



UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

## ***Emancipating the Past: Kara Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Construction of Black Womanhood in the Antebellum South***

### **Who is W.E.B. Du Bois?**

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was an African-American sociologist, activist, intellectual, and editor. He is considered one of the most prolific voices of the twentieth century, and is often venerated for his brilliant critiques of Eurocentrism and white supremacy. Additionally, Du Bois was also one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

### ***Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil***

*Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* is a collection of insightful essays and poems written by W.E.B. Du Bois. In this text Du Bois contends with issues of race, violence, gender, identity, and class. Some of his most provocative essays include "Souls of White Folk", "Of the Ruling of Men", and the "Damnation of Women".

### **Who is Kara Walker?**

Kara Walker is an African American contemporary artist that is most recognized for contextualizing the experiences of enslaved African Americans through her exemplary silhouettes. Some of her most notable works include "Endless Conundrum, an African Anonymous Adventuress", "Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)", and "Freedom: A Fable".

### **Kara Walker and the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA)**

As a teaching museum, the UMCA is dedicated to providing students an opportunity to enhance their educational experience through exposure to contemporary art. We are especially grateful for the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation for allowing us to display such prolific works from their collection. It is our hope that this exhibition will serve as an important learning tool to aid students in their understanding of racial and gender inequality.

### **Overview**

Using the works in the Kara Walker collection, and the original manuscript of W.E.B. Du Bois' "Damnation of Women" (located in the Du Bois Library), students will critically engage with issues of race, gender, and power as it relates to slavery and the Civil War.

### **Lesson objective**

Students should be able to:  
Demonstrate an understanding of the ways enslaved women were systemically oppressed because of their racial and gender identities.

### **Activity**

Students will view and read W.E.B. Du Bois' "Damnation of Women" (located in the Du Bois Library), and the exhibition *Emancipating the Past: Kara Walker's Tales of Slavery and Power*. Students should be prepared to submit a short reaction paper highlighting the common themes raised in both collections.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **Kara Walker**

<http://www.art21.org/artists/kara-walker>  
<https://www.artsy.net/artist/kara-walker>

#### **W.E.B. Du Bois**

<https://www.library.umass.edu/locations/w-e-b-du-bois-center/about-the-center/>

### **Contact UMCA**

For scheduled visits please contact:

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