

## INTRODUCTION

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### The Portrait of a Soldier Is the Portrait of an Artist

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**“WAR . . . BROUGHT OUT** all of . . . the art in me,” declared the African American World War I combat veteran and artist Horace Pippin.<sup>1</sup> Across his visual and textual oeuvre, war is a political framework and social context, a fundamental metaphorical trope, a mythical symbol, and an aesthetic point of departure. As his life and works bear witness, World War I was his defining experience, and art was his defining language. War was not only the catalyst to his choice of subject matter; it was inextricable from his experimental aesthetic techniques—self-reflexive artistic processes characterized by slippery ambiguities and an array of signifying practices. For Pippin, the power of writing and visualizing his experiences into being was redemptive and reconciliatory, radical and revisionist. That power remained a force to be reckoned with as his visual and textual lexicon and his political, social, and cultural consciousness developed.

**THE TESSELLATED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN** war, art, masculinity, and identity in Pippin’s body of work point to African American military experiences—particularly combat duty in the frontline trenches in France—as integral to his artistic and political vision. Trauma, terror, violence, sacrifice, militancy, and a lifelong recognition of the futility of the quest for psychological cathartic release are all heartbreakingly to the fore. Refusing to shy away from ellipses, fragmentation, and rupture, he foregrounded representational failures in light of the enormity of experiences that could not be writ-

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ten, much less visualized, into existence. Rejecting white racist caricatures of Black men as comedians, laborers, theatrical performers, and entertainers—but never as men-at-arms or combat soldiers—Pippin sought to restore the elided psychological and physical realities of Black military experiences. In paintings, burntwood panels, sketches, and manuscripts characterized by formal and thematic complexities, he cuts to the heart of the life and death, as well as the afterlife and afterdeath, of the soldier turned veteran artist. My purpose in writing the first intellectual history and cultural biography of Pippin's life story of war as a life story of art is to begin to explore the multifaceted dimensions of his narrative-laden artworks and hyper-visualized manuscripts.

War signifies across Pippin's manuscripts, paintings, burntwood panels, and drawings not only as a social, political, and historical reality but as a source of artistic imagining via symbol, trope, and metaphor. His artistic practices and self-reflexive formal techniques first came to life following his early reimaginings of World War I and continued to distinguish his still lifes, historical vignettes, religious allegories, genre scenes, natural landscapes, and political works. War is a literal and symbolic presence in his four post-World War I autobiographical manuscripts no less than in his body of artworks, including those that, on the surface, seem disconnected from his military experiences. Tellingly, the diminutive figures of armed soldiers can be found buried in a vast array of his still lifes, while many of his natural landscapes are strewn with human skeletons in a dystopian evocation of No Man's Land. Pippin's religious paintings, created toward the end of his life, are haunted by the physical bodies of Black and white soldiers as well as by scenes of aerial combat and mass burial. Via a powerful use of symbolism and allegory, he produced an antididactic and antiexplanatory body of work in order to do justice to his antiwar vision. Working with vignettes within vignettes and tableaux within tableaux, he produced manuscripts, paintings, burntwood panels, and sketches. Throughout his life, World War I remained the key to Pippin's protest aesthetic by acting as the catalyst for his denunciation of the physical and mental atrocities experienced by Black women, men, and children. According to Pippin's aesthetic and political vision, theirs was the No Man's Land of white U.S. mainstream society as they confronted twentieth-century legacies of slavery in the form of segregation, lynch law, and discrimination.

Across this volume, I map a life story of art that is indivisible from a life story of war. I argue that Pippin rejected white racist forces by fighting for the right to become a combat fighter and by fighting for the right to become an artist. Not only was he a self-made soldier, in a context of minimal

army training, scant supplies, and grossly unfair and inferior treatment at the hands of a white racist military establishment; he was also a self-made artist who developed his techniques, obtained his materials, and pioneered his own aesthetic vision regardless of the exclusionary practices of a white art world. It is time for scholars and critics to examine the entirety of his oeuvre in comparative perspective. I work with the conviction that if Pippin's development as an artist has been subjected to widespread distortion, his decision to become an author has been all but written out of his life and work. Despite the difficulties he encountered in writing himself into existence, due not only to a gunshot wound he received in No Man's Land that initially rendered his right arm lifeless, but also to his limited access to a formal education, Pippin's manuscripts testify to his cultivation of an array of formal and thematic strategies as he assumed the role of memorialist-witness to the unrepresented realities of Black military lives.

