

Talent Will Transcend Prejudice
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The history books are filled with many significant firsts, such as the first man in space, the first child to receive the polio vaccine, the first person to explain the law of gravity and so forth. But firsts in the field of human rights have not always received a lot of attention, especially when they first happened. In fact, a human rights first occurred several weeks ago in Washington, D.C., without drawing much media attention.

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937) was an African American painter who grew up in Philadelphia. He began his career as an artist here, but lived most of his life in Paris. (There, African Americans were subjected to less racism.) Tanner’s painting *Sand Dunes at Atlantic City*, completed around 1886, has just become the first by an African American to hang in the White House.

At a ceremony in the White House on Oct. 29 last year, Hillary Rodham Clinton said to a group gathered for the occasion: “From this day on, *Sand Dunes at Atlantic City* will be on view for millions of visitors who walk through the White House. Each person who sees this magnificent painting will know that talent always has the power to transcend prejudice.”

The search for a painting by an African American was initiated when a man who had toured the White House wrote to President Clinton asking why African Americans were not represented in the White House art collection. In his reply to Edward Bell, President Clinton wrote, “Thank you, Edward Bell, for asking questions, which is what we need our citizens to do.”

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