COLLECTIVE (RE)MEMORY Vol 1

A Site-Specific BLT Reader

SANTA MONICA, CA

BLACK LUNCH TABLE · EST 2005

"

It's *fascinating* that there is very little discussion about ways in which artists work together, *collaborate* together, structures they build together.

"

— *Carrie Mae Weems*

Welcome to the *Table*

BUF... ART1

00:01:30 — 00:01:37
[cat prompt] Discuss idea of ensuing compensation equity

— review introduction

00:01:43 — 00:05:19
[Intros] poet laureate, Buffalo, NY, Literary Freedom, tiny libraries, Open Buffalo, social justice, activist, 50 Women w/a Vision,

00:05:40 — 00:19:46
[cat prompt]
art compensation, Buffalo, Poet Laureate, poetry/spoken word, full time artist, preserving art, equity, making money as an artist, pricing one's work, s/g worth, audience/clients, mentorship, artists helping artists, art + business, art + value, art, art + identity, social justice, George Floyd, museum accessibility, cheap #BLM, empty platitudes, 5

00:14:48 — 00:14:57
discussing money taboo, pay secrecy, finances, money, artist finances, art community, American culture, bookkeeper, the recognition, Aces of color, marketability, compensation, labeling, art, (galleries), George Floyd, societal arts,

Notes from a topic tagging session. All audio files from roundtable events are tagged by thematic area by BLT teams in preparation for public access via BLT's digital archive.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When asked "what is art?" the great Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks responded with "Art is that which endures." This quote anchors my thinking about cultural production and the substantial ways Black people contribute to, participate in, and create new worlds across time and space. Endurance is specific to the temporal context within which it is examined. So, too, is archival practice. Both ask us to consider time as abstraction and device—a prism through which we understand ourselves and each other. A manner of engaging the real and the fantastic. A measure of the distance between this moment and the next. The archive is about legacy, yet it is always in conversation with the present and an imagined future. This reader was compiled with these thoughts in mind. As BLT reflects on two decades of self-authorship, radical archiving, and an equitable re/writing of contemporary cultural history, we offer this reader as a reminder of the power of an idea, community, and a keyboard.
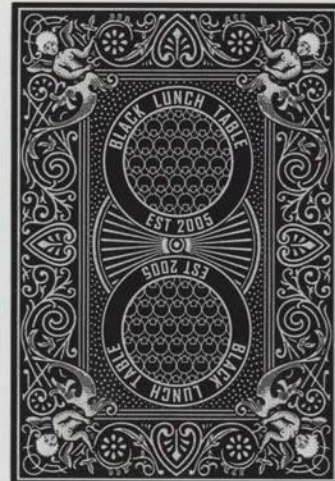
keondra bills freemyn
Editor | Co-Executive Director
Black Lunch Table
blacklunchtable.com

What does it mean to identify as "Black?"

What kinds of public art do you find valuable in your neighborhood?

Discuss your local art community (and your own intersection with it).

Prompt cards from BLT Artists' table events.

ABOUT BLACK LUNCH TABLE

Black Lunch Table (BLT) is a vernacular history archiving project. Our mission is to build a more comprehensive understanding of cultural history by illuminating the stories of Black people and our shared stake in the world. We envision a future in which all of our histories are recorded and valued. We continue addressing historical omissions by empowering marginalized voices to record, transcribe, archive, and publish their stories.

Through our ongoing Wiki initiative, Artists' and People's roundtables, and digital archive, BLT continues to provide a unique, critical platform for exchange. We persist in countering dominant, exclusionary, historical canonization practices and propose new strategies for documenting stories and authoring histories, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to our mission.
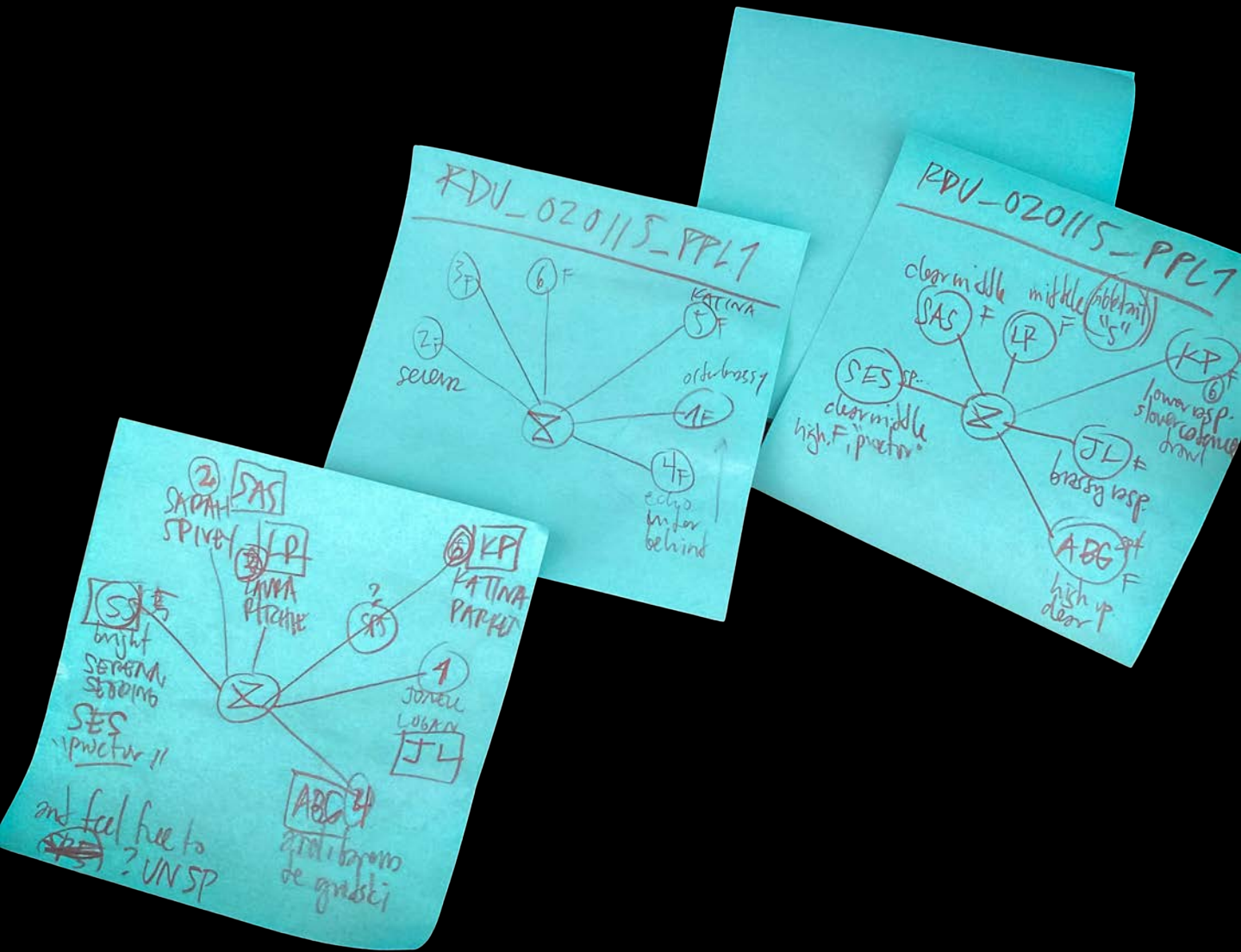
Seating charts created during the audio transcription process for BLT roundtable events in Durham, NC.

HISTORY OF BLACK LUNCH TABLE

Black Lunch Table began in 2005 at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine as a performance staged by founding artists Heather Hart and jina valentine.

