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Strongest Showing of Civil Rights Material Yet at Swann Galleries' Annual African Americana Auction

New York— On **Thursday, March 30**, Swann Galleries will hold an auction of **Printed & Manuscript African Americana**, featuring powerful ephemera both painful and uplifting from oft-overlooked chapters of American history.

The earliest material in this annual sale relates to slavery and abolition, including an annotated early nineteenth-century bible belonging to an enslaved family (\$800 to \$1,200), and several letters concerning George Washington's slaves on Mount Vernon (each \$10,000 to \$15,000). A copper slave badge made by Charleston silversmith John Joseph Lafar, 1824, is estimated at \$8,000 to \$12,000, while a vellum certificate of emancipation for a Maryland woman named Margaret Tillison, 1831, is valued at \$600 to \$900. Also available is the scarce 1795 edition of *Bannaker's Almanac*, expected to sell between \$30,000 and \$40,000. There is a run of first-hand accounts of slavery written by people who had been freed, including the first edition of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, published in Auburn, New York in 1853 (\$1,000 to \$1,500).

A highlight of the sale is a previously unrecorded photograph of abolitionist hero Harriet Tubman, part of a carte-de-visite album compiled in the 1860s. The album features 48 photographs of contemporary political and abolitionist figures, one being the only known photograph of the first African American elected to Congress, John Willis Menard (\$20,000 to \$30,000).

Frederick Douglass is also represented in the sale with rare offerings, including a typed copy of the last speech he made before an audience, titled *A Defense of the Negro Race*, 1895, just four months before his death (\$3,500 to \$5,000). In an emotional 1885 Autograph Letter Signed to Civil War journalist George Alfred Townsend, Douglass wrote, "You are wrong in saying I bought my liberty, a few friends in England bought me and made me a present of myself;" the two-page letter is estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000.

Making its auction debut is the printed culmination of *The Proceedings of National Negro Conference, 1909*, which became the NAACP the following year. The scarce book included two pieces by W.E.B. Du Bois: *Politics and Industry* and *Evolution of the Race Problem*; and one by Ida B. Wells, titled *Lynching, Our National Crime* (\$2,500 to \$3,500).

The strongest selection of Civil Rights material Swann has ever offered is led by typed manuscripts for Malcolm X's *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch* column, *God's Angry Men*, 1957, heavily edited and signed in the activist's own hand (\$200,000 to \$300,000). Also available is a rare working draft of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, 1963, in which he addresses seven religious leaders in defense of his methods of peaceful and passive resistance. King wrote the letter on

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scraps of paper that had been smuggled to him in prison, and then typed and returned for him to edit. The draft, which already includes the iconic line, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” is estimated at \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Further examples of King’s work can be found in an archive of more than 500 documents relating to the foundation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, in the wake of Rosa Parks’s momentous defiance. The material includes the original by-laws and constitution of the organization, checks signed by King, and details on expenses relating to a fleet of station wagons and a voting machine. The archive, held in two contemporary binders, is valued at \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Also in the sale is material related to the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam, as well as various protest signs used in marches throughout the 1960s and ‘70s. Outstanding items include two iconic placards used in strikes: *I Am A Man!*, 1970, and *Honor King: End Racism!*, 1968, are valued at \$10,000 to \$15,000 and \$20,000 to \$30,000, respectively.

Materials commemorating the achievements of African Americans in the arts include a silver sequined cape presented to James Brown by Michael Jackson at the 2003 BET Awards, along with a pair of Brown’s platform shoes (\$25,000 to \$35,000 and \$1,500 to \$2,500, respectively). An archive of material related to The Ink Spots, including photographs signed by Ella Fitzgerald and Peal Bailey and maintained by band member Charlie Fuqua, is valued at \$4,000 to \$6,000.

The auction will be held Thursday, March 30, beginning at 10:30 a.m. The auction preview will be open to the public Saturday, March 25 from noon to 5 p.m.; and Monday, March 27 through Wednesday, March 29 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

An illustrated auction catalogue is available for \$35 at www.swanngalleries.com.

For further information or to make advance arrangements to bid by telephone during the auction, please contact Wyatt Houston Day at 212-254-4710, extension 300 or wyatthday@swanngalleries.com.

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