

Lush Caribbean landscapes, often peopled with bathers, played an important role in Bearden's late works. This new emphasis on the land was not limited to views of the island of St. Martin; he also painted composite landscapes that blended his memories of locales, as in *Summer (Maudell Sleet's July Garden)* (fig. 10). In the last decade of his life Bearden created two fascinating autobiographical narratives, *Profile/Part I, The Twenties*, which depicts memories of Mecklenburg County and Pittsburgh; and *Profile/Part II, The Thirties*, which focuses on New York.

#### TECHNIQUE

Bearden's small 1964 collages reveal his use of graphite and ink lines to emphasize individual details within his pictorial fragments. He continued this delineative practice throughout his career, eventually also using painted marks. By 1965 Bearden had added flat-color papers to the magazine and newspaper snippets including pressure-sensitive glossy laminates, brightly printed commercial sheets called Color-Aid; matte construction papers of the sort school children use in art classes; bright foils; and papers he painted and printed specifically for use in collages (see *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*, fig. 11). He also employed a plethora of plain and patterned fabrics and made a few collages entirely of textile fragments. After pasting down the various elements to canvas, board, or paper, Bearden often altered their surfaces by adding spray paint and paint applied with traditional brushes, using abrasion and sanding to roughen and interrupt the plane, and removing color by means of a bleaching agent.

Bearden's extended sojourns in St. Martin in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with his increased attention to watercolor, a more readily transportable medium than collage. Back in New York, the work in watercolor may have led him to the monotype process, a hybrid of painting or drawing and printmaking, the visual impact of which is very different from that of collage. Bearden's monotypes and collages, however, address similar themes such as music, as in *Zach Whyte's Beau Brummell Band* (fig. 12).

Monotypes are made by applying an image to a glass or metal surface and transferring it to paper, usually by means of a printing press. This freely worked approach in turn enhanced Bearden's collage methods, leading to more fluid and painterly surfaces. Eventually he shifted from making collages with touches of paint to making paintings on paper with collage additions, works that fully accommodate the term "collage-paintings" that he had always used to describe his art. By imbuing these late collages with an array of surface properties gleaned from his many artistic experiments, Bearden arrived at a highly personal hybrid of painting and collage that took full advantage of the intellectual curiosity that marked every aspect of his lengthy and productive career.

*The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.*

A large-print version of this brochure is available at the entrance to the exhibition. Brochure written by Ruth Fine, curator of special projects in modern art, and produced by the Department of Exhibition Programs and the Publishing Office. © 2003 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington



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#### SPECIAL LECTURE PROGRAMS

##### *A Bearden Celebration*

Sunday, September 14  
2:00–4:00 pm  
East Building Auditorium

To introduce *The Art of Romare Bearden*, Ruth Fine, curator of the exhibition, National Gallery of Art, presents an illustrated slide overview of the complex and colorful images that recall and document the world of Romare Bearden. A panel discussion follows, featuring original members of Spiral—a group of African-American artists, including Romare Bearden—who gathered in the 1960s in response to the Civil Rights movement. Participating Spiral members are Emma Amos, Reginald Gammon, and Richard Mayhew. Other panelists are Camille Billops, Hatch-Billops Collection; Floyd Coleman, Howard University; and moderator Mary Schmidt Campbell, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. The program will conclude with a book signing of *The Art of Romare Bearden*, the exhibition catalogue.

##### *Bearden Remembered*

Two panels of artists and colleagues discuss Romare Bearden, his art, his career, and his influence on their work.

Saturday, October 18 (Panel 1)  
Sunday, November 2 (Panel 2)

2:00–4:00 pm  
East Building Auditorium

#### FILM PROGRAMS

##### *The Art of Romare Bearden*

September 14–January 4  
East Building Auditorium  
Sundays, Tuesdays, and Fridays  
11:30 am to 12 noon

East Building Small Auditorium  
daily, 12 noon to 3:00 pm,  
with a few exceptions

Narrated by Morgan Freeman and including readings by Danny Glover, the film traces the artist's life and career, using new and archival footage to show the impact of North Carolina, Pittsburgh, New York, and the

Caribbean on Bearden's work.