A compelling place from which to begin to examine Pippin's military service as the point of departure for his life story of art is an analysis of his *Portrait of a Soldier* (c. 1940, Color Plate 1) and *Self-Portrait* (1941, Color Plate 2). Created more than twenty years after World War I, *Portrait of a Soldier*, Pippin's pencil sketch of a Black man in a military uniform, is most likely a self-portrait. An individual closely resembling the artist appears in the official clothing typically associated with the archetypal white American doughboy. A bold foray into self-imagining, Pippin's decision to represent himself in a U.S. army uniform constitutes a radical declaration of Black patriotism and belonging. Set against a national backdrop of segregation and lynch law, and directly confronting white American trepidation regarding the spectacle of a uniformed Black masculinity, the self-portrait is a powerful political statement. *Portrait of a Soldier* pulls no punches regarding either Pippin's own combat experiences or the Black man's right to bear arms. In Pippin's radical vision, the Black World War I soldier appears with a rifle rather than a shovel or spade as a powerful counter-image to white national amnesia, which tended to distort, if not entirely erase, histories of Black combat service. In creating this self-portrait, Pippin rejected white racist agendas that sought to equate the Black soldier with laboring duties. As he realized, his enlistment in a segregated combat unit made him one of the "lucky" ones, as Black men were repeatedly relegated to the Services of Supply divisions, otherwise infamously known as "Slave Battalions" in recognition of their exposure to dehumanizing labor, excessive violence, and even torture.<sup>2</sup> "The story of these troops—who constructed roads, dug trenches, unloaded supplies at Brest Harbor, or exhumed and reburied American war dead—has never been told," Steven Trout observes. "Laborers in uni-

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form were invisible men from the start, at least where most whites were concerned, and they have largely remained so ever since.”<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the political and symbolic force of body- and soul-destroying inequalities, Pippin radically pictures himself in the uniform typically associated with a white normative American militancy in order to establish his, and by extension every Black man’s, right to military enlistment by virtue of a shared status as U.S. citizens. In a bold departure from the vast majority of the photographic likenesses of American soldiers, Black or white, he replaces the U.S. flag typically on display there with an unrecognizable backdrop. His decision to omit such a potent symbol of U.S. nationalism reinforces his reimagining of the Black soldier within a mytho-spatial “no place.” Critiquing the ways in which Black men had been cut off from the social, political, cultural, and historical contexts of a white U.S. imaginary, he testifies to their exclusion from a white normative iconography by circulating within a No Man’s Land of representation, a key concern across his oeuvre. For Pippin, this self-portrait retains a haunting currency, not by designating himself as the archetypal Black soldier, but by emphasizing his status as the quintessential “Soldier”: he insists upon the Black man’s right to become an explicitly universalized icon of military prowess. *Portrait of a Soldier* blurs the boundaries between war and peace by virtue of its emphasis upon mental introspection rather than the blood and mire of battle. On first glance, this work appears to have been drawn by a veteran perhaps engaged in reimagining a younger self as yet uninitiated into warfare. Pippin provides a close-up of a physiognomy resembling his own but not yet marked by the horrors of conflict; his rifle remains on his shoulder, seemingly unused; a generic backdrop provides no evidence of recent or pending physical conflict. This soldier-subject is not shown engaging in military offensives; rather, he replicates a heroic and contemplative pose. Refusing to confront the viewer, he stares into the distance and performatively inhabits multiple guises: part seer, part visionary, and part militant archetype.

Far from portraying his soldier-subject as uninitiated into warfare, however, Pippin provides evidence of an introspection that renders it most likely that the circa 1940 *Portrait of a Soldier* was produced in the aftermath of his military service. This drawing exists in complex relation to the provocative portrayals of Black soldiers actively engaged in conflict that dominate the autobiographical manuscripts, paintings, sketches, and burntwood panels he produced in the decades following his return from the frontline trenches. Powerfully in evidence across his works is Pippin’s stark realization that any radical recuperation of Black militancy ultimately pales in comparison to the corporeal and spiritual suffering caused by the war.

