfare. Buoyed by her recently discovered political cause, Reyneau's life was once again filled with purpose. With renewed spirit, she began to wage a new social battle. Her cause was the uplift of African Americans, and her weapon was the creation of a series of portraits of those who set examples for their race.

Reyneau's first portrait of an African American subject was of the young garden worker in Florida, Edward Lee [Fig. 4]. After completing this, Reyneau

claims to have journeyed to Alabama in hopes of capturing the likeness of the famous scientist George Washington Carver. She recalled, *I went to Tuskegee where I met and painted the last portrait of Dr. George Washington Carver. I talked to Dr. Carver about a plan to break down the barrier of ignorance which kept the two races separated. The present exhibition of great Negro citizens who have contributed to our national life is the outcome of that plan.*⁹

In addition to claiming that she had initiated the contact between herself and Carver, Reyneau maintained that she convinced the Smithsonian Institution to accept her portrait of Carver for their National Collection of Fine Arts. She also took credit for inviting African American artist Laura Wheeler Waring to participate in the creation of the Harmon Foundation's exhibition.¹⁰

In actuality, it is highly unlikely that Reyneau was the motivating force behind any of the events concerning the exhibition, outside of taking the initiative of painting the portrait of Edward Lee. It was the Harmon Foundation that arranged for Reyneau to meet George Washington Carver after she had shown the painting of Lee to Mary Beattie Brady. Reyneau's version of the event, which has been published in numerous articles, appears to have been her own fabrication for publicity purposes.

In a 1953 letter to Margaret Just Butcher, Mary Beattie Brady relayed her version of the origin of the portrait exhibition.¹¹ She asserted that Reyneau had come into her office one day in the early 1940s, inquiring about assistance with her career. Brady promptly informed her of the Harmon Foundation's policies limiting their endeavors to African American artists. Brady recalled, *I made a number of suggestions to her [Reyneau] but I did note the very positive and fine quality of a portrait she had done of a young man down in Florida on the estate of a friend where she had been visiting. His name was Edward Lee. . . .*

A few weeks later I awoke in the middle of the night with a feeling of shame that I had given her such short consideration because it suddenly occurred to me that her work in portraiture might point the way to some very real positive services in wiping

out prejudice in this country. I got in touch with her and suggested that she come back for another confab over the luncheon table.

As a result of this, steps were taken to get her down to Tuskegee with the hospitality of the Institute and there she did a life portrait of Dr. George Washington Carver, finished just a few days before he was taken sick and died.¹²

Brady's recollection of these events is more credible, given the Harmon Foundation's long-standing relationship with Tuskegee Institute and in particular with its president, Frederick Douglass Patterson. Reyneau's claim of responsibility for the Smithsonian's acquisition of the Carver portrait is also challenged by Brady: "Through various connections, Mr. Oscar

Chapman, then Assistant Secretary of the Interior, became interested and wanted to arrange privately to buy through subscription money that he would raise, the George Washington Carver portrait, with the idea of hanging it permanently in the Smithsonian Institution in the National Museum."¹³

In actuality, Chapman first wanted to illustrate Reyneau's portrait on the cover of a pamphlet in 1943 that was being created to generate attention for a project that Congress granted to the Interior Department. The project's goal was to purchase George Washington Carver's birthplace and make it a national monument. Chapman remembered Reyneau's portrait, and felt that it impressively portrayed Carver's character and life.¹⁴



Fig. 4. Edward Lee, circa 1942, by Betsy Graves Reyneau. From Harmon Foundation photogravure set in the Library of the National Portrait Gallery and National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The circulated pamphlet brought overwhelmingly positive responses to Reyneau's image. The public's reaction to the painting, and to the possibilities of a Carver monument, was so impressive that the department established a committee to purchase the portrait, so that "all the people might have an opportunity to enjoy it, as well as to take an interest in the future development of the George Washington Carver National Monument."¹⁵

Documents between Chapman, the Smithsonian's Alexander Wetmore (assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution), and R. P. Tolman (the National Collection of Fine Arts's acting director) confirm Brady's recollection of the events leading to the Smithsonian's acquisition of the Carver portrait.¹⁶ The National Collection of Fine Arts accepted the donation of the work on the assumption that it would eventually find a place in the permanent collection of the then-proposed National Portrait Gallery.