*The Art of Romare Bearden* also features commentary by Bearden's friends, writer Albert Murray, musician Wynton Marsalis, and artist Emma Amos, as well as by scholars, including curator Ruth Fine, professor Richard Powell of Duke University, and biographer Myron Schwartzman. Produced by the National Gallery of Art, the 30-minute version (VHS and DVD) is available for sale in the Gallery Shops. A 12-minute version of the film is shown continuously in the exhibition.

The film is made possible by the HRH Foundation.

##### Oscar Micheaux Film Series

A series by African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, one of the first independent producers to make popular movies with black actors during the Harlem Renaissance, begins October 4. Included in the series are *Body and Soul* (1925), *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920), and *Within Our Gates* (1920).

##### Documentary Film Program

*A Great Day in Harlem* (1994) is based on Art Kane's legendary 1958 photograph of America's preeminent jazz musicians.

*Bearden Plays Bearden* (1981) features interviews and extensive footage of the artist.

For a complete schedule, consult [www.nga.gov/programs/film](http://www.nga.gov/programs/film)

#### CHILDREN'S FILM PROGRAM

##### *Jazztime*

Saturday, September 20;  
Friday, November 28;  
and Saturday, November 29  
10:30 and 11:30 am  
Ages 5 and up

All children's film programs are shown in the East Building Auditorium. Programs are free and subject to change without notice. Seating is offered on a first-come, first-seated basis. No registration is required. For more information, please call the Children's Film Program information line at 202-789-4995.

#### CONCERT

##### The Stanley Cowell Trio

Concert in honor of  
*The Art of Romare Bearden*  
Sunday, October 12, 2003  
7:00 pm  
West Building, West Garden Court

The jazz trio, consisting of piano, bass, and drums, includes two works by Cowell in the program, "Equipoise" and "Cosmology."

#### FAMILY WORKSHOPS

##### Focus on Romare Bearden

Sundays, October 12, 19, and 26  
1:00–3:00 pm, ages 9–11

Explore collage techniques with artist and educator Cheryl Foster. This workshop includes a tour of the exhibition and hands-on collage activity. All workshops are designed for children accompanied by an adult. Preregistration is required and begins September 14. To register, please call 202-789-3030.

#### FAMILY WEEKEND

##### *The Art of Romare Bearden*

Saturday, November 8, 10 am–3 pm and Sunday, November 9, 11 am–3 pm  
Ages 4 and up

A schedule of events is available on the National Gallery of Art Web site [www.nga.gov/kids](http://www.nga.gov/kids). For more information, call 202-842-6880.

#### BEARDEN COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

Saturday, September 20  
10:00 am–3:00 pm

Street festival celebrating *The Art of Romare Bearden* exhibition features hands-on art activities, storytelling, films, music, book display and sales, and food concessions located on Fourth Street between the East and West Buildings. A schedule of events is available at [www.nga.gov/kids](http://www.nga.gov/kids). For more information call 202-842-6880.

#### SCHOOL TOURS / LEARNING MATERIALS

September 29 to December 17

Tours of the exhibition are offered for grades K-12 on even dates at 10:15 and 11:45 am. Registration begins August 1, 2003. To register, please fax your request to 202-789-4974. Groups are limited to 45 students. Learning materials—booklet, slides, and reproductions—will be sent to scheduled groups. They can also be borrowed through the Gallery education resources service and will be available online.

#### TEACHER WORKSHOP

##### J. Carter Brown Evening with Educators

Wednesday, November 5  
4:30–7:30 pm

The National Gallery and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts host a Bearden workshop for approximately 400 regional teachers. This program features a slide lecture, self-guided tour of the exhibition, performance by a jazz band, and refreshments. Fee: \$20. To register please call 202-842-6796 or visit [www.nga.gov/education/teacher.htm](http://www.nga.gov/education/teacher.htm).

#### TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION

For dates and times, consult the calendar of events at the art information desks or the Web site, or call 202-842-6706. No reservations are required. Tours by special appointment may be arranged by calling 202-842-6247 (adult groups of twenty or more) or by faxing 202-789-4978 (school groups forty or less).

