

Augusta Savage



By: Adriana Angier

EARLY LIFE

**Augusta Savage was born
Augusta Christine Fells on
February 29, 1892, in Green
Cove Springs, Florida. Part of
a large family, she began
making art as a child, using
the natural clay found in her
area.**





Skipping school at times, she enjoyed sculpting animals and other small figures. But her father, a Methodist minister, didn't approve of this activity and did whatever he could to stop her. Savage once said that her father "almost whipped all the art out of me."





**When just 15 years old,
she married John T.
Moore in 1907 and had
her only child, Irene, in
1908. After Moore died
a few years later,
Augusta moved to West
Palm Beach, Florida, in
1915.**

Her and her family moved down to West Palm Beach, Florida, in 1915. created a group of figures that she entered in a local county fair. Her work was well received, winning a prize and along the way the support of the fair's superintendent, George Graham Currie. He encouraged her to study art despite the racism of the day.



CAREER



She moved to Jacksonville, Florida, hoping to make a living by executing commissioned busts of the city's well-to-do African Americans. When that plan failed, she left her daughter with her parents in Florida and moved to New York City to study art. In 1921 she enrolled at Cooper Union in the four-year sculpture course, but her instructors quickly waived many of the classes in light of her talent. She graduated in three years.

While at Cooper Union, she had an experience that would greatly influence her life and work. In 1923, Savage applied to a special summer program to study art in France, but was rejected because of her race.

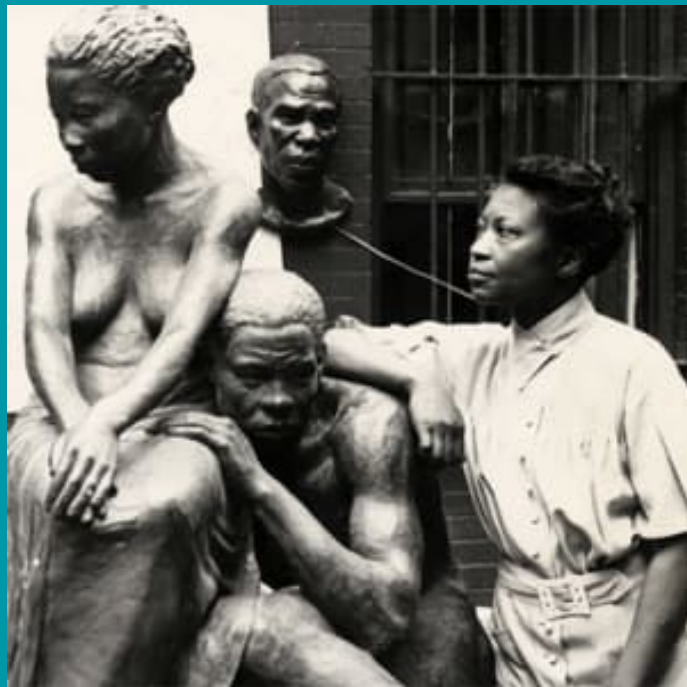


DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

She then ended up sending letters to the local media about the program selection committee's discriminatory practices. Savage's story made headlines in many newspapers, but it still wasn't enough to change the group's decision.



Savage soon started to make a name for herself as a portrait sculptor. Her works from this time include busts of such prominent African Americans as W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. Savage was considered to be one of the leading artists of the Harlem Renaissance, a preeminent African-American literary and artistic movement of the 1920s and '30s.





Savage got her opportunity to study abroad. She spent time in Paris, where she exhibited her work at the Grand Palais. She earned a second Rosenwald fellowship to continue her studies for another year, and a separate Carnegie Foundation grant allowed her to travel to other European countries.

Savage returned the United States while the Great Depression was in full swing. With portrait commissions hard to come by, she began teaching art and established the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts in 1932. In mid-decade, she became the first black artist to join what was then known as the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors.





Savage was then commissioned to create a sculpture for the 1939 New York World's Fair. Inspired by the words of the poem "Lift Every Voice and Sing," by James Weldon Johnson, she created *The Harp*. Standing 16 feet tall, the work reinterpreted the musical instrument to feature 12 singing African-American youth in graduated heights as its strings, with the harp's sounding board transformed into an arm and a hand.

For her remaining years she spent time in the solitude of small-town life. She taught children in summer camps, dabbled in writing and continued with her art as a hobby.



DEATH

Savage died of cancer on March 26, 1962, in New York City at 70 years old. While she was all but forgotten at the time of her death, Savage is remembered today as a great artist, activist and arts educator, serving as an inspiration to the many that she taught, helped and encouraged.



Cummer Museum Exhibit

LEGACY

Augusta Savage said her legacy was the work of her students. She was an artist, educator, activist and community leader. Her work is the focus of an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society, organized by the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens. She made sculptures through her heart and for her people. Without her talents, none of it would've been brought to life.



SOURCES

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