

The Howard University Law Library has been housed in seven different buildings since its founding nearly 140 years ago, in 1869. In its long history, the library has never been housed in a more aesthetically pleasing building than its current home.

In the past year the visual appeal of the architectural award-winning Law Library has been enhanced by the addition of four rather compelling works of art to the Library's collection.

### The Oba and His Court

In March 2008, the library received a 18th or 19th Century bronze sculpture, which was a gift from Vice President William B. Harvey of the University of Virginia to former-University President H. Patrick Swygert, '68.

The sculpture was created in the former African kingdom of Benin, using a labor-intensive, centuries-old technique known as lost wax casting. This very rare example of Benin commemorative sculpture shows a dramatic portrayal of the Oba or king, surrounded by his law enforcement officers. The sculpture had most likely originally been housed in a shrine in one of the Oba's palaces. It is interesting to note the Portuguese influences that can be seen in the sculpture, such as in the European-style helmets on some of the figures.

In the 13th or 14th Century, the Benin Kingdom emerged in what is today southern Nigeria, and by the 15th Century it had become a powerful state, with the divine kingship at the center of its

political, religious, and social life. The kingdom continued to flourish until the end of the 19th Century.

The most distinctive period of Benin art came during the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, when it became known for forms of extreme exaggeration, massiveness, and flamboyant ornamentation.

### Charles White and Jacob Lawrence

Last August, the Law Library was pleased to receive a mural entitled Five Great American Negroes, by the painter, lithographer, and teacher Charles Wilbert White. The 5' x 12' x 11" mural depicts the images of Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marian Anderson and George Washington Carver, and hangs on the southern wall of the Library's second floor. The subjects of the mural were selected by readers of the *Chicago Defender* newspaper in 1939. The gift was donated to the library by the Howard University Gallery of Art.

White was born in 1918 in Chicago. He studied at both the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students League in New York. After completing his studies, Mr. White was commissioned to create several murals for the Works Project Administration. In the 1940s, Mr. White honed his skills under the tutelage of David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera at the Taller de Frafica in Mexico City. Two years later, White returned to the United States and became involved in the New York Graphic Workshop.

In 1945, Charles White was artist-in-residence at Howard University. Howard received the mural from the Department of the Army in 1947. From 1965 until his death 47 years later, Mr. White taught at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles.

## Art Adds History to the New Law Library

By Seth Kronemer  
Archivist, Howard University School of Law





Five Great American Negroes

### On The Way

In February, the Law Library received the gift of a rare, limited edition Jacob Lawrence lithograph entitled *On The Way* (1990), from Ms. Anna A. Williams, a friend of the law school. The lithograph is number 50 of 100 that have printed.

Jacob Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1917, but spent much of his childhood in New York's Harlem neighborhood. While living in Harlem, Lawrence developed his artistic abilities under the guidance of such notable artists as Charles Alston, Augusta Savage, and Henry Barnarn. In 1970, Lawrence became a professor of Art at the University of Washington, and held tenure there until he died in 2000.



Over his career Lawrence developed a unique style which he described as “dynamic cubism,” and *On The Way* is a good example of this captivating style. In the composition, Lawrence shows African-Americans moving in an urban setting. One of the things that makes the image so compelling is Lawrence’s use of bright, primary colors to manipulate our understanding of perspective in the city.

### La Amistad

Finally, in June, the Law Library received, on long-term loan, an exacting, hand carved, model of the schooner *La Amistad*, from the collection of former University President H. Patrick Swygert.

Scratch built by Mr. George A. Lowery of Phoenix, Arizona (who has made similar models for cinema producer Steven Spielberg), the model is composed of a poplar hull, planked in ebony. The ship’s deck is made of gray-dyed hawwood planks; the cabin and deck fixtures are made of cherry wood; and the masts, yards, bowsprit and booms are made of birch.

The model was built utilizing plans of several similar schooners, dimensions given in an 1841 Act of Congress relating to the sale of *La Amistad*, and an image of *La Amistad* found in a contemporaneous painting.

*La Amistad* was a cargo ship, which in June of 1839, was transporting 53 African captives from Havana, Cuba, to Puerto Principe, Cuba, where they were to be used as slaves on a sugar plantation. Three days out from Havana, Sengbe Pieh,

*Continued on page 28*

## Art Adds History

Continued from page 17

one of the captives, successfully freed himself and his fellow Africans, and took command of the ship. Although Pieh had intended to sail back to Africa, three months later the ship was found off the coast of Long Island, captured by the United States Navy, and towed into New London Harbor.

Over the next two years the Africans onboard *La Amistad*, whose fate quickly became a cause célèbre for the abolitionist movement, were jailed and tried three times. In their last trial they were successfully represented by former-President John Q. Adams, and the 35 surviving captives were ultimately returned to Africa. The schooner *La Amistad* was sold at a U.S. Marshals' auction in 1840.

The next time you are on campus, please do stop by the Law Library to enjoy some of its delightful ambiance and its historical artwork.

## Fun Facts from the Law School Archives Did You Know?

- That the law school was started as a night school and only became a full time day school in 1928?
- That the first dean of the law school, John Mercer Langston, was born into slavery?
- That the current dean of the law school, Kurt L. Schmoke, was mayor of Baltimore from 1987 until 1999?
- That Charlotte Ray, class of 1872, was the first woman to graduate from the law school and was also the first woman admitted to the DC Bar?
- That in 1931, Clarence Darrow served as a judge for the moot court team?
- That the law school has produced three mayors of Washington, DC, including Walter Washington '48, Sharon Pratt Kelly '68, and Adrian Fenty '96?

For more Fun Facts, visit the 140th Anniversary Web site at [www.law.howard.edu/1234](http://www.law.howard.edu/1234).



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