#### AUDIO GUIDE

An audio tour is available at the entrance to the exhibition. Narrated by Director Earl A. Powell III, this tour includes commentary by musicians Wynton Marsalis and Branford Marsalis; Ruth Fine, curator of special projects in modern art, National Gallery of Art; and

David Driskell, artist, collector, and professor emeritus, University of Maryland, College Park. Excerpts from interview with playwright August Wilson courtesy of the Kojo Nnamdi show and WAMU, 88.5 FM, American University Radio. Audio guide available at the entrance to the exhibition: \$5.00. To reserve audio tours for groups, call 202-842-6592.

#### ON THE WEB

A feature in conjunction with the exhibition, a teaching program, and links to related programs at the Gallery are available on the Web site, [www.nga.gov/exhibitions/beardeninfo.htm](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/beardeninfo.htm). NGAkids features Bearden at [www.nga.gov/kids](http://www.nga.gov/kids).

#### CATALOGUE

*The Art of Romare Bearden*, with essays by Ruth Fine et al, is published by the National Gallery of Art (348 pages, 224 color images, 86 black and white). Softcover: \$35. Hardcover, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Publishers: \$50.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Hours: Monday–Saturday 10:00–5:00, Sunday 11:00–6:00. Gallery Web site: [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). For information about accessibility to galleries and public areas, assistive listening devices, sign-language interpretation, and other services and programs, inquire at the art information desk, consult the Web site, or call 202-842-6690 TDD line 202-842-6176.

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and to all of its programs is free of charge except as noted.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

1 / *The Family*, c. 1941, gouache with ink and graphite on brown paper. Collection of Earle Hyman

2 / *Backyard*, 1967, collage of various papers with graphite on fiberboard. Marian B. Javits

3 / *The Street (Composition for Richard Wright)*, c. 1977, ink on paper. National Gallery of Art, Washington, gift of Werner H. and Sarah-Ann Kramarsky and Collectors Committee Fund

4 / *Harlequin*, c. 1956, collage of various papers with paint, ink, and graphite on paper. Collection of Frank Stewart

5 / *Pittsburgh Memory*, 1964, collage of printed papers with graphite on cardboard. Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld, New York

6 / *Of the Blues: At the Savoy*, 1974, collage of various papers with paint on fiberboard. From the Collection of Raymond J. McGuire

7 / *Li'l Dan, The Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*, c. 1983, watercolor and ink on paper. Estate of Romare Bearden, courtesy of Romare Bearden Foundation, New York

8 / *Mauritius*, 1969, woods, paint, stain, nails, screws, and staples. Courtesy of Ekstrom & Ekstrom, Inc., New York

9 / *Reclining Nude*, c. 1977, collage of various papers with ink and graphite on fiberboard. Billie Allen

10 / *Summer (Maudell Sleet's July Garden)*, 1985, collage of various papers with paint, ink, graphite, surface abrasion, and bleached areas on fiberboard. Private collection, Charlotte, North Carolina

11 / *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*, 1966/1967, collage of various papers with charcoal and graphite on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Paul Mellon Fund

12 / *Zach Whyte's Beau Brummell Band*, 1980, oil monotype with paint on paper. Garth Fagan