Shedding light upon this portrait's importance as a post- rather than prewar representation of Pippin as a soldier is a full-length photographic portrait of the artist—considered lost or even nonexistent—that I discovered during the research for this book.<sup>4</sup> Here he appears as a young man, standing within a domestic interior and without the rifle and helmet that characterize his self-representation in *Portrait of a Soldier*. Even a cursory comparison of the later sketch and this photograph, dated 1917, and prior to Pippin's service in the trenches, betrays their telling differences. In contrast to the sketch's close-up view, the photograph reveals Pippin in full-length pose. This photograph's rare status as a portrait of the artist turned soldier before he was wounded in World War I is confirmed by his posture: he stands with both arms held out from his sides, exhibiting no physical injury. As he confronts the viewer with a direct rather than an abstracted gaze, the idealized vigor of his smooth physiognomy and erect physical frame is poignantly unlike the stooped posture and lined facial features represented in his *Portrait of a Soldier*. The photographic portrait emphasizes his significance as an individual soldier; in the sketch he effects his transformation from a private self into a public exemplar by casting himself in the role of the archetypal combatant. Created over two decades later, *Portrait of a Soldier* reveals Pippin's determination to foreground his own experiences as a representative signifier for the physical and psychological difficulties confronting Black men as survivors and veterans, rather than as novices uninitiated into warfare. A key concern across Pippin's body of work is his repeated determination to trace a warring past in a peacetime present, as in his postwar life he juxtaposed the physical war he endured as a soldier with the psychological war confronting his life as a veteran.

Straining beyond the specificities of Pippin's own experiences in revealing ways, *Portrait of a Soldier* and the photographic likeness testify to the experiences of the thousands of Black men who made up the Fifteenth New York National Guard division, the combat unit in which he fought and which became the 369th Regiment, stationed with the French—not the American—Expeditionary Forces in the frontline trenches of Europe throughout 1918. Pippin's regiment participated in key Allied offensives in Château-Thierry, the Champagne, and the Argonne, all regions of northeastern France in which vast but uncertain numbers of men were left for dead and many others, including Pippin, were seriously injured. (The casualty figures vary from one historical account to another and depend very much upon the writer's racial biases and access to primary materials.) Far from reflecting the buoyant optimism and empowered stance of the photographic portrait taken prior to his military service, Pippin's surviving bodies of work betray more

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similarities to *Portrait of a Soldier*, in which he comes to grips with the burden of the veteran for whom war remained a locus of tragedy.

*Portrait of a Soldier* provides a powerful framework within which to examine the body of paintings and manuscripts in which Pippin dramatizes an array of Black men variously engaged in hand-to-hand combat, hauntingly prophesying their own deaths, undertaking raids into No Man's Land, or telling stories to preserve morale. Shoring up his antiwar protest, Pippin's transformation of his autobiographical experiences into a generic *Portrait of a Soldier* minimizes individualism in favor of aggrandizing the socially determinist realities confronting all servicemen. Recognizing the limitations and distortions enacted by official histories, Pippin's autobiographical manuscripts work in conjunction with his drawings, paintings, and burntwood panels to memorialize the histories and lives of Black combat service that have been subjected to deliberate as well as accidental erasures within white-originated and white-controlled national archives. As attested by the lacunae and distortions presented by the official records, along with a vast outpouring of pioneering work by revisionist scholars, Black combat service in World War I has remained, for far too many decades, the militancy that has been forbidden to speak its name or visualize itself into existence.