The Carver portrait—depicting him in one of his famous pastimes, the crossbreeding of amaryllis flowers—was a significant acquisition. It was the last portrait before his death, and it was the first portrait of an African American to be acquired by the Smithsonian Institution.

Brady and Chapman decided that to commemorate such a monumental occurrence, the United States National Museum (then located on Tenth Street and Constitution Avenue in Northwest Washington, D.C.) should house a special exhibition of what was then referred to as "Portraits of Leading American Negro Citizens" in May 1944.¹⁷ René d'Harnoncourt, who at that time was general manager of the department's newly created Indian Arts and Crafts Board, arranged for this exhibition under the sponsorship of Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.¹⁸

Brady recalled that the decision to mount this exhibition "led to my having the idea of calling Mrs. Laura Wheeler Waring on the telephone at their home in Philadelphia and asking her if she would like to join with Mrs. Reyneau in getting

together a collection of portraits by two women."¹⁹ It is unlikely, however, that exhibiting a "collection of portraits by two women" was Brady's most important motivation behind her invitation to Waring. Instead, she was doubtless anticipating the pressure that she and the Harmon Foundation would receive from the black community if they neglected to include an African American artist in a large-scale exhibition celebrating black achievement.

Brady, who apparently felt the need to defend her controversial commission of the white artist Reyneau, explained, *Portraiture* [painted by African Americans] *was so distorted that it was difficult to make any impact on the art-going public. While I feel very hesitant always to try to encourage artists to do something that may not come naturally to them, I do feel that we have a very important responsibility with our criticism to be constructive and to show dignity, leadership and positive values where we can.*²⁰ Brady's difficulty in finding suitable African American artists probably had less to do with absence of talent than with a lack of interest. Even though the foundation, more than any other philanthropic organization of its time, had access to the most distinguished African American artists of the twentieth century, the proposed portrait project would be time-consuming; the Harmon Foundation did not guarantee payment for the commissions; and the style that Brady desired was both too rigid and too aesthetically unappealing for most artists.

Additionally, the creation of fine art was never Brady's goal for this exhibition. Even though she firmly believed in the persuasive powers of the art object, she also strongly advocated the application of art for propaganda. She once expressed her belief that photographs of an object (even in black and white) were as powerful as painted portraits and could be successfully substituted for them.

Consequently, respected artists such as Aaron Douglas, who worked closely with the foundation and whose oeuvre included portraiture, may have found Brady's offer unappealing, or Brady herself

may have found some of the artists to be unsuitable candidates.²¹

Whatever her reasons, Brady, who did realize the necessity of including a black artist in the project, made the politically motivated and precisely calculated decision to pair Caucasian artist Betsy Graves Reyneau with African American artist Laura Wheeler Waring. Brady described this as a symbolic partnership of “two races and two women banded together to fight social injustice.”²² Brady wrote to Frederick Patterson, *I really think Mrs. Reyneau, together with Mrs. Waring, have been rendering a service of growing value in the field of interracial adjustments and I hope that a way may be developed to keep this portrait collection in circulation for a period of years, especially with the idea of using the exhibit as a springboard for activities of various kinds in schools, churches, clubs, labor groups, etc.*²³ Brady’s decision was a publicity coup. Throughout the exhibition’s ten-year tour,

journalists consistently commented upon its interracial component. Headlines that read “White and Negro Hostesses to Greet Public at Art Show,” “Race Harmony, Art Aided in Negro Portrait Exhibit,” “Negro Portraits Used to Combat Racism in U.S.,” and “Portraits of Outstanding Negroes Help Break Down Race Prejudice” were prevalent during the exhibition’s run.