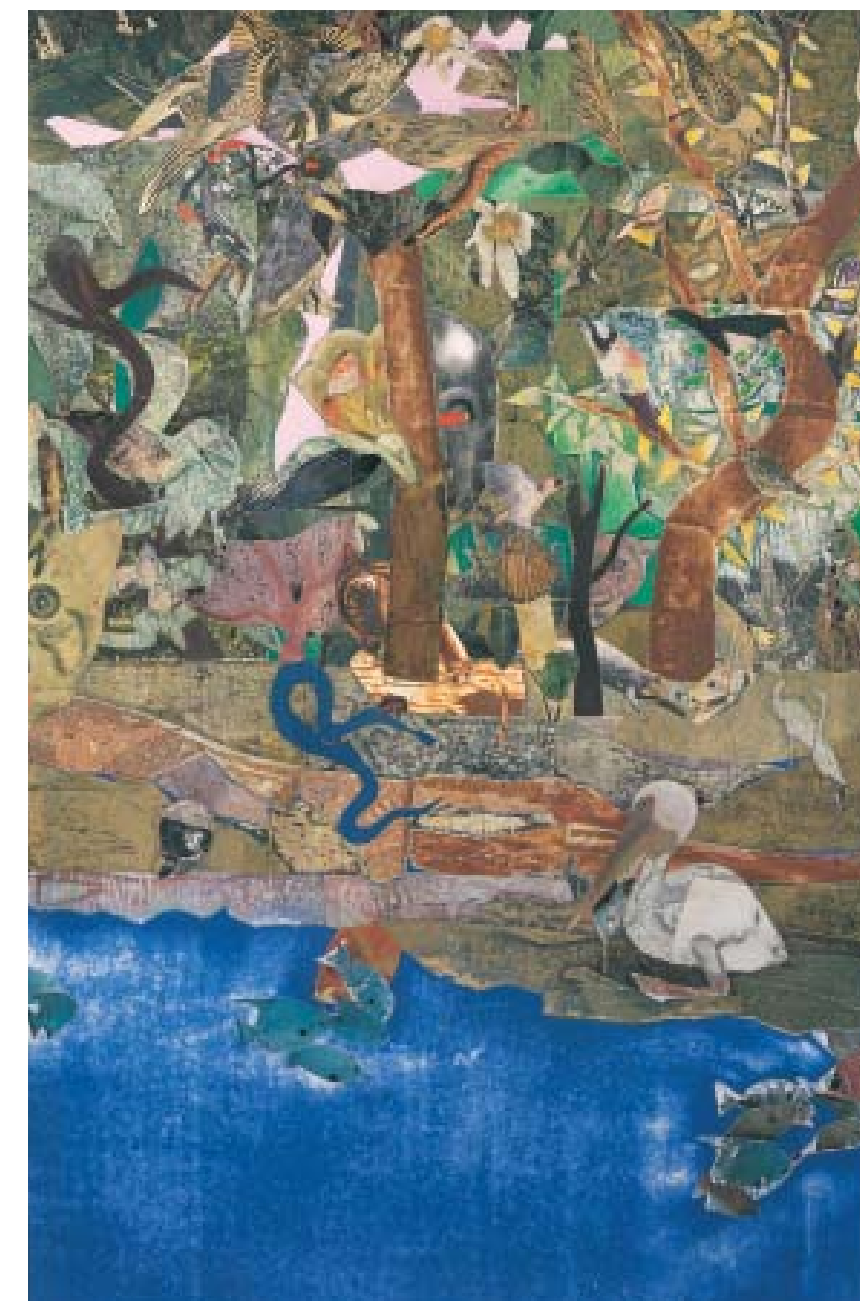
cover / *Blue Snake*, 1971, collage of printed papers with paint, ink, graphite, and surface abrasion on fiberboard. Priscilla T. Grace, Promised gift to the Philadelphia Museum of Art

All works by Romare Bearden are © Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.

#### THE ART OF

# Romare Bearden

National Gallery of Art / September 14, 2003–January 4, 2004



The exhibition is made possible with generous support from AT&T

The exhibition is sponsored in part by Chevy Chase Bank

## CHILDHOOD

*The Art of Romare Bearden* (1911–1988) celebrates the career of one of the most innovative American artists of the twentieth century. Bearden derived his autobiographical and metaphorical imagery from a cultural heritage rooted in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, where he was born. This region was the home of Bearden's paternal family, and Bearden returned there for visits throughout his childhood (fig. 1). About 1914, he moved with his parents to New York City—settling in Harlem—as part of the African-American Great Migration north. For the rest of his life he was based in New York, a continual source of inspiration. Bearden's imagery also reflects extended childhood stays with his maternal grandparents in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and, much later, time spent on the Caribbean island of St. Martin where he and his wife Nanette maintained a second home on her family's property.