Organized around literal and metaphorical lunch tables, BLT takes the school lunchroom phenomenon as its starting point. In previous iterations (2006-2011), BLT took the forms of online intercollegiate meet-ups, artist salons, and informal roundtable discussions. The format for our roundtables is modeled after a project iteration we staged in 2014 in Chicago at The Black Artists Retreat [B.A.R.], an annual symposium for Black artists. Participants are curated into conversations, provided with a set of prompts, and discussions are audio-recorded and transcribed for eventual public access on our online archive. In January 2015, we staged our first People's Table (then called #blacklivesmatter table). That event responded to recent police involved shootings of unarmed Black people, and state-violence both locally and nationally. The #blacklivesmatter session followed the format established at [B.A.R.] 2014 in a two-part series of lunch table discussions engaging artists, activists, academics, students, politicians, and local community members in North Carolina.

As we researched models for the BLT archive to house the recorded audio, we noted that many significant Black artists were omitted from art historical archives and the world's most widely referenced encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Our Wikipedia initiative redresses these omissions by mobilizing a collective authoring of articles on the lives and works of Black artists. Black Lunch Table is now recognized as an official Wikimedia user group. In 2019, BLT was granted 501c3 status and has evolved exponentially with the support and dedication of its governance board, and the commitment of its funders. Thanks to the support of grants from the Mellon Foundation, the Warhol Foundation, the Logan Foundation, Ruth Foundation, Ford Foundation, Creative Capital, the Wikimedia Foundation and others, BLT has matured from an independent collaboration between two artists into a nonprofit with administrative staff, production staff, and affiliate proxies in other cities.
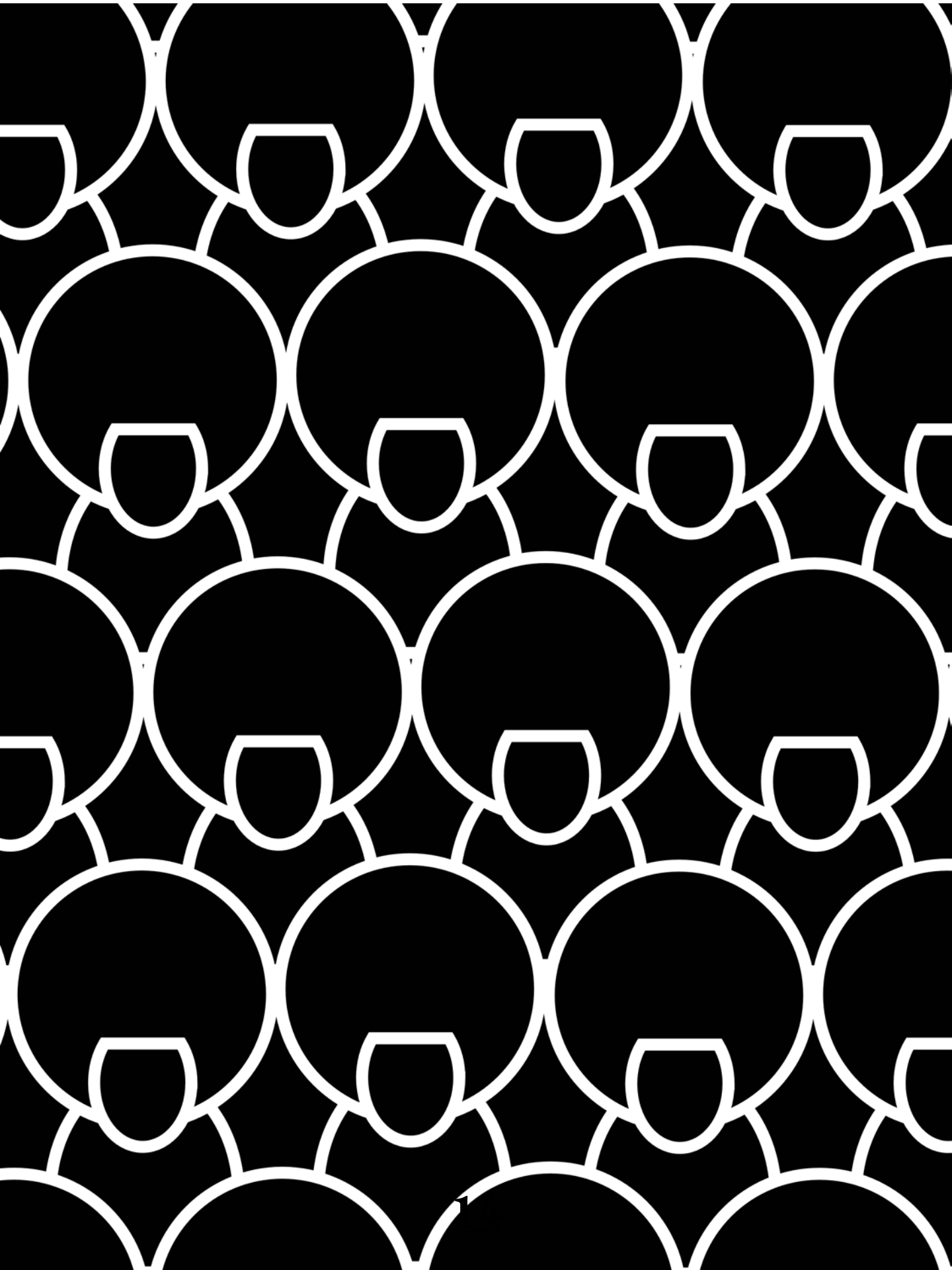
"

To me it's an important thing, *integrity*. Figuring out how we access these spaces without being tokens, without being co-opted. Being true to our *visions* and ourselves.

"

— *Vivian Crockett*

BLT Origins

SKOWHEGAN
Journal
2012

The Present Classification
Heather Hart, Steffani Jemison, and Jina Valentine

"What is impossible is not the propinquity
of the things listed, but the very site on
which their propinquity would be possible."
(Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*)

Heather Hart (A '05), Steffani Jemison (A '08), and Jina Valentine (A '05) are planning a new tableau
for a collection not yet acquired. Entitled *The Present Classification*, this project will assume the formats
of exhibition and live performance.

But what exactly is a collection? How to define the parameters of a finite set? Do we define the
characteristics of the collection in advance of its actual acquisition, then accept only those objects that
qualify? Or do we determine the character of the collection by afterwards assessing the unifying traits of
things amassed? The foundational principles we have established for *The Present Classification* reflect
our collective interests. The intersection of two independent projects, and three individual "collectors" set
the parameters for the proposed collection. These principles also frame a specific discussion that we,
the proposed "collectors," have the agency to define. The collection will comprise in various formats the
sum of: a. text art b. submissions from Black artists c. submissions from Skowhegan alumni.

To further prescribe the parameters of *The Present Classification* is to imagine the character of the
would-be collection in advance of its actual acquisition. On one hand, predetermination risks precluding
the chance serendipitous submission. On the other hand, leaving the structure entirely flexible surrenders
much of the impulse for creating a collection to the collective character of the objects themselves. We
suspect that undertaking this project will require a bit of both methods: first drafting a wish list (of letter
and of litter, of color and spatter, of spit and spam, of concepts and collapse) then negotiating the results.

The collection would consist of text-based contributions from Black Skowhegan alumni. It might
be composed of rather diverse forms of text-art and text-artifact—like paintings and prints, diary and
sketchbook notes, t-shirts and buttons, playbills and receipts. Via the new tableau, these seemingly
incongruous items—a cross section of sentimental detritus and fine art work—can be provisionally,
if temporarily, linked through the identity of its producers and the connections made through the
objects themselves.

How do we set about attaining these objects? Do we present an open call to all Black, living alumni of
Skowhegan to submit text-based works and objects? The success of such a query would depend on
potential group constituents identifying themselves as such and mobilizing towards a collective identity.
As with drafting parameters for the collection of objects, the alternative method for casting *The Present
Classification* (the corpus) would be to individually solicit potential members.

