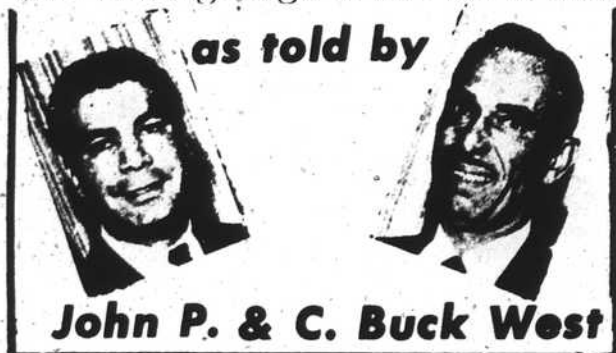


# Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man



as told by  
**John P. & C. Buck West**

SPONSORED BY,



NEVADA NP POWER  
SINCE 1900 COMPANY

HENRY OSSAWA TANNER

Foremost Modern Painter of Religious Subjects  
(1859-1937)

(From Vol. II of J. A. Roger's "World's Great Men of Color")

"THERE IS NO American artist more talked of than H. O. Tanner," wrote Vance Thompson from Paris in 1900. 'Perhaps this is because he is a mulatto and, in spite of the example of Dumas and DeHeredia, we are still surprised when the artist reveals himself under a dark skin. And there may be another reason. Mr. Tanner is not only a biblical painter, but he has brought to modern art a new spirit.'

"Until his death thirty-seven years later, Tanner was still the foremost painter of American birth resident there. He undoubtedly did more towards retaining that high position in contemporary art won for America in France by Sergeant and Whistler than any other.

"He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, son of a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. At the age of thirteen he had already decided to be 'a great painter.' This inspiration had come when he saw an artist at work in the field. Gazing for a while in admiration, he had hastened home and, obtaining a piece of awning, painted his first picture on it. For a palette he used the back of an old geography book.

"LIKE MANY another great artist, he had early difficulties. Poverty and lack of appreciation, dogged him for a long time. His health, too, was not of the best and forced him to quit more than once and to sell his pictures for a pittance. One of them that he once sold for fifteen dollars brought \$250 a week later.

"Drawing was difficult at first for him, despite the great urge within. His first lesson was most discouraging. Having saved fifty dollars, he arranged to take lessons with a leading painter at two dollars a lesson. When he arrived at the studio, trembling with excitement, he was asked whether he could draw a straight line. Like the man who, when asked whether he could play the violin, replied: 'I don't know. Give me one and I'll see,' Tanner took his charcoal. For three hours he drew, or rather tried to draw, simple, straight, parallel, horizontal and perpendicular parallel lines. Then he paid his two dollars and left, his bright dreams of the morning completely shattered. Several days elapsed before his spirit returned.

"REALIZING THAT at \$2.00 a lesson his \$50.00 would not go very far, he began teaching himself, and did so well that he was accepted as a student at the Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

"From the first he had difficulties with his teachers. He believed in independent expression; in putting on the canvas what was in himself.

"In one of his economically darkest periods, this was to serve him ill. A fellow-painter, generous but erratic, had taken him into his home free, on condition that he would renounce all other ideas of art save those of his benefactor. One day, however, a friend of the painter's visited him, and complimented Tanner highly on his work, but said not a word about the work of Tanner's host. The next day, when Tanner returned from school, he found his canvasses,

brushes and clothes on the door-step, and the door locked.

"For a livelihood Tanner was now forced to go into the flour business. He would get up early to spend a little time with his art. The overwork caused an illness that interrupted his artistic work for several years.

"Sometimes he did sell a picture. Of these he would say like a true artist, 'I always felt like a criminal, for if they had seen that picture as I did, with all its faults continually staring at me, they certainly would not have purchased it.'

"HOPING TO earn enough to continue his studies, he sent black-and-white sketches to New York publishers, but they were always returned. Finally he sold the sketch of a lion for \$40.00, which permitted him to change his diet of cornbread and apple-sauce. Soon afterward he sold another sketch for \$80. Then to make life easier, he was appointed art instructor at Clark University.

"Here he saved a little money and began to look towards Europe. In the hope of supplementing this he gave an exhibition. But it was a failure and consumed much of his savings. Then a friend lent him \$75.00, which enabled him to leave for France.

"In France he studied under John Paul Laurens and Benjamin Constant. During this period he ran very short of funds and was forced to practice the most trying economy. As a result he fell seriously ill from malnutrition and typhoid fever.

"HIS GREAT ambition, like that of many other artists, was to have a picture accepted by the Salon. One whose picture is hung at that great annual event is usually 'made.' But this dream did not come true for him until after five years. His 'Daniel in the Lions' Den,' did more than being only hung; it received an honorable mention.

"Recognition in America came at the same time. His 'Raising of Lazarus' was exhibited at John Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, where it attracted much favorable attention.

"The sun had begun to shine for him now. This picture was one of the sensations of the Salon the next year and was bought by the French Government. Tanner, who was in the Levant at the time, received a letter from a friend saying: 'Come home to see the crowds flocking around your picture.' It was also hung in the Luxemburg Gallery. Tanner, as usual his own severest critic, wrote of it: 'I lived several years in dread that the picture would look to others as it did to me and that it would lose the place it held in the Luxemburg.'