During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Bearden's family home was a meeting place for major cultural figures such as writer Langston Hughes, painter Aaron Douglas, and musician Duke Ellington. The polyphony of words, images, and sounds these luminaries would have generated undoubtedly stimulated Bearden's curiosity and imagination.

## EDUCATION

The Beardens' aspiration for their only son was that he earn a degree in medicine. After taking courses including biology, trigonometry, and Greek during a year of studies at the historically black Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, however, Bearden shifted his focus to art, first at Boston University and then at New York University, from which he received a degree in education in 1935. He enrolled in courses including perspective, figure drawing, and watercolor. More important, Bearden studied at the Art Students League with George Grosz, an immigrant to New York from Germany where he had been a major figure in the artistic movement called Dada. The politically charged Dada images would likely have interested Bearden who created a weekly political cartoon for the Baltimore *Afro-American* for two years in the mid-1930s. Another aspect of Dada practice that later emerged in Bearden's art was the use of collage. Grosz also introduced Bearden to the full history of Western art, which would provide the foundation for many of his compositions. *Backyard* (fig. 2), for example, pays homage to seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting.

In addition to his classroom education, Bearden studied painting and sculpture on view in New York's museums and galleries. His images also incorporate elements of African art, essential to his own cultural heritage and a source of formal innovation in the art of European modernists such as Pablo Picasso, who in turn influenced Bearden.

## EARLY CAREER

Practicing his art at night and on weekends, from the late 1930s through the 1960s, Bearden's days were occupied by a job with the New York City Department of Social Services. His only interruptions were a stint in the army during World War II, several months of study and travel in Europe on the G.I. Bill in 1950, and a period of ill health mid-decade. Not until he was almost sixty years of age was he finally able to earn enough through art sales to work full-time in his Long Island City studio.



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In 1954 Bearden had married Nanette Rohan, and two years later they moved to an apartment downtown on Canal Street where they lived for the rest of their lives. Harlem scenes remained an important motif in his art, however, as evident in *The Street* (*Composition for Richard Wright*) (fig. 3), which was reproduced in the *New York Times* in 1977.

## PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

Throughout his life Bearden was an active participant in both the Harlem and downtown (below 110th Street) artistic communities. Modernist painter Stuart Davis was among his early downtown friends, and Bearden credited him with suggesting formal connections between jazz and the visual arts, both of which emphasized the importance of compositional intervals. The uptown circle included painter Jacob Lawrence, sculptor Augusta Savage, historian and philosopher Alain Locke, writer Richard Wright, and dancer Addison Bates, who organized Bearden's first solo exhibition in 1940. The show was held at 306 West 141st Street. Called "306," the site was a vital meeting place for artists in the community. In 1944 and 1945 Bearden had his first exhibitions outside Harlem, at G Place Gallery in Washington, D.C. From 1945 to 1947, he showed with Samuel M. Kootz, and from the early 1960s until his death, with Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc. Both were major mainstream New York galleries.

A prolific writer, Bearden completed three art-historical texts in collaboration with friends—one on art theory with the painter Carl Holty and two on African-American artists with editor and journalist Harry Henderson. Bearden's publications include essays on social and artistic subjects, exhibition and book reviews, catalogue statements, song lyrics, and poetry. He was honored by more than a dozen solo museum exhibitions and 150 gallery shows during his lifetime, as well as by numerous awards for artistic achievement, including the National Medal of Arts received from President Ronald Reagan in 1987.

## EARLY PAINTINGS

In 1941 and 1942 Bearden's paintings in gouache on brown paper of subjects rooted in his southern experience and religious practice, such as *The Family* (see fig. 1), achieved a monumentality that reflected his admiration for the murals of Mexican artists like Diego Rivera. Following his years in the army, he embraced the abstracted forms of European modernism in narrative series of paintings ranging in subject from biblical motifs to works inspired by the poetry of the twentieth-century Spaniard Federico García Lorca. During the 1950s and early 1960s Bearden explored abstract expressionist ideas in works that also contain figurative elements, such as *Harlequin* (fig. 4), one of his earliest experiments with collage.