Exalting psychological interiority over physical mortality, Pippin's pencil drawing and early photographic portrait counter the widespread effacement of Black men, not only from official military records but from mainstream literary adaptations, fine art, and popular culture more generally. Both works betray his radical commitment to social and political protest by circulating his own physiognomy as the visual antithesis to white misrepresentations of Black soldiers in paradoxical terms as comedic buffoons, sacrificial martyrs, infantilized dependents, or vengeful barbarians. As confined within a white racist schema, Black men were variously represented as damaged victims brutalized by slavery and its legacies, as bloodthirsty killers rising up in vengeance against racist persecution, or as entertainers performing a racial burlesque for a white audience—but never as militant combat soldiers enlisted in the service of the United States army. Betraying a radically revisionist determination, Pippin visualizes a Black military presence that was otherwise beyond the pale of white official memorialization. He challenges the limitations of dominant visual and textual iconographies across his manuscripts, paintings, and sketches and creates an alternative space within which to defy the polarized dynamic that placed dehumanized caricatures of Black men on a continuum with paternalistic representations of military service as a civilizing and redemptive force for African American soldiers. This mythology typically represented Black men as bent down, clothed in rags, and physically

emaciated prior to their initiation into the U.S. army. Regardless of his commitment to an antiwar vision, Pippin repeatedly relies upon his own portrait to showcase—via his erect figure, exemplary attire, and exceptional physicality—an empowered vision of Black masculinity. Whereas many white writers and artists operated under the racist assumption that the opportunity to serve in the military transformed Black men from children into men, his manuscripts, paintings, and drawings communicate his conviction that there was no need of war to prove that “every man” in the Fifteenth New York National Guard “were a man.”<sup>5</sup>

On the surface, nothing could be further from either *Portrait of a Soldier* or the newly discovered photographic portrait than *Self-Portrait*, a full-color oil painting that Pippin created in 1941, one year after the sketch. Here he visualizes himself as a painter at work rather than as a soldier on the way to or in the aftermath of war (see Color Plate 2). Whereas Pippin’s pencil portrait constitutes a powerful statement of physical militancy conjoined to psychological profundity, replacing the rifle slung across his back with the paintbrush prominently on display in his right hand makes *Self-Portrait* a radical declaration of artistry. Instead of the soldier’s helmet and coat, he paints himself as an artist wearing a white shirt and black trousers, no longer gazing abstractly into the distance but instead contemplating the canvas resting on an easel before him. Emphasizing the complexity of his masked gaze and meditative expression across both works, Pippin calls viewers’ attention to his self-reflexive strategies in *Self-Portrait* by including a painting within a painting, by which he introduces art itself as his subject matter. He opts for a visual poetics of revelation through concealment: just as he chose not to document the horrors of warfare in *Portrait of a Soldier*, so as not to risk providing objectified spectacles of Black manhood for voyeuristic consumption among white audiences, in *Self-Portrait* he renders the subject of his painting within a painting invisible to the viewer, displaying only the reverse of this canvas within a canvas. His decision to conceal this artwork signposts his refusal to satiate the demands of white audiences intent upon appropriating and authenticating Black artistic production. Rather—and as revealed not only within his paintings but across his photographic portraits—Pippin rejected his own and his work’s circulation as products for consumption throughout his career. Testifying to his right to acts of agency, he actively complicated the claims made by sensationalistic and objectifying accounts of his life and art. By foregrounding artifice rather than authenticity, he ruptured oversimplified accounts of his aesthetic practices as instinctive and spontaneous, instead insisting upon his compositional complexities via a symbolic use of design. Asserting his status as a producer rather than a



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product and as an artist rather than an art object, he accentuated aesthetic process over and above artistic realization to defy categorical attempts to understand his paintings or know his life. Just as he demanded that his audiences reimagine the horrors of war as graphically absent but psychologically present within his *Portrait of a Soldier*, in his *Self-Portrait* he suggests that his paintings are as much a source of ambiguity as his military experiences. Similarly remaining interpretatively off-limits and concealed from view, he offers a cautionary tale about how to read his life and bodies of work. As further evidence of his powerful declaration of independence, Pippin refuses to display his right arm as disabled in this *Self-Portrait*. Against the repeated and sensationalistic display of his injury in the vast majority of photographic portraits circulating during his lifetime, he reimagined himself as an artist with no disability in order to remove any trace of his marketable status as a “disabled World War I veteran who paints.”

