

Eastman Johnson, **A Ride for Liberty – The Fugitive Slaves, March 2, 1862**, Oil on board, Brooklyn Museum

Very few artists of the 19th century depicted slaves in their artwork. Eastman Johnson's painting of a slave family escaping to the safety of Union lines is an exception. The image also raises the thought of whether Lincoln freed the slaves or did the slaves free themselves? Johnson traveled with the Union General George McClellan as he marched to Manassas, Virginia in early 1862. During the march Johnson witnessed a family making a run for freedom in the early morning hours. His painting depicts a family of four sitting on a trotting horse. The northern troops are barely visible in the morning light. The father and son look forward towards freedom, while the mother, clutching the baby, looks back at what they are fleeing. Johnson shows a moment where slaves took their own actions to follow their dream of freedom.