## COLLAGE

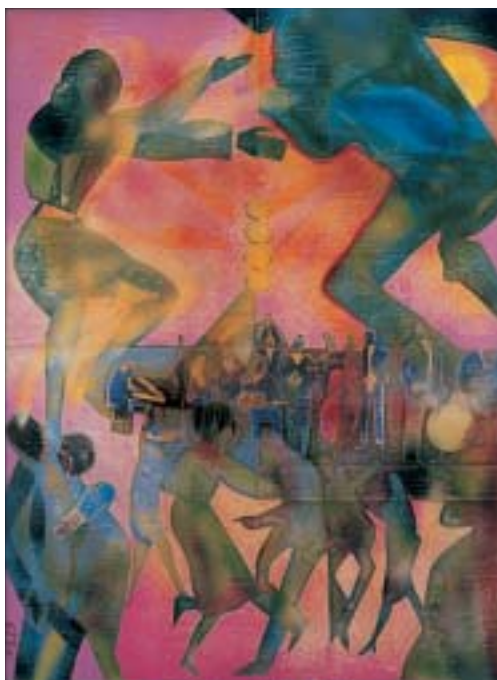
From 1963 through 1965 Bearden met with other African-American artists concerned with civil rights. Their group was known as Spiral (for the Archimedean spiral that simultaneously moves both upward and outward). Initial discussions focused on ways artists might play a role in the march on Washington in August 1963. Bearden suggested making a group statement in collage. Other artists rejected the idea, but Bearden became fully immersed in the process. Working with snippets



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from photographic magazines such as *Ebony* and *Life*, he created more than twenty densely layered, complex compositions that became the basis for much of his subsequent art. These works convey autobiographical content and community culture: city streets and the people who inhabit them, as in *Pittsburgh Memory* (fig. 5), southern farmland, domestic interiors, musicians, trains, and life's rituals from baptisms to burials. Particularly compelling are the eyes and hand gestures of his figures, which remain central to the compositional and psychological strength of Bearden's art throughout his career. After completing these collages Bearden photographically enlarged them in black and white. These expansive monochrome "Projections," as he called them, are marked by dramatic effects of a jarring cinematic form. They received considerable acclaim when exhibited in 1964, but Bearden produced no further works in this medium; he instead preferred collage, often working at a larger scale than previously and using fragments of Projections as part of his palette of papers.

## MECKLENBURG COUNTY, MANHATTAN, MUSIC

During any given working period, Bearden emphasized his favored themes, including memory and place. Mecklenburg memories dominate collages of the late 1960s. In the 1970s Bearden frequently depicted New York, but memories of Pittsburgh, and a brief period in Berkeley, California, offered additional city subjects, not only for his domestic-sized pictures but for numerous mural commissions for public spaces. Jazz and the blues, music from both north and south, were also essential to Bearden's art, as may be seen in the exuberant dancing and syncopated sounds that hold sway in *Of the Blues: At the Savoy* (fig. 6).

The improvisational approach, key to jazz, also is primary in Bearden's process: each new mark on a work is in response to others as they are set down rather than based on a predetermined plan. Bearden's reuse of motifs, sometimes decades apart, provides the elements of theme and variation, call and recall. The method has roots in the history of art—it is common for artists to make copies and variations of others' work—and in the improvisational milieu of jazz musicians.

## NARRATIVE THEMES

Series derived from literature, including the Bible, were important to Bearden from the 1940s onward. In addition to depicting stories from Homeric legend, Bearden explored narrative themes through costume designs and book illustrations. Bearden wrote and illustrated the text for the children's story *Li'l Dan, The Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story* (fig. 7). He also made individual works that suggest a larger narrative such as his single known sculpture, *Mauritius* (fig. 8), essentially a three-dimensional collage, the title of which refers to a martyred Roman warrior from North Africa.

## LATE WORK

Throughout Bearden's career, the beauty and dignity of the black woman, as in *Reclining Nude* (fig. 9), was a central motif. He depicted her in a wide variety of situations and guises: from Madonna with child to lover, from teacher to healer. He frequently included images of the southern conjure woman and Caribbean obeah woman—spiritualists who performed rituals, prepared medicines, and resolved problems.



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