"DEVOTED TO biblical subjects, Tanner went to Palestine for a living background for his ideas. 'Moses and the Burning Bush,' 'The Scapegoat,' 'Christ and Nicodemus,' 'The Repentance of St. Peter,' 'The Immaculate Conception,' and others, were a result of this visit.

"With success won, Tanner made France his home where, he said, he found an absolute cosmopolitanism and a recognition in the Fine Arts, which barred no nationality, race, school, or variation of the artistic method. All that was asked, he said, was that art should be true, that it should set forth life.

"He found there, also, a freedom from color prejudice that did not exist in America. For instance, when he re-visited Chicago for an exhibition of his paintings at the Art Institute, where he had won the Harris Prize in 1906 for the best American painting of the year, he was given a guest membership in the Cliff Dwellers' Club, one of the Country's leading societies of artists and literary men.

"TANNER USED to have his meals at the club. Once when it was ladies' guest-night he came as usual for dinner, as did other members, a certain miniature painter, voiced his indignation that a Negro should be a guest at the club on such an occasion. 'Didn't Tanner know that ladies were going to be present?' he demanded. This man, like a few others, usually kept out of the dining room when Tanner was there.

"Among the prizes won by Tanner were the Walter Lippincott Prize; the Second Medal at the Universal Exposition, Paris, 1900; the Second Medals at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, 1901; and at the St. Louis Exposition, 1906; and the Gold Medal at the Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco, 1915.

"Two of his pictures were bought by the French Government, others by the Carnegie Institution of Pittsburgh, and his 'Two Disciples at the Tomb,' by the Chicago Art Institute.

## THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- April 6, 1954 William Pickens, former dean, Morgan College, and NAACP official, died at the age of 73.
- April 7, 1909 Matthew H. Henson, Negro adventurer and explorer, made the historic dash to the North Pole with Admiral Robert Edwin Peary. The discovery brought early honors to Peary. Henson, born in Maryland in August, 1866, was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for the feat many years later.
- April 7, 1922 Col. Charles Young, highest ranking Negro in the U.S. Army, died in Liberia, West Africa.
- April 7, 1942 Negro volunteers were accepted in reserve components of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps for general service in non-commissioned officers' ranks.
- April 8, 1863 The African Methodist Episcopal Church, under Bishop Payne, purchased Wilberforce University, Xenia, Ohio, from the Methodist Episcopal Church for \$10,000.
- April 9, 1898 Paul Robeson, dramatist-concert singer-actor-scholar-author-traveler, was born in Princeton, N.J. Robeson, whose scholastic ability earned him a Phi Beta Kappa key, was also an athlete at Rutgers University. He won four varsity letters in track, basketball, baseball and football; was picked by Walter Camp as All-American end in 1918.
- April 10, 1717 Don Juan Latimo, a Negro, taught Latin at Seville, Spain. He died at the age of 117.
- April 10, 1833 London acclaims Ira Aldridge in "Othello."
- April 10, 1887 Birth of late Robert Vann, founder-publisher of the Pittsburgh Courier weekly newspaper. He died in 1910.
- April 11, 1947 Jackie Robinson made his debut as the first Negro to play in organized baseball, with the then Brooklyn Dodgers.
- April 12, 1734 Anthony William Amo, of Guinea, West Africa, was awarded the Ph. D., at the University of Wittenberg, Germany.
- April 12, 1861 The Confederacy fired on Ft. Sumter, S.C. opening the Civil War, and a struggle for the perpetuation and extension of slavery.
- April 12, 1942 Ten firms with war contracts ordered to stop racial and religious discrimination.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Others are in the leading art galleries of Europe and America.

"Tanner was undoubtedly the greatest modern painter of religious subjects. Discarding worn-out traditions, he developed a technique of his own. To a vivid emotion he added a certain exact impressionism. There was a warm sympathy in his painting that placed him in the rank of Rubens, Rembrandt, Michael Angelo; (See HISTORY, page 4)

**LAS VEGAS VOICE**

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER (Published every Thursday) DEDICATED to the INTERESTS and ASPIRATIONS for a BETTER LIFE of the NEGRO CITIZENS of the STATE of NEVADA

CHARLES I. WEST, M.D. - Publisher & Editor  
ALICE KEY - Associate Editor \* JOHN P. WEST - General Manager  
DOROTHY WEST - Treasurer \* CARITA HARBERT - Office Manager

RAY FEASTER - Advertising Production \* EDDY K. KIM, Society  
REV. DONALD M. CLARK - Religion \* DOROTHY JOHNSON - Food Forum  
HENRY MILLER & ROBERT ARRINGTON - Advertising Representatives  
CLINTON WRIGHT - Photography \* EARL PERKINS - Northern Nevada

EDITORIAL, ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION OFFICES  
958 West Owens Ave. (Golden West Shopping Center) Las Vegas, Nevada  
Telephone: 642-5308

ADVERTISING RATES FURNISHED UPON REQUEST

Price per copy - 15¢ \* One year - \$6 \* Two years - \$10  
(Application for 2nd Class Mailing Permit pending at Las Vegas, Nevada.)