Laura Wheeler Waring (1887–1948) [Fig. 5] was the daughter of the Reverend Robert Wheeler, a Congregational minister, and Mary Freeman Wheeler, a musician and schoolteacher who was one of the first African American women to graduate from Oberlin College.²⁴ At an early age, Waring displayed a proclivity toward art, which was nurtured by her family and her teachers through high school. Following high school, Waring enrolled in courses at the Pennsylvania Academy of



Fig. 5. Laura Wheeler Waring, circa 1945.

From Harmon Foundation photogravure set in the Library of the National Portrait Gallery and National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, where she studied under Thomas Anshutz, William Merritt Chase, and Henry McCarter. Six years after entering the academy, Waring was awarded the Cresson Traveling Scholarship, which enabled her to travel throughout most of Western Europe, visiting galleries and finding inspiration.

Upon her return, Waring joined the teaching staff at the Cheyney Training School for Teachers in Pennsylvania to augment her income. Even though she made substantial contributions as an educator, she eventually left Cheyney to return to Europe to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.²⁵ Waring worked in Paris in 1924 and 1925, interrupting her study periodically to travel through France, the Mediterranean, and Algeria. Shortly after her return to the United States, she was introduced to the work of the Harmon Foundation.²⁶

Waring's official involvement with the foundation began in 1926 when she was a replacement juror for the "Exhibition of Works by Negro Artists and Awards." The following year, she participated in the exhibition as a contestant. She subsequently received the Harmon Gold Award and a cash prize of \$400 for her contribution to the field of fine arts—the highest Harmon Award ever to have been received by a woman.²⁷ By this time, Waring had fully established herself as a portraitist, best known for her portraits of African Americans. The five Harmon judges were especially taken with her rendering of Anna Washington Derry, an elderly woman, and *Anita*, a bust of a young woman.²⁸ Upon receiving the Harmon Award, Waring decided to devote all of her time to her artistic career. Singer and performer Roland E. Hayes observed, "Following the grant to her of the Harmon Gold Award, she has become more enthusiastic about the idea of searching out and the portrayal of Negro types."²⁹ In her thank-you letter to William Harmon in 1928 she wrote, *Over and above the medal and very generous gift there are results that you have imagined or else you would not have done this. I am writing only to testify that these results are real. . . . May I tell you that I have been planning to make a record of interesting characters of the American Negro in paint. I have*

*been invited by a friend in France to bring the exhibit there when it is finished. She will use it largely to create more interest in interracial and international knowledge as she was one who was so much interested in bringing Roland Hayes before the public.*³⁰

To her close friend W.E.B. Du Bois Waring wrote in 1929 that the exhibition "consists of twelve portraits of American colored women of varied ages and types. Although it was my own exhibition, it had to pass the gallery's sponsors before it was exposed."³¹ The Harmon Foundation's knowledge of Waring's exhibition actually points to the possibility that the idea for a portrait exhibition of outstanding African Americans may have originated with her, rather than with Mary Beattie Brady or Betsy Graves Reyneau. According to art historian David C. Driskell—who had formed a close relationship with Brady during the latter part of her life—Brady would often unwittingly adopt the ideas of others and pass them off as her own.³² Since Waring's letter to Harmon was in the foundation's files, it is entirely possible that Brady read and adopted Waring's ideas from her Paris exhibition.

Waring's African American social connections may have also contributed to Brady's decision to include her in the Harmon exhibition. Her teaching position at Cheyney College—an established venue for African American artists and intellectuals—gave her frequent opportunity to meet the most distinguished African Americans of the period.³³ Such notables as Jessie Fauset, Lillian Evanti, Roland Hayes, Harry T. Burleigh, Claude Mackay, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, E. Franklin Fraser, Rayford Logan, Meta Warrick Fuller, Henry O. Tanner, Leslie P. Hill, Palmer Hayden, and W.E.B. Du Bois are cited by Waring as friends and social acquaintances in her letters and diaries.

Waring also came into contact with the artistic and intellectual black elite during her stay in Paris. Art historian Theresa Leininger-Miller recorded that Du Bois and Alain Locke *put artists in touch with each other and with other African American contacts in Paris, who made up what Woodruff and others called "the Negro Colony" on the Left Bank in Montparnasse. During the 1920s and 1930s,*