



1943

Oil on canvas

18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches (46 x 35.9 cm)

HORACE PIPPIN
American

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Matthew T. Moore,
1984, 1984-108-1

LET'S LOOK

What is the first thing you notice about this painting?

How many figures do you see?
How are they arranged?

What do you notice about the figures?

What could the large "V" stand for?

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

Look for examples of flat shapes and shapes that look three-dimensional. Which way of painting do you think Pippin preferred?

Which figure is Mr. Prejudice?
Explain why you think so.

What do you think Horace Pippin is saying in this painting? Use examples from the painting to support your interpretation.

MR. PREJUDICE

Although *Mr. Prejudice* is a relatively small painting, roughly 18 by 14 inches, its impact is powerful. The group of figures in the lower half were painted with flat shapes and bold colors and placed symmetrically on either side of the giant "V" separating them. A grimaced white man, bare to the waist like an executioner and intent on his task, hammers a wedge down into the "V." Only after we notice the skin color of the other people in the painting—black on the left side and white on the right—and what they are wearing, do we realize that the artist is making a strong social statement.

Horace Pippin was deeply affected by his experiences as a soldier in a segregated troop during World War I in France, where he fought bravely for democracy. He also remembered how African American soldiers were treated poorly after they returned home. He painted *Mr. Prejudice* over twenty-five years later, towards the end of World War II, when he saw more discrimination against the next generation of young African American soldiers. For African Americans, the "V" for victory referred to winning the struggle for equality in the U.S. as well as winning the war in Europe.

A black Statue of Liberty, proudly holding aloft her flaming red torch, juts in at an angle from the left edge of the painting. What color is the real Statue of Liberty? Why did Horace Pippin make his version black? Four African American men stand below her, each wearing a uniform: a doctor in white, a sailor in blue, an aviator in tan, and Horace Pippin himself wearing a brown World War I uniform, the right arm he injured in battle hanging straight down at his side. On the right side of the painting a white-robed member of the Ku Klux Klan (a white supremacy group) hovers above a large white man in a red shirt, who holds a noose and gazes across the painting at the Statue of Liberty. Could the noose be a reference to the lynch mobs that terrorized freed slaves after Emancipation? Or perhaps this man

is John Brown, the militant white abolitionist who was considered a hero by Pippin's family.

A closer look at *Mr. Prejudice* reveals two men, each working at an industrial machine, who are being forced apart by the point of the "V." Several white men dressed in uniforms occupy the lower-right corner of the painting. One of them, wearing an aviator's cap and goggles, extends his hand towards the black men on the other side of the painting. Although his gesture is mirrored by the African American sailor on the left, their hands do not actually touch. What is Pippin saying about cooperation between the races?

ABOUT THIS ARTIST

Horace Pippin was born in 1888 in West Chester, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. After moving to Goshen, a rural community outside New York City, he won his first set of crayons and watercolors in an art contest. When Pippin was in the eighth grade, his mother became too ill to work, and he was forced to leave his one-room school to help support his family. He had many jobs: as a porter, on a farm, and in an iron mill. His first look at fine art was while working for a moving company, where he would occasionally pack oil paintings. Pippin enlisted in the army in 1917, and served on the front lines in France during World War I. Within a year he was shot in the right shoulder by a sniper and was sent home. Unable to work, he married Jennie Ora Fetherstone Wade Giles and moved back to West Chester, where he joined the American Legion (a group of war veterans) and started a Boy Scout troop. Several years later he discovered that he could guide his injured arm to burn landscape designs into wood panels with a hot poker.



The End of the War:
Starting Home

1930-33

Oil on canvas

18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches (46 x 35.9 cm)

HORACE PIPPIN
American

Gift of Robert Carlen, 1941, 1941-2-1

At the age of forty, Pippin began painting with oils, spending three years on his first oil painting, *The End of the War: Starting Home* (see left). For the rest of his life Pippin explored a variety of themes and subjects: flowers from his garden, stories from the Bible and American history, and scenes from the daily lives of poor African Americans that were reminiscent of his own childhood.

Pippin was discovered suddenly by the painter N. C. Wyeth and the art critic Christian Brinton in 1937, and within one year his paintings were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Wealthy collectors, Hollywood stars, and museums all over the U.S. bought his work. With

this rapid success came difficulties: Pippin's wife suffered from mental illness and he began to drink heavily. However, he found comfort in the Bible and in his creative life. Before he died in 1946, he was working on a painting called *Holy Mountain*, which embodied his hopes for interracial harmony and international peace.

Although Pippin never studied at an art school, his paintings look almost *abstract*. He always focused on painting his own reality, which grew out of a lifetime of physical labor, little money, disability, and social injustice. As he plainly stated, "I paint things exactly the way they are . . . I don't do what these white guys do. I don't go around here making up a whole lotta stuff. I paint it exactly the way it is and exactly the way I see it."

WORLD WAR I AND THE HARLEM HELL FIGHTERS

World War I began in 1914 when a Serbian nationalist assassinated the Archduke of Austria-Hungary in the city of Sarajevo. Once Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia, neighboring nations took sides. The Allies (France, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, and Japan) mobilized to help Serbia. Coming to the aid of Austria-Hungary were the Central Powers (Germany and Turkey), and Germany quickly invaded Belgium and France. The United States entered the war in 1917 to join the Allied troops, who were exhausted and discouraged. At that time the role of African Americans in the military was hotly debated. While the idea of arming thousands of black men scared some white Americans, soldiers were desperately needed and many black men enlisted. Horace Pippin fought in the 369th Regiment, a famous African American Infantry division nicknamed the Harlem Hell Fighters. Throughout the boredom and the bloody battles, the men of the 369th Regiment were both fearless and fierce, although over half of them lost their lives. The French government was so impressed that the entire regiment was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* (French for "cross of war"), one of France's highest military honors.

CONNECT AND COMPARE

Interview artists in your community. Did they study art in school or learn on their own? Why do they make their art? What are they trying to communicate? How is their art unique?

Using a black-and-white reproduction of *Mr. Prejudice*, trace shapes like the letter "V" and the oval aviator's goggles and find where they are repeated.

Compare *Mr. Prejudice* to *The Annunciation* by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Think about subject matter, composition, symbolism, color, perspective, modeling, light and dark tones, and overall meaning.



Mr. Prejudice

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The Annunciation

1898

Oil on canvas

57 x 71 1/4 inches
(144.8 x 181 cm)

Framed: 73 3/4 x 87 1/4 inches
(187.3 x 221.6 cm)

HENRY OSSAWA TANNER

American (active France)

Purchased with the W. P. Wilstach
Fund, 1899, W1899-1-1

RELATED ART PROJECT

Reflect on a social issue—such as AIDS, the environment, affirmative action, human rights, or a current event—that affects you personally. Draw or paint a picture showing your concerns, using the first letter of your topic to organize the composition, as Pippin used the large “V” in *Mr. Prejudice*. How will the placement of the letter affect your message? Will you use symmetry? Flat shapes? Bold colors?

This painting is included in African American Artists: 1859 to the Present, a set of teaching posters and resource book produced by the Division of Education and made possible by generous grants from Delphi Financial Group and Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company.