The paradoxical relationship between the collection and its constituents (and between the collective
and its constituents) has been exhaustively explored, recently by such diverse scholars as literary theorist
Susan Stewart and political philosopher Giorgio Agamben. One of the most compelling discussions
appears in the Deleuze and Guattari opus *A Thousand Plateaus*, wherein the formula N–1 is used to

Alcove window   Install Alcove cover - OFFICE   Disassemble R.F. Fountain x store

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The original *Black Lunch Table* discussion at Skowhegan in 2005.

evoke the individual's power to escape the collective that contains it: "The only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted." Here, N represents the whole, and 1 is a part dependent on the larger collection for its identity. The collection subsumes the singular object into its totality; as a result, the object's material history is suspended as the object is placed into a greater, atemporal narrative. Within the collection, all things accumulated are reclassified by their association to one another, providing a view of the forest despite the trees.

In 2005 Heather Hart and Jina Valentine organized a performance event entitled *The Black Lunch Table*—a precedent for *The Present Classification*. The impetus for this event was their wonderment over the lack of any such table at Skowhegan's daily group lunches. Together they decided whom they should invite to sit with them for one particular afternoon lunch. In curating the group of participants, Hart and Valentine did some guess-work, inviting as well those artists they thought might identify as Black. Those invited included other residents of African descent, the then director and dean, and several visiting artists. At the table, they discussed issues of being Black in the art world, issues of otherness in general, their individual relationships with actual and metaphorical Black lunch tables in grade school and higher education… and of course the irony of having these discussions at an invitation only all-Black lunch table. The hyper-classification, by way of self-segregation, of Skowhegan's Black residents functioned to both create a forum for topics discussed informally at other occasions, and highlight the fact that no such grouping of like-skinned people had naturally occurred thus far. Within that group of people, subsets included a. those not actually of African descent b. vegetarians c. those pending graduate

review d. those whose work explicitly addressed issues of race e. self-identifying as post-Black f. included in the present classification.

In 2010 Steffani Jemison organized *Future Plan and Program (FPP)*, a provisional publishing project featuring newly commissioned literary works by visual artists of color. *FPP* has published texts by Skowhegan alumni including Jemison, Valentine, and Jamal Cyrus (A '10). Like Valentine and Hart's *Black Lunch Table, FPP*, as a curatorial initiative, possesses a clear set of overlapping objectives: first, to create a new publication and presentation opportunities for artists of color; and second, to provide a context for conversation about orality and literacy, writing and transcribing, poetics and performance, that is informed by the authors' experiences as artists of color. These authors share a number of characteristics: each maintains an active visual arts practice, each is a person of color, and each is connected to a larger network of artists of which Jemison is also a member. The authors all address issues of race, autobiography, and "otherness" with varying degrees of conspicuousness. Moreover, similarities in style, humor, and tone, as well as overlaps in subject matter and external references, connect their work. As a result of their involvement with *FPP*, the authors frequently have the opportunity to perform, read, and exhibit together, further strengthening their creative ties and mutual influence. Finally, the authors share a conviction that writing non-fiction as a form of art and cultural theory challenges the perceived roles of practicing visual artists. As a precedent for *The Present Classification, FPP* likewise creates a tableau upon which seemingly disparate works and artistic pursuits might be considered as interdependent parts of a common narrative. *FPP*'s corpus is composed of a. former and future

in cellar   store R.F. upns in cellar   store R.F. Patio Furniture in Fresco Barn   put storm windows

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bookstore owners b. thespians c. those questioning the meaning of "of color" d. perennial students and teachers e. ones that from a long way off look like flies f. included in the present classification.

Neither the *Black Lunch Table* nor *Future Plan and Program* intend to create *new* parameters for classification; as with *The Present Classification*, we work exclusively within frameworks already existent. These projects simply serve as tableau upon which to make these social divisions visible: a. artists "of color" b. those embraced as radical-chic c. the marginal d. relevant to the larger art-historical narrative e. outsiders f. included in the present classification.

In Jorge Luis Borges' description of the "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge," in *Book of Imaginary Beings*, he explains that animals are divided into the following categories:

(a) belonging to the Emperor   (b) embalmed   (c) tame
(d) suckling pigs   (e) sirens   (f) fabulous   (g) stray dogs
(h) included in the present classification   (i) frenzied
(j) innumerable   (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush
(l) et cetera   (m) having just broken the water pitcher
(n) that from a long way off look like flies.

Ideally classifying systems derive from the unique interdependence of objects within a specific collection, which constitute its overall character. Accordingly, the classification of *stuff* within any specific collection will be singular and inapplicable to any other collection. In "Preface" to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault wonders at the physical impossibility of a meeting ground for all these classified creatures and marvels that perhaps such a space exists only within a space created by language. Within the space of narrative, list, or fantastical description, the dis/similar find common ground and therein find their commonality. In fact, such a locus exists within this very text, wherein the concepts uniting disparate elements form a structure, a meeting ground for their coexistence.

The meeting ground can occupy a physical as well as discursive space. The first step in creating *The Present Classification* is both. We, "the collectors" propose a one-afternoon reenactment of *The Black Lunch Table*, during which participants would eat, discuss, and restage, in an expanded format, the 2005 event. Thereafter, the participants would be charged with the task of divining a common narrative out of the objects collected through submissions (including their own objects). Rather than *curating* the exhibition on the basis of an artistic statement or determining theoretical missive, *The Present Classification* seeks to let the works self-order within the rather broad grouping of "text art by Black alumni of Skowhegan." Of course, this process of ordering and contextualizing texts will be a critical part of the success of the overall exhibition, and that those able to attend the Lunch Table will be charged with scripting a new narrative.
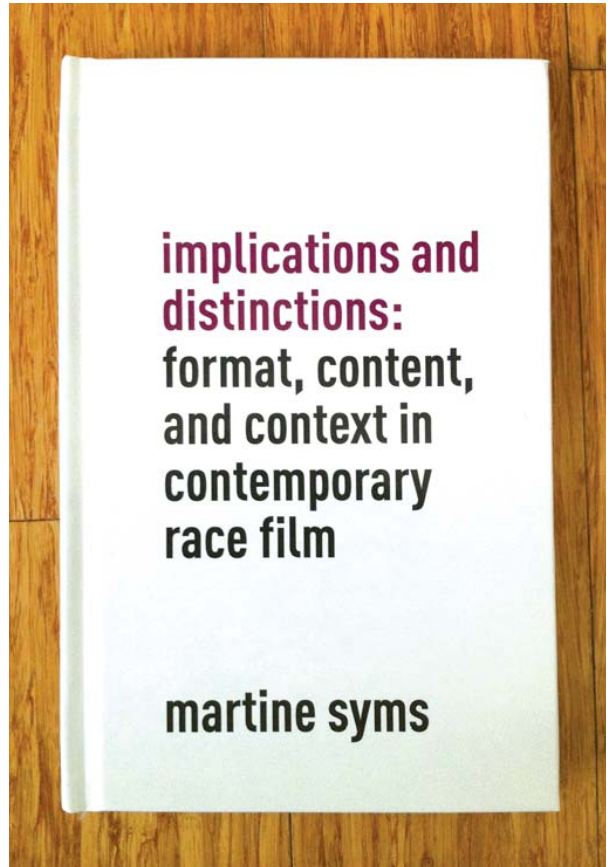
A *Future Plan and Program* publication. Cover Design: Nikki Pressley.
Photograph: Adebukola Bodunrin.

Heather Hart, 37, makes installations that you should touch. She attended Skowhegan in 2005 and received her MFA from Rutgers in 2008. She lives and works in Brooklyn.

Steffani Jemison, 31, works in many media. She is a 2012-2013 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Jina Valentine, 32, works with text and collage. She attended Skowhegan in 2005, received her MFA from Stanford University in 2009, and currently teaches at UNC Chapel Hill.

on R.F. – PULL SCREENS   Storm Doors on R.F. – Store Screen Doors   Close Attic Door at R.F. – Turn off FAN

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art21 magazine

Another Country

by Heather Hart and Jina Valentine | Sep 14, 2018

Black Lunch Table. *Black Lunch Table*, 2005. Activation; dimensions variable. Photo: Angela Hennessy. Courtesy of Black Lunch Table.