Regardless of their ostensible differences, *Portrait of a Soldier* and *Self-Portrait* exist on an aesthetic continuum. Together they affirm the extent to which the social, political, and cultural realities of war were fused with the formal and thematic possibilities of Pippin’s art practice to become the defining lexicon across his life and works. Both testify to his preoccupation with foregrounding individual intellectual profundity and psychological complexity above corporeal fixity, and to his determined refusal to engage in no-holds-barred graphic reimaginings of Black subjects. Afflicted by bouts of depression or, in his words, “blue spells,” he used multidirectional brushstrokes to animate a blue-colored background in *Self-Portrait* and shore up his expressionist engagement with kaleidoscopic emotional states, as varying signaled by the dramatic shading in *Portrait of a Soldier*.<sup>6</sup> As works like these demonstrate, Pippin encouraged his audiences to engage in acts of reimagining by removing explicit references to his thematic content—in one case, war; in the other, art itself—as he instead drew their attention to his exemplary aesthetic prowess and artistic practices. White racist stereotypes casting Black men as barbarous murderers, infantilized victims, comedic minstrels, or even sacrificial martyrs held Black masculinity in an ideological and political stranglehold. Pippin provided powerful testimony to his awareness of the fraught terrain that confronted African American soldiers turned authors and artists intent on writing and visualizing themselves into existence in the early twentieth century.

**THIS GROUNDBREAKING YET NEGLECTED** painter and writer, a founding father of twentieth-century African American art history, was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on February 22, 1888. He died on July 6, 1946. I



have written this book to address the oversimplifications and misconceptions surrounding his life and works. The critical myopia in relation to his paintings, burntwood panels, and manuscripts is staggering in view of his influence on an array of major artists, particularly through his visual storytelling: powerful tableaux testifying to a multitude of unrepresented Black domestic, military, political, and cultural lives. A groundbreaking figure with respect to Black literary traditions and military history, he is the only Black veteran to have produced three draft manuscripts—*By Harris Pippin; St. Mihiel, Heaviest Champagne Argonne, Hear;* and *Written by Horace. P.*—and an *Autobiography*, in addition to a body of paintings, burntwood panels, and sketches inspired by World War I. Yet his life and works have suffered from the racist vicissitudes of a white-dominated art world, just as the ideologically skewed perspectives of U.S. military histories have, until very recently, placed Black men's combat service intellectually, politically, socially, and culturally off-limits. More damaging even than this neglect are the willful inaccuracies and outright falsehoods to which Pippin's life history and extant oeuvre have been subjected at the hands of white mainstream critics, curators, and dealers, who have engaged superficially with his bodies of work while profiting from them. An exception to this rule is Pippin's white dealer, Robert Carlen, a key figure within the artist's life and one to whom we remain profoundly indebted for his fundamental role in the commissioning, circulation, exhibition, and, above all, the preservation of Pippin's writings, paintings, burntwood panels, and sketches.

In a revealing letter dated August 27, 1970, to one of Pippin's white patrons, Roberta Townsend, Carlen questions not only the premise but the very possibility of this cultural history and intellectual biography of Pippin's life and works. "Selden Rodman who did the book on Horace Pippin, recently wrote me he has been asked to do a revised book on Pippin, and asked for my cooperation which I gave him on his first book," he writes. "I don't know how much more can be added to what I gave him and which is in this first book. Certainly nothing new about Pippin's life, nor are there any pictures unknown to me that have turned up since this first published list." "Several other individual writers have also contacted me asking for data on Pippin's life and pictures," he continues, immovable in his belief. "I cannot comprehend any new angle they might present on Pippin."<sup>7</sup>

Over four decades later, I began researching and writing this book with an almost identical conviction. Like Carlen, I could not have been more wrong. At the outset I was motivated by the view that editing and publishing Pippin's previously unpublished manuscripts would shed new light on the artist by introducing audiences to his less well known work as a writer.

