



Fighters for Freedom

William H. Johnson Picturing Justice
Lonnie G Bunch III
Virginia Mecklenburg

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- Accompanies major exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC, 8 March-8 September 2024, Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum in Miami FL, 28 September 2024-5 January 2025, Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, NC, 6 September-29 November 2025, and Dayton Art Institute in Dayton, OH, 20 June 20-13 September 2026, with other venues to be confirmed
- Engaging imagery intended for general audiences and young people with an interest in African American history, art, and social justice

William H. Johnson painted his *Fighters for Freedom* series in the mid-1940s as a tribute to African American activists, scientists, teachers, and performers as well as international heads of state working to bring peace to the world. He celebrated their accomplishments even as he acknowledged the realities of racism, violence, and oppression they faced and overcame. Some of his *Fighters* — Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver, Marian Anderson, and Mohandas Gandhi — are familiar historical figures; others are less well-known individuals whose determination and sacrifice have been eclipsed over time. Johnson elevates their lives visually, offering historical insights and fresh perspectives. Through their stories he suggests that the pursuit of freedom is an ongoing, interconnected struggle, with moments of both triumph and tragedy, and he invites us to reflect on our own struggles for justice today. In *Fighters for Freedom* Johnson reminds us that individual achievement and commitment to social justice are at the heart of the American story.

Lonnie G. Bunch III is the 14th Secretary of the Smithsonian, a position he assumed in June 2019. Previously, Bunch was the founding director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Virginia Mecklenburg is senior curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