"...you're moving in these worlds where you are switching all the time, but the table, the lunch table, was always that place of respite, where you get to touch base with folks who you don't have to explain much to..."
—Shervone Neckles[1]

Thirteen summers since the original convening of the Black Lunch Table (BLT), we look back on the project's history and evolution and consider its future trajectory. We recently reconvened many of the original participants to discuss how our lives, our conception of Blackness, and our relation to lunch tables (both physical and conceptual) have evolved since that first event. Directly on the heels of that reunion, we embarked on our first engagement on the African continent, hosting events in Cape Town and Johannesburg. And we've just launched the beta version of our website, which will afford the public access to a sample of the documentation of four years of BLT roundtable conversations.

We imagine the present work to be a creation of a matrix—a process, a language—by which we aggregate people, locations, conversations, languages, and data. The discussions are recorded, transcribed, and assigned metadata for inclusion. The BLT archive is a living one, documenting temporally and geographically specific discourses. In this project of investigating the phenomenon of self-segregation, the compositional elements are self-reflexive or self-renewing.

Archiving past conversations informs the creation of new prompts for future conversations. Since the metadata tags are endlessly editable, the relational metadata create flexible definitions for terms used within our archive and shared with others. These definitions will inform the interpretation of the transcripts and audio. The archive will inform the direction of cultural research, which will in turn inform the content of future roundtable conversations. The potential for creation of meaning, and for the expansion of our project, is infinite and a metaphor for how we envision the project's future.

"THE POTENTIAL FOR CREATION OF MEANING, AND FOR THE EXPANSION OF OUR PROJECT, IS INFINITE AND A METAPHOR FOR HOW WE ENVISION THE PROJECT'S FUTURE."

When we met in 2005 at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, we began the project as tricksters, wondering what would happen if we segregated a purportedly idyllic space so that it mimicked spaces we had experienced in our lives. We thought about perception and self-identification. Claiming this space reified our presence in the community and exposed the problems around who gets a seat at the table. There, we mulled over ideas of civic responsibility, of self-segregation, and of being cultural gatekeepers.

> *"…this idea of bringing what is very natural to us into an art space and centralizing us in that space…reminding folks that this is what is real to us…"* —Shervone Neckles
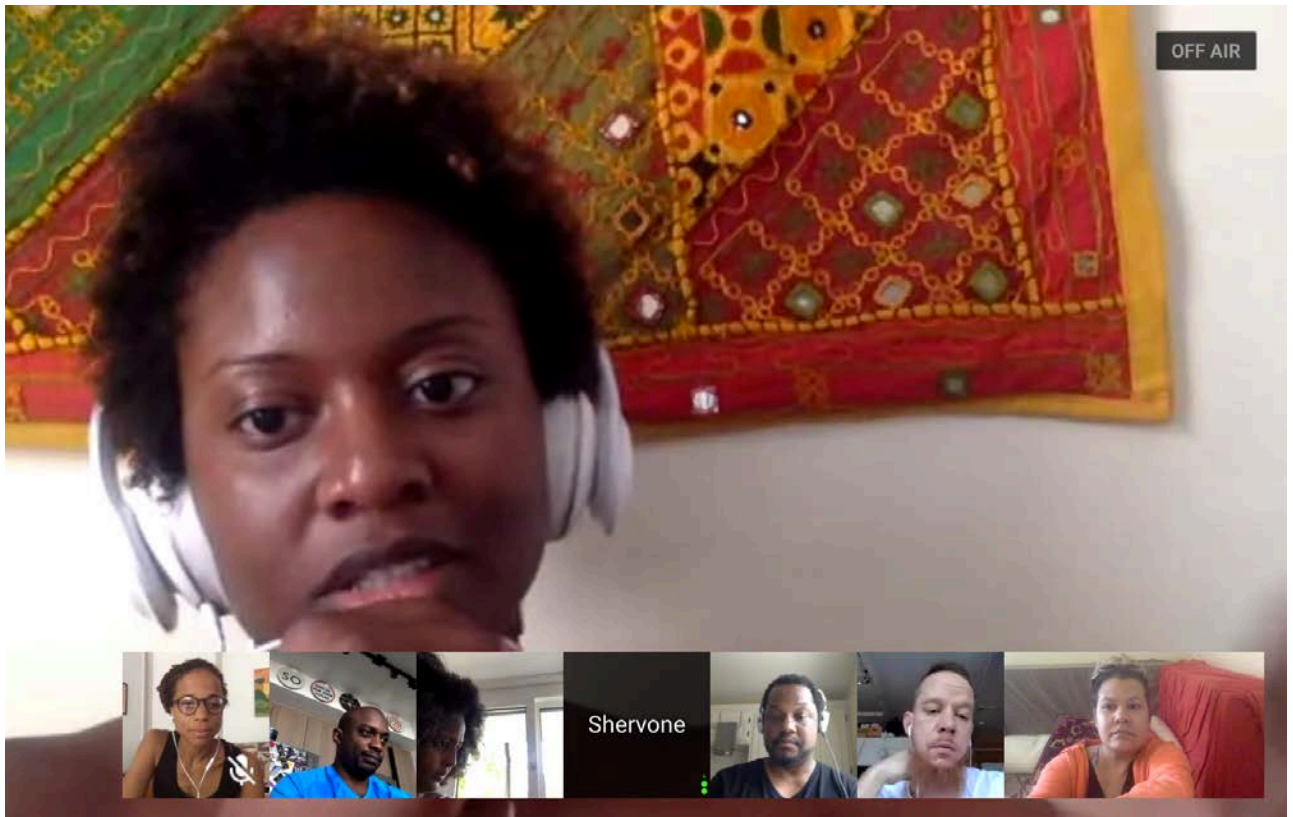
Black Lunch Table. Black Lunch Table Reunion. 2018. Hangout activation, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy the artists.

The event catalyzed a series of conversations with our excluded white friends about its apparent subversion and disruption, which teased out issues related to the privileges they lived with daily. That first convening still echoes for each of us.

> *"I do remember certain people were really upset…"*—Loul Samater

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"My goal became: to talk about the problem of whiteness—the problem of the toxicity of the belief in whiteness—and the support for whiteness that so many of us live with, all the time. In an environment like Skowhegan, you have an overview. You're not in it; you're sort of outside of it—seeing the way that other white participants were so uncomfortable with Black people having some agency and some collaborative intent that didn't center on [white people]." —Steve Locke

"The Black lunch table at Skowhegan, for me, was kind of interesting because I went to a high school where we had a white lunch table. It was a predominantly Black environment, where the other table was the white kids and the Asian kids. So, I was being introduced to a way of communing around Blackness, which I would experience more and more once I moved to New York, right after Skowhegan." —Yashua Klos

"THAT FIRST CONVENING STILL ECHOES FOR EACH OF US."

Departing the United States and bringing our project to the Continent felt at once like a homecoming and a leap into the void. The parameters for discourse around Blackness are known—or at least fathomable—for us in the States. Our and others' perceptions of our racial identities were the basis for the project, at its inception. Expanding the parameters to include international discourses on the subject of race required a reevaluation of our self-images, and of the foundational principles of the project, as well as a renovation of the textual architecture upon which the entire thing is built.

We understand Blackness as a mythic concept, as a social construct, and as a lived reality as it relates to our subjective experiences in the United States. Our lineages are composed of negro, coloured, African American, and Black. Our lineages comprise white, Native American, and undocumented traces. As conspicuously Other, we have self-consciously chosen to sit or not to sit with our classmates or colleagues at Black lunch tables.