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I soon realized that Pippin's artistic practices, let alone his military experiences, had been subjected to extensive critical obfuscations that no edited volume could even begin to resolve. I recognized the intellectual and political necessity of researching and writing a book that undertook the dual work of excavation and theorization regarding his life stories of art and war. Working with unpublished and previously unexamined and even undiscovered materials—variously held at the Chester County Historical Society, the Chester Country Archives, the Barnes Foundation, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Archives of American Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black History, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Goshen Public Library and Goshen Historical Society—I have written the first intellectual, biographical, artistic, and military history of Horace Pippin. Such a volume is long overdue. I respectfully follow in the footsteps of pioneering Horace Pippin scholars like Romare Bearden, Mark F. Bockrath, Barbara A. Buckley, Carole Cleaver, Steve Conn, David Driskell, Jacqueline Francis, Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, Harry Henderson, Audrey Lewis, Steven L. Jones, Mary Lyons, Stephen May, Anne Monahan, Richard J. Powell, Selden Rodman, John Roberts, Joyce Robinson, Judith Stein, Cornel West, Judith Wilson, Sarah J. Wilson, and Judith Zilczer. The aims of this study are twofold: first, to trace Pippin's life story of art as a life story of war by restoring his otherwise elided biographical, aesthetic, social, and political contexts; and, second, to shed light upon his development of an alternative visual and textual lexicon by providing the first in-depth investigation into his diverse bodies of paintings, sketches, and handwritten manuscripts. Constituting a powerful archive in their own right, an array of paintings, sketches, photographs, letters, and historical documents by or about Horace Pippin are reproduced here, most of them for the first time.

A wide-ranging rather than prescriptive approach to examining Pippin's life and works in multifaceted perspective has led to vast amounts of "new" information regarding his biography, exhibition history, artistic development, and extant bodies of work, no less than his military service. These discoveries fail to fit in with existing data as defined by Carlen. I have written this book in order to begin to do justice to Pippin's unexamined lives as a self-made artist as well as a self-made soldier and writer. Having unearthed a wealth of fresh biographical, historical, genealogical, and art historical evidence, I break new ground not only by analyzing his visual and literary works and including an in-depth investigation into his unpublished autobiographical manuscripts, but by providing a number of scholarly "firsts." Newly discovered archival materials make a revised biography not only pos-

sible but imperative in order to counteract the perpetuation of gross falsehoods. Working with archivist Ann Roche at the Goshen Public Library and Historical Society and with genealogist Clifford Parker at the Chester County Archives, I have examined census records, marriage applications, city directories, obituaries, newspaper articles, death certificates, military archives, and photographs that not only fill in many gaps but open up further areas for research by making it possible for scholars to ask new questions about Pippin's life story. While recognizing the impossibility of arriving at any categorical certainties, I expose the fictional basis of the vast majority of claims that have circulated as facts over the decades—not only ill-conceived debates surrounding his imagined "primitivism" and myths of his "discovery" as an artist, but unfounded speculations related to his maternal ancestry; the genealogical patterns and generational histories vis-à-vis his family's enslaved origins in the U.S. South; his military service; his changeable handwriting and the varying composition dates for his manuscripts; widespread assumptions about fake versus authentic works; and the extent and range of his appearances within the photographic archive.

My scholarly approach encompasses genealogical research, military history, art history, oral testimonies, and literary analysis in order to theorize the indivisibility of Pippin's life story of art from his life story of war. Working with this interdisciplinary methodology, and fully cognizant of the questions that can never be asked, much less answered, I foreground a critical apparatus necessarily characterized by a bricolage framework. In a book constructed from diverse parts, I juxtapose and interweave analyses of eclectic bodies of evidence—including paintings, sketches, oral histories, war memoirs, letters, novels, poetry, interviews, journalism, art historical and literary criticism, conservators' reports, dealers' testimonies, and genealogical records, among much more—not to cut to the real Horace Pippin, but to find the multiple Horace Pippins who have remained intellectually and culturally off-limits. While new research into Pippin's life and work is invaluable in and of itself, the interdisciplinary research necessary even to begin to address his intersection with the elided realities of Black combat service—not to mention a Black artistic tradition subjected to repeated oversimplification—has important theoretical ramifications and calls for a sea change in current approaches. As an individual whose multifaceted identities and practices can never be disclosed by a mono-disciplinary perspective—that is, as solely but not simultaneously an artist, art critic, writer, soldier, photographer, oral historian, and community activist—Pippin represents an invaluable test case regarding a core ongoing issue: how far do critics still have to go to arrive at a nuanced and intellectually incisive examination of Afri-

