James Weldon Johnson was a Renaissance man: successful Broadway lyricist, poet, novelist, diplomat, and a key figure in the NAACP. In 1900 he collaborated with his brother to produce “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” a song that later acquired the subtitle of “The Negro National Anthem.” President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Johnson consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua, where he served with great distinction. In the 1920s, Johnson became a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance, known for his anthology, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*; his work on African American religion, *God’s Trombones*; and *Black Manhattan*, the first history of African Americans in New York City. As chief operating officer of the NAACP during that same decade, he helped formulate the strategy that would later overturn American segregation laws. The background of this portrait recalls “Creation,” Johnson’s best-known poem in *God’s Trombones*.

Laura Wheeler Waring (1887–1948)

Oil on canvas, 1943

Gift of the Harmon Foundation

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