"I don't really believe in race, so that's my own challenge with the BLT as a concept. I think that Blackness is more of a frame of mind than it is an actual reality. It's the frame of mind that maybe shapes our realities." —Hank Willis Thomas

"The fiction of race has poisoned all of us. We're all living with the fiction. We all know it's not real. We know it's constructed; we know it's insane. But it also is a way: it's the color line that divides the living and the dead, for a lot of us." —Steve Locke

"What does it mean to identify as Black?" This question became a prompt for our roundtables. We found it necessary to explain the concept of a Black lunch table to a South African audience, which found it foreign.

Black Lunch Table. *Black Lunch Table: Artists' Roundtable, Market Photo Workshop, Johannesburg*, 2018. Activation; dimensions variable. Photo: Jina Valentine. Courtesy of Black Lunch Table.

In South Africa, we are American, Black or coloured, of the African diaspora.[2] So, we are compelled to reconsider the parameters for a discussion among artists of the African diaspora. Is identifying as Black an acknowledgement that one is perceived as such, or is it a claiming of an identity and an affinity with a culture? As Black Americans, we were born of

"IS IDENTIFYING AS BLACK AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT ONE IS PERCEIVED AS SUCH, OR IS IT A CLAIMING

generations afflicted by the toxicity of colorism, classism, and social mores enforced by a white government and bequeathed the epigenetics of slavery. In South Africa, the conversations around racism,

classism, and nationalism revealed an equally complex yet very different history of racial trauma and cultivation of the Other. That history is uniquely South African and sets its people apart from other populations on the continent.

As Americans, we appropriate a Blackness derived from our perceptions of African culture, and we then market it back to Africans through pop culture and commodification. We look for Wakanda and a unification with our history in Africa. The fiction of a monolithic, homogeneous Black experience permeates popular culture in the West. Perhaps navigating a white world as one who is conspicuously Other is our common experience, bridging cultural, national, and class differences. Of course, the terms that define Otherness are established by those who've secured their roles as authors of the people's history: the former or current colonial powers. We consider the ripple effects of colonialism, of neocolonial powers, and of the rise of nationalism in the West, as well as how power balances and international influences are more determined by capital than by brute exertions of force by one country over another.

What does it mean to identify as Black? Or coloured? Or of the African diaspora? What does it mean to live in a world where we unconsciously or consciously require such social determinations and divisions? Are ethnic hierarchies and labels impediments that we collectively, as a human race, wish to overcome? Is there value and power in claiming spaces of affinity for the discussion of our shared struggles and successes?

Authoring the dominant historical account means determining who are Others and the terms by which they are treated as such. We determine that the Black Lunch Table is a relevant and critical gesture to disrupt this production of the dominant narrative.

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1. All quotes in this essay are from the Black Lunch Table Reunion, held on June 30, 2018, via Skype. A full transcription will be available at blacklunchtable.org.

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2. Conversation with Ghairunisa Galeta, Ashley Whitfield and Thuli Mlambo 2018, oral communication, 28th July.

HEATHER HART AND JINA VALENTINE

Heather Hart is a visual artist based in Brooklyn, and Jina Valentine is a visual artist and professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Their project, the Black Lunch Table (BLT), will host public programs in November 2018. The BLT archive can be found at blacklunchtable.org.
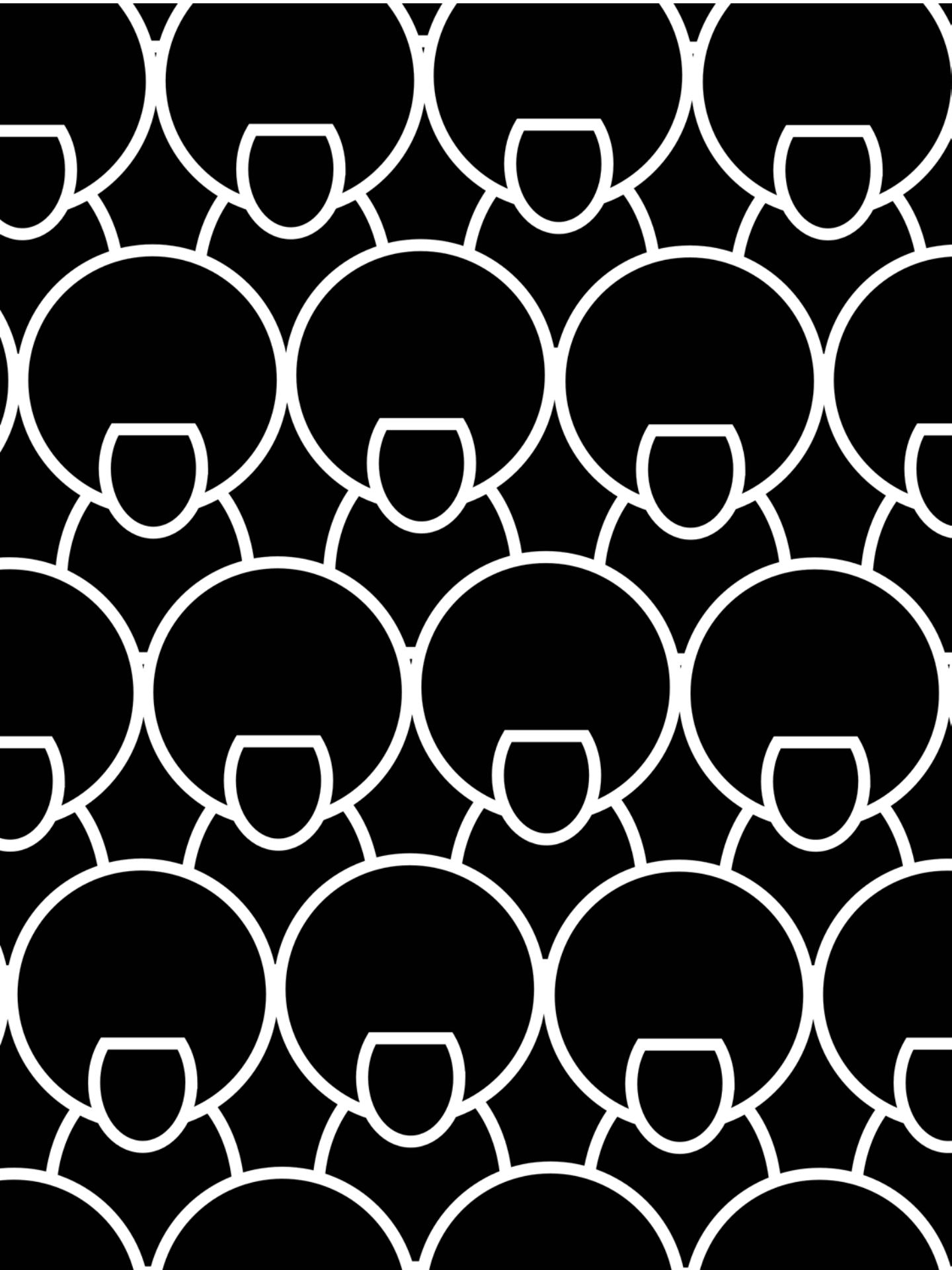
Welcome to the Black Lunch Table:Jina Valentine and Heather Hart on Creating Space for Communities of Color in the Art World

The Art Genome Project

Jan 17, 2016 3:55PM

I was the last to take my seat at Jina Valentine and Heather Hart's "Black Lunch Table" session at the Creative Time 2015 New York Summit this past November. Twelve writers, artists, and teachers of color crowded around one table in the empty cafeteria of the Boys and Girls High School in Brooklyn. I joined in the middle of a heated conversation between a Brooklyn schoolteacher and the Arts Outreach Leader at Kickstarter on the politics of white celebrities like Miley Cyrus who ostensibly appropriate black popular culture while remaining silent on issues of black victimhood. As I sat down, Jina silently slid a playing card to me with a conversation prompt that read: "Does less vulnerability to violence = empowerment?"