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can American narratives, histories, and artistries? Although he lived only one life, Pippin's numerous roles—as an artist, autobiographer, letter-writer, soldier, veteran, curator, critic, civil rights protester, narrator, pictorial griot, and memorialist-witness—require a malleable and inclusive theoretical framework that can encompass an array of social, political, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. Working to develop an intellectual approach that fully addresses the multiplicity of his identities and the complexities of his paintings and manuscripts, I argue for such a framework. An interdisciplinary approach is imperative for grappling with the aesthetic and political force not only of Pippin's life and works, but those of many other twentieth-century African American writers, artists, and intellectuals who similarly adopted an array of self-made practices in order to artfully navigate white racist contexts of production: they too are beyond the pale of conventional scholarly analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Tracing the interconnections between his life stories of art and war, I provide the first investigation into Pippin's World War I experiences by examining his autobiographical manuscripts, letters, paintings, burntwood panels, and sketches in relation to his imaging and imagining of the once “Unknown” and now—thanks to the ongoing research of pioneering scholars—increasingly “known” Black soldier. Dramatically to the fore, especially for an artist working in the first half of the twentieth century, is his determination to replace an official whitewashing with an unofficial blackwashing of the national memory of war.<sup>9</sup> Integral to his aesthetic was the act and art of generating a series of works that I theorize as visual and textual warsapes: works characterized by an allegorical and symbolic, psychologically complex and multifaceted, treatment of war. Pippin sought to do justice not only to his reimaginings of war but to his antiwar convictions as he fought to liberate both his military experiences and his artistic practices from the otherwise annihilating constraints of a white racist imaginary. He staked his claim to the Black combat veteran's right to memorialize the unmemorialized and to the Black artist's right to art for art's sake as a radical protest aesthetic. Far from “simple,” “pure,” “charming,” or “naïve,” as designated by the majority of critics, his multilayered artworks and manuscripts proclaim his self-appointed status as an artist and author engaged in self-reflexive formal practices. In his role as memorialist-witness, he testified to the full gamut of Black political, social, and cultural realities that existed beyond the pale of a white-dominant iconography. Across his life and works, struggle was both a physical process and an aesthetic reality as he worked with an array of narrative forms, compositional techniques, and a forceful use of color symbolism to restore life in his right arm after his injury from a

gunshot wound in No Man's Land. Coming to life via his cultivation of an array of formal techniques and his self-reflexive development of an aesthetics of formal and thematic disjuncture, his autobiographical narratives are characterized by an emotive use of rupture, fragmentation, and ellipsis. As such, they constitute a significant body of work integral to his aesthetic development. He was no documentarian reporter: Pippin's syntactical and formal breaks in literary language establish his status as an imaginative author and artist and give the lie to any presumptions surrounding his "primitive" or even "unlettered" status as he sought to translate his traumatizing memories not only into paint, but also into words.

Any in-depth investigation into Pippin's life story in relation to his body of paintings and manuscripts must recognize that histories of Black experiences in World War I—let alone the literary and artistic works of Black veterans turned artists and writers—have suffered from widespread dismissal throughout the twentieth century. I have written this book to address not only the dearth of research on a major figure in African American art history but the lack of in-depth investigations into Black history and cultural traditions more generally. I am profoundly indebted to seminal twenty-first-century developments in the field, however, and to an array of pioneering historians and critics. Michael Cooper, Robert Edgerton, Bill Harris, Stephen L. Harris, Jennifer James, Jennifer Keene, Michael Lee Lanning, Adriane Lentz-Smith, William Miles, John H. Morrow Jr., Peter Nelson, Jeffrey T. Sammons, Richard Slotkin, Steven Trout, Mark Whalan, and Chad Williams have written paradigm-shifting volumes. They have powerfully redressed the widespread neglect of the lives and times of Black soldiers by producing radically revisionist, theoretically interventionist, and groundbreakingly original scholarly works that have augured a sea change in World War I studies. Written and researched in the first decades of the twenty-first century, this book, in which I excavate and examine Pippin's life story of war as a life story of art, is not so much a solitary effort to redress a historical and cultural myopia as it is a participant in a very recent and welcome revisionary effort, across social history, military history, and cultural history, to account for and understand the diversity and significance of African American experiences in World War I. Drawing upon and interweaving a vastly underresearched and neglected corpus of military records, memoirs, memos, letters, and testimonies by Black and white servicewomen and servicemen, I have worked with the findings of current revisionist scholarship to provide readers with the first in-depth and fully contextualized account of Pippin's life as a World War I soldier. I include a theorization of No Man's Land as a political and imaginative as well as a literal and physical space,