Valentine and Hart have been staging similar events since 2005, and their formula is simple: bring artists and educators of color into guided conversation together at one table. The effect? The creation of a temporary art community both real and imagined. For the next hour our conversation moved quickly, from the impact of government surveillance on the Black Lives Matter Movement, to political correctness on college campuses, to

the underline recent controversy over Brooklyn Museum's hosting of a real estate summit. The number of approving *mmmhhmm*'s and head nods amongst the audience—and the shared laughter and outrage—suggest that these educators, artists, and community leaders perhaps lack enough sanctioned spaces to talk freely about those issues most essential to their communities and work.

The Black Lunch Table, 2015, hosted at Porch Project: Black Lunch Table, sponsored by Elsewhere Museum. Photo courtesy artists. Greensboro, NC

A school cafeteria is often a battleground of social dynamics for kids as well as a prime-time arena for swapping and often authoring popular trends and culture. At almost any given U.S. high school, you're likely to find an all-black lunch table. Given patterns of institutional exclusion as well as self-selection, why is this type of forum still such a rarity in the art world and in academia? (The flip side is that when these forums do exist, in

the art world and in academia, people of color often feel as though they're participating in an echo chamber.)

It's amazing how institutional critique has transformed in the age of the internet. It's odd to think of an act of radical activism as plucking away at a keyboard in MoMA's library.

Responding to this need, Valentine and Hart's project is interested in exploiting the creative outcomes of the lunch table, as well as revealing the social and political realities that determine who sits at which one. Their work falls in line with recent efforts at creating a more inclusive account of modern and contemporary art history, attending to the work of artists whose races or ethnicities led to their omission. Evidently, this approach resonates: artists like Carrie Mae Weems and Theaster Gates have participated, sharing their personal histories in tension with what frames and defines the work of black contemporary artists.

Artsy spoke with Valentine and Hart about the experience of being a person of color in the art world, the personal political responsibility of artists, and how they've pursued these discussions through their series of national participatory events, including a recent Wikipedia-edit-athon at the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Museum of Modern Art, as well as their individual artistic practices. This is The Art Genome Project's second virtual roundtable (see our flagship iteration here), part of a series of ongoing discussions in which we gain insight from artists and thought leaders on a range of aesthetic and art-historical topics. What follows is an edited version of the conversation, moderated by Ellen Tani, contributor on The Art Genome Project.

—Olivia-Jene´ Fagon

Our participants and moderator from left to right: Ellen Tani, Heather Hart and Jina Valentine.

17   The Myth of the Comprehensive Historical Archive

jina valentine, eliza myrie, Heather Hart

Published on: Nov 16, 2020

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Wikipedia is an undertaking of mythic proportions, as is addressing its deficits. The Black Lunch Table project is inspired by the myth, the potential possibility, and works to increase the conversation around resource equity, gender and racial bias, and knowledge gaps within and beyond Wikipedia.

From the outset, Wikipedia has espoused the ideals of free and open knowledge, catalyzing a mass authorship of cultural history worldwide. As the site on which narratives are drafted, contested, revised, and cited, Wikipedia attempts a hopeful and earnest approximation of a comprehensive and democratically authored history. This is of course an impossible goal. Realizing an archive that is both complete and democratic is a task of a mythic proportion. It would require establishing technological, educational, and cultural resource equity worldwide, and the deprioritizing of Eurocentric historical narratives and English-language Wikipedia. Nonetheless, Wikipedians are collectively invested in constructing an archive of infinite scope and complexity. We are enamored of this mythic, utopian vision.

Myths as metaphors for infinite tasks of unfathomable scope abound throughout culture. Perhaps the most well-known is that of Sisyphus eternally pushing a boulder uphill and of Penelope's endless weaving and unweaving her tapestry. The interminable tasks themselves are generally not the focus when we speak of them. Rather, they are metaphors for present or past situations and offer propositions for imagining the future. As with other myths, the quest for a comprehensive encyclopedia is itself significant, but the various discourses it catalyzes and contributes to are just as important. These discourses are Wikipedia-specific, but they relate to issues symptomatic of local and international sociopolitical conditions.

The Black Lunch Table Wikipedia project is inspired by the myth, the potential possibility. The work we do contributes to discourse around resource equity, gender and racial bias, and knowledge gaps within and beyond Wikipedia. Our work both directly and indirectly affects change around those issues. While we don't imagine our project will be able to solve all of its own goals, we do hope that our engagement with Wikipedia will affect how folks conceive of historical authorship more broadly and that they will come to share our belief that histories are neither static nor linear. Through educating the public about our project as it works to identify knowledge gaps on Wikipedia, we hope that everyone will feel they can and should contribute to historical authorship as we all have something at stake in how our histories are told.

`Mythic Being: Who Is Black Lunch Table?`

The Black Lunch Table (BLT) is an ongoing collaboration founded by artists Jina Valentine and Heather Hart that intends to fill holes in the documentation of contemporary art history. Our project is inspired

by questions related to authorship: *Who writes the record? What is omitted from the record?* Those who have access to knowledge and its production determine what is included in the historical record. Authoring the dominant historical narrative means determining who is other and the terms by which they are treated as such. BLT is a critical gesture to disrupt that narrative. Our project mobilizes a democratic rewriting of contemporary art and cultural history, with the overall aim of filling gaps in and decentralizing authorship of the dominant historical record.

BLT began in 2005 at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Organized around literal and metaphorical lunch tables, BLT takes the school lunchroom phenomenon as its starting point. It has existed in numerous forms since then and is presently comprised of a series of community roundtables, an online oral history archive, and Wikipedia project.

As we researched models for the BLT archive and noted those artists omitted from the larger art historical archives, we wondered what artists had also been omitted from the world's most widely referenced encyclopedia. We were surprised by how many there were. Our Wikipedia project redresses these omissions. The BLT Wikipedia project mobilizes a collective authoring of articles on the lives and works of Black artists. When we began our Wikipedia project in 2014, important figures such as Fred Moten, Hamza Walker, Meschac Gaba, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and Valerie Cassel Oliver were all without pages. Five years later, each has a page that began as a BLT target. We are inspired to continue this work as we note what artists, curators, and art historians remain underdocumented on Wikipedia.

Access to Knowledge and Its Production

We are descended of ancestors whose histories have been largely erased or altogether left undocumented. Of the little genealogical information that ties us to our African and indigenous heritages, inaccuracies abound, and the stories are incomplete. We have made efforts to fill these holes with the family lore, oral histories, and traditions we are bequeathed. We know that those who witnessed our ancestors' histories lacked fora to offer testimony of it. And that absent a voice to account for those stories, that testimony is forever lost. Meanwhile, as we witness the continued underdocumentation of Black and brown people, we wish to testify, to make record of it.

We both pursued graduate art degrees but were left with lingering questions about the art histories we'd been taught. We imagine these questions were not unique to our experiences: *Why are there so few Black Artists included in the canon of Western Art History? Is "Black Art History" a topic to be segregated out of the rest of contemporary art history, as a parallel and unequal timeline? Why? And where, as young, aspiring artists do we fit into this already unfolding discourse?*

BLT's original task list of notable Black artists with missing or incomplete articles was several hundred names long. As of this writing, this focus list for our edit-a-thons has grown to over thirteen hundred

names and remains incomplete. This is not due to inattention to the task of authoring or editing these articles but rather that we are continuously discovering names, movements, and artworks that are otherwise significant but have been omitted from Wikipedia. And many of these artists are still living, creating, exhibiting, and producing material, requiring their articles to be continually updated.

The length of the list plainly illustrates the magnitude of our task—it is one of Sisyphean proportions. The task list is also a clear manifestation of systemic bias. As it enumerates historical omissions on Wikipedia, it points to larger failings in the documentation of cultural production. What is missing on Wikipedia is most certainly missing from other popular archives.

The task list is an accounting of so much of what was missing from the histories we were taught. The task list, as an aggregation of missing articles, both illustrates a void in our collective history and demands for its resolution. We actively name that which we sought in order to determine our places within this history.

Potential Possibilities: Inclusion + Omission

In the twenty years since Wikipedia's founding, how it is accessed and who is able to access it along with the internet as its supportive interface have all changed dramatically. It is crucial to note these changes when considering how and where researchers, students, and various other netizens access information. It is useful to examine what information was available on Wikipedia in the early days. In 2007, there were two million articles total in 161 languages;[1] a dozen years later, there are approximately six million English-language articles and forty million articles in 293 non-English languages.[2]

Consider that in 1998 only 26 percent of Americans had regular access to the internet versus 2018 where 81percent of US households have broadband access to the internet and 76 percent of those households have smartphones.[3] In 1998 (before smartphones were widely available), access to information most often required consulting physical, printed media. In 2019, it's likely that information sought can be found through a quick Google search (on a smartphone), one that often includes a link to a Wikipedia article as the first result. As the amount of information documented on the platform grew exponentially over those years, so did users' expectation of finding the information they sought. There is a general perception that Wikipedia hosts a comprehensive collection of knowledge—that everything worth documentation exists in some form on the platform.

The vast majority of Google searches and, by a slim majority, the number of Wikipedia queries are conducted via smartphone. Because of *how* we search for information in 2019, first-page Google results wield enormous intellectual capital, social capital, and financial capital. In this era wherein *Googling* is often conflated with *researching*, offering easy access to answers and info, folks generally trust the first

page of Google results. That first-page real estate is most often populated by an infobox, a link to Wikipedia, a link to Amazon—links to the most (algorithmically) "relevant" result.[4]

In particular, internet users give the *Knowledge Panel* (that box that appears in the top of the Google search with basic information about a subject) our full faith. The Knowledge Panel sources data from several sites, including Wikipedia and Wikidata, and presents a tidy summation of the pertinent (basic) facts about a person, place, or thing. There's much debate and criticism over the value, potential inaccuracy, and bias in coverage related to the Knowledge Panel.[5] And tracing the varied and entangled systems of bias at play in Knowledge Panel production is complicated. Perhaps the most problematic issue is that the Knowledge Panel shows *the most important information* on a given subject. Nuanced information is depreciated by that which can be presented as unquestionable and uncomplicated and sans context.

Search subjects bolstered by Knowledge Panels attain greater visibility, credibility, and notability. Those Wikipedia subjects that have received sufficient authoring, citation, and development *and* an infobox will be most visible in a simple search. This structure reinforces existing knowledge and notability hierarchies. A subject with an infobox included in their Wikipedia article (and therefore a Knowledge Panel on Google) will accumulate additional validation, further establishing that subject as most important or *most relevant*. Stunningly, approximately two-thirds of Wikipedia articles lack an infobox. Our concern here is for the two-thirds of articles whose most essential information cannot be tidily summed up into an infobox, whose most essential information is difficult to cite due to systemic bias in media and academic focus, or whose article hasn't received the attention due because it falls outside the interest areas of most Wiki contributors.

What Does It Matter Who Is Speaking?

Considering *how* we access information and *who* accesses it is only part of the story.[6] The ratio of regular contributors to Wikipedia to the rate of access to articles is astounding. As of 2016, a mere 1 percent of Wikipedia users are also regular contributors, authoring more than half of the content. Another way to illustrate that is approximately thirteen hundred people regularly contribute to creating over three-quarters of the six hundred new articles posted to Wikipedia every day; and every day there are approximately 13.9 million unique page views. Following that calculus, we can say: ±99 percent of folks access Wikipedia as read-only, expecting the platform to offer the information they seek. Most never question, *who is this 1 percent writing articles?*

As the French theorist Michel Foucault noted, "Everything is said in every age."[7] Theories relating to semiotics discuss how languages are formed out of necessity. New words are born to describe phenomena and culture specific to an era.[8] This idea also suggests that which is left unsaid can be seen to describe what was lacking in that culture. In other words, if there's no language to describe it, either

assumption that all culturally or historically significant subjects have been documented *and* published by credible sources.

BLT's engagement with Wikipedia includes contributing to the ongoing discourse around notability. Many otherwise significant Black artists are omitted from dominant art historical narratives and receive insufficient attention from the cultural media, making it difficult or impossible to prove they're notable enough for inclusion on Wikipedia. Although we agree that establishing a verifiable standard for an encyclopedic entry is necessary, such policies as "Wikipedia notability standards" fail to adequately take into account systemic and implicit biases that exist in art exhibition, art criticism, and art historical writing. Wikipedia risks mimicking the same system it was built to disrupt.

When we first began our Wikipedia project, the notability standards for visual artists were so high that they excluded the majority of artists considered notable by contemporary arts and cultural institutions. An artist must have had at least two major museum exhibitions and received multiple reviews in credible journals. This standard was created through a flawed peer-review system drafted by Wikipedians who may not have had any familiarity with the art world or its measures. These notability standards as they are defined could not take into account the potential for systemic bias that precludes many significant artists from achieving that specific formulation of professional achievement.

In order to find those artists elided by the systemic bias inherent in such notability guidelines, BLT considers the following:

- the lingering effects of slavery, segregation, redlining, and busing as they relate to current issues around resource and knowledge equity: *Who gets to be an artist? Who has access to cultural resources in their communities?*
- the demographic of under/graduate arts programs, gallery rosters, major museum group exhibitions, and major museum solo exhibitions in the United States
- museum boards memberships and their influence in determining exhibition seasons; the demographic of curators at major museums in the United States; the collectorship of artworks and how this intersects with board composition
- both the demographic and aesthetic biases of art critics, art historians, academicians, scholars: *Whose work is seen, discussed, canonized?*
- the demographic and knowledge base of Wikipedia admins who establish notability standards for artists and other specialized professions; while peer-reviewed articles are recommended for article citation, does Wiki governance include such industry-specific peership models?
- the dearth of citable sources and historical and critical writing about Black artists

From these deficits we grow our task list. The majority of us do not meet the notability standards Wikipedia has set. Nevertheless, we start new articles. Some are flagged for deletion, many remain. We must be bold.

In the past few years, notability standards for visual artists have become less restrictive, yet the potential for systemic bias to influence notability remains. There are many Black artists whose mentorship and effect on later generations of Black artists is difficult or impossible to cite, not for a lack of artistic production on the artists' part, but for a general lack of published secondary source material about their lives and work and insufficient exhibition records. Additionally, the editorship— which includes Wikipedia administrators, arbitration and governance committees, safe-space committees, and diversity-related committees—is predominantly composed of middle class, college-educated white men who can afford to volunteer their time and efforts. We tend to author, edit, and advocate for subjects with which we find affinity. So again, we ask, *who is this 1 percent?* The myth of a democratically and globally authored encyclopedia is of course beautifully compelling, but we remain far from achieving this goal.

Who Is the 1 Percent? The Demographics of Wikipedia Editors

While Wikipedia is an open source platform where anyone can have a voice in writing and editing historical records, a Wikimedia Foundation survey showed that about 91 percent of Wikipedia editors are male and 77 percent are white.[11] The statistic of race however has not been an official study of the Foundation. When we investigated the origins of this statistic, we were told by multiple editors that it was an unofficial *visual assessment*. The problematics of assessing another's racial identification based on visual appearance aside, this statistic only accounts for the demographics at select social gatherings and workshops. We imagine it includes an international population, and that the non-white 33 percent is predominantly not of the African Diaspora. So we imagine, based on our own assessment, that Wikipedia editors that identify as Black fall well below 15 percent.

The methodology and resultant metrics for the gender survey were far more rigorous. Despite the various critiques related to accuracy, that survey at least provided sound evidence of a substantial gender gap among editors. The gender gap article on Wikipedia further examines its successes and shortcomings, including accounting for editors who opted out of participating. More recent articles include discussion of the fact that this data is eight years old and should be afforded a time line for updating.