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for it is only by coming to grips with the otherwise elided psychological and physical realities of Black military experiences that we can bring to light the formal and thematic force of Pippin's manuscripts, paintings, sketches, and burntwood panels. Just as it is impossible to theorize his life and works as an artist without addressing his life and works as a soldier, Black World War I histories and narratives are incomplete without an examination of Pippin's manuscripts and paintings.

As a soldier-artist-author intent upon critiquing the stranglehold of white racist assumptions regarding Black combat service, Pippin's war-inspired autobiographies and paintings exist in complex relation to the visual and textual archive generated by other Black veterans turned writers and artists. Typically adopting visual and textual narrative techniques characterized by detachment and a determination to structure and order their experiences, the works of Black combat veterans that are interwoven into this book—those of William Dyer, Malvin Gray Johnson, Noble Sissle, Nedom Roberts, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Dox Thrash, Ely Green, and John A. Jamieson, among many more—offer a powerful contrast with Pippin's highly experimental, textured, unfinished, and evocative works and his challenging literary and visual practices. Surviving in powerful relation to Mark Whalan's declaration that the “political energies of memory and memorial were shaped and focused through evocations of Black service in the war in a range of disciplines: photography, poetry, film, public statuary, and prose fiction” are not only Black ex-soldiers' written testimonies but the paintings, prints, and sketches produced by Pippin and an array of Black artists.<sup>10</sup> Taken together, these vastly neglected works constitute a missing archive of war and a lost African American visual and literary tradition.

As a soldier turned artist and author, Pippin took on the burden not only of commemorating a Black fight for survival in the trenches but of representing Black lives as lived in the aftermath of a long history of institutional slavery that he recognized as surviving in “spirit” via twentieth-century systems of white racist persecution and disenfranchisement in the United States.<sup>11</sup> For Pippin there was a double theater of war: the No Man's Land of the frontline trenches of northern France and the No Man's Land of the United States as a white-supremacist nation engaged in physical and psychological depredations against Black women, children, and men. He developed an array of practices in order to do justice to his sense of war as both a historical reality and a powerful metaphor by which to investigate the fight for Black civil rights: a war not characterized by military offensives, but taking place in peacetime U.S. society. Created in the aftermath of slavery and in an early twentieth-century northern context of segregation and lynch law,

his manuscripts and paintings memorialize his specific military experiences while foregrounding his more general understanding of war as a defamiliarizing lens through which to trace the ongoing fight for Black legal and political equality in contexts of escalating violence and racist injustice. Using this lens, Pippin was able to map nineteenth-century struggles against slavery onto twentieth-century racist inequalities that ran rife within the United States during the World War I era.

Across his eclectic bodies of work, Pippin foregrounded the Black veteran artist's and author's right to narrative ambiguity and aesthetic experimentation as he dramatized the otherwise elided or distorted realities of Black histories and narratives. Rejecting white demands for graphic exposés of Black bodies as commodified repositories of suffering or victimization, he relied upon narrative techniques of indirection and undertelling to render psychological and existential debates indivisible from Black bodies as loci of persecution and annihilation. He refused to make authentic representations of Black experiences straightforwardly available for white consumption. Rather, via techniques of narrative layering and ambiguity, he encouraged audiences not to objectify or commodify Black lives but to perform acts of imaginative and empathetic identification. This was no mean feat in an era in which the bodies and lives of Black World War I veterans, no less than the works of Black artists, were subjected to widespread stereotyping and spectacularization. He developed an array of formal techniques and an alternative visual and textual language with which to represent Black male and female subjects who were otherwise rendered voiceless and bodiless within a white imaginary. He was fully aware of the censorship and distortion of Black military experiences within white official histories and records. Pippin's coming-to-consciousness as a self-made soldier, artist, and author testifies to his realization regarding the intellectual and political necessity of bearing the burden not only of representation but of memorialization.