Our critique of these surveys and the implementation of the findings is that they fail to examine diversity-related issues as intersectional. And moreso, addressing gender disparity with a critical study and analysis and race disparity with undocumented visual assessment (the methodology and

metrics of which are nowhere to be found online) prioritizes one issue over the other. This naturally sets up a space for gender inclusion that overshadows the work of race and ethnic diversity.[12]

Considering diversity-related issues through the lens of intersectionality also enables the Foundation (and editors, including Wikipedia project managers) to address related concerns in the more nuanced and critical manner they are due. For example, resource and knowledge equity intersects with race and gender parity and ought to be studied and addressed as interrelated. Studies on the distribution of cultural resources and access to technology by geographic region[13] could offer context or insights into the gender and race gaps in specific communities and provide clues for how to address them.

Wikipedia does need more editors of color and women editors and more quality articles on notable Black artists to reflect a more true and inclusive history. Our project intends to decentralize Wikipedia editing about Black visual artists, bringing the movement to communities and sites that would normally not host an editing event. Participants have a hand in directly authoring stories for future generations and in impacting systems that may not have been built for them.

We are actively cultivating a more diverse editorship, in addition to encouraging editors in the majority demographic to focus on marginalized or omitted subject matter. BLT creates spaces that encourage people of color and women to join the Wikipedia movement by hosting events focused on improving or creating pages for Black visual artists while also encouraging white male editors to focus on gaps in coverage on Wikipedia.

Infinite Possibilities for Engagement

We describe the BLT project as *nomadic,* as one that seeks to meet the people where they are, both physically and metaphorically. We travel to spaces in order to connect with people who would normally not have the initiative or confidence to approach Wikipedia editing on their own and to introduce focus of marginalized communities on Wikipedia to more experienced editors.

We are presently working to decentralize our engagements away from larger institutions by exploring strategies for hosting with smaller cultural and community institutions. Our intention is to bring our events to spaces that are community-run and perhaps underserved. In order to democratize the authoring of cultural history, we need to address access to and the unequal distribution of cultural resources. To democratize the authoring of cultural history, we need to bring our project to the people.

By taking our project out to the potential editors we are able to witness the moment when historians, laymen, and academics alike realize that Wikipedia is a useful, vetted, reliable resource and that editing is empowering, gratifying, and fun. To do this, our project creates space for editors that is focused on one-on-one attention to lessen the sense of intimidation felt by those new to the platform.

Meeting the people where they are demystifies the process of contributing to Wikipedia and helps to illustrate the many possibilities for engagement on the platform. Above all else, we hope that our efforts serve to increase the ethnic diversity among the editorship and provide affirmation that these new editor's voices are not only welcome but critically necessary.

Our project has raised awareness about the importance of this work, particularly as it pertains to the often unrecorded history of Black visual artists. We are constantly receiving emails, Facebook messages, and so forth from cultural workers who have noticed that this info or that person is missing or needs editing on Wikipedia. Most often they are interested in learning how to fix the error or omission themselves and are seeking guidance.

Because the levels of completeness and quality among the articles on our task list vary so widely, there are in fact endless possibilities for new editors to engage: we encourage grammarians and punctuation police, source-material researchers, biography updaters, fact citers, and photo contributors to find their place.

In the past year, our WikiCommons Photo Initiative (a pop-up photo booth) has become a highlight of our work. The primary objective of the photo initiative is to quite literally increase the visibility of Black visual artists on Wikimedia. The process is simple: we invite a local Black photographer to host a pop-up portrait studio at our edit-a-thon; we invite local artists on our Wikipedia list to have their photo taken; the photographer releases all portraits to WikiCommons for use (eventual use, if the artist still lacks a page; or immediate if they have one) on the artists' Wikipedia article. Thus far we have uploaded nine hundred photos to the Commons, dozens of which have been incorporated into artists' Wikipedia articles.

The photo initiative is an opportunity for everyone to contribute in a small but incredibly impactful way. Those articles with photos and infoboxes appear in Google searches with a prominent Knowledge Panel, which informs folks about the basic facts related to the subject *and* presents them as noteworthy and included in the ever-growing record of human knowledge.

Art + the Archival Impulse

Why is it important that BLT is an artist project? What does it mean that we are asking artists to write our own art history? We are challenging the status quo. BLT is engaged in radical archiving and institutional critique. We are pushing the structures of cultural, historical, and social institutions to change. Our Wikipedia project intends to rewrite the record and make right the systemic biases that have led to historical omissions.

Self-aware in our involvement as Wikipedians, we question whether Wikipedia is indeed a "movement" or simply another institution. Its utopian mission of Sisyphean proportions requires

would-be Wikipedians to believe that their investments are for a just and worthy cause: *together we can create a free and comprehensive record of all human knowledge*. BLT is inspired in our engagement with this possibility, with the myth. We acknowledge that our investment in this mythic goal is more of a salve than a solution. As artists, we don't imagine we are saving the world.

"'What does it matter who is speaking,' someone said." Artists are already speaking. We are perhaps the best positioned to empower those without a soapbox or the confidence to speak, to add their voice and their historical perspective to the record.

Artworks like BLT intend to shift the lens by which folks view the world, challenge institutions to do better to reflect the interests of the publics they purport to represent, invite the uninvited to the table, and redraw the lines within linear narratives, elucidating their complexity and amplifying the multivocality extant in a peoples' history. Artists imagine new structures for the organization of archives and new points at which to access them. We find value where others find none. We imagine our work is a product of the times we live in; the communities we build together; and the ideas, resources, and knowledge we inherit, impart to others, and leave as our legacies.

We imagine our biographies, our articles, are valuable in context and connection to others. Those connections illustrate a complex cartography of conversations, aesthetics, and ideas; the brilliance of individuals at each point is revealed as their stories are recounted. We imagine the story of human knowledge as one that is infinitely complex, multivocal, and interconnected. Attempting to illustrate even an approximate likeness of it requires tracing as many connections as possible and engaging as many voices as possible. We imagine the scope of our project, and the project of Wikipedia, is infinite. We are enamored of the infinite potentialities present in this endeavor.

Footnotes

1. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia," accessed April 25, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia#Launch_and_early_growth. ↩
2. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia: Size comparisons," accessed April 25, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Size_comparisons. ↩
3. It's unfortunately outside the scope of this essay to dive into how these statistics vary among socioeconomic, race, and education-level classifications. Kurt Bauman, "More Than Two-Thirds Access Internet on Mobile Devices," US Census Bureau, August 8, 2018, ↩
4. In-depth discussion of algorithmic bias is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article. But check out Algorithmic Justice League (https://www.ajlunited.org) for resources on the subject. ↩

5. Caitlin Dewey, "You Probably Haven't Even Noticed Google's Sketchy Quest to Control the World's Knowledge," *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/05/11/you-probably-havent-even-noticed-googles-sketchy-quest-to-control-the-worlds-knowledge/. ↵

6. The quote "What does it matter who is speaking?," attributed to Samuel Beckett, can be found in Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Penguin, 1991), 101. ↵

7. While language expresses that which is communicable and relevant in each era, it also identifies that which is omitted and inarticulable. In Foucault's concise formulation, "everything is said in every age." The factors conditioning an age—giving every era its style, its trends, and its values—direct the formation of the language used in that era. That which is socio-temporally relevant in each age is visible and productive of the language describing it. As a result, what remains unsaid illustrates the negative spaces within a culture. ↵

8. "Updates to the OED," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed August 9, 2019, https://public.oed.com/updates/. ↵

9. Such language is flagged as in this article for example: Wikipedia, s.v. "Theaster Gates," accessed November 1, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theaster_Gates. ↵

10. "*The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images*." The Situationist Internationale (SI) was a group of artists whose films, texts, and interventions in everyday life intended to change the world by making the public aware of and empowered to change the conditions of their realities. The theory of the "spectacle" is central to their work and basically asks people to question popular ideologies, imagery, political systems, and aesthetics. Guy Debord, in *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. K. Knabb (London, UK: Rebel Press, 2005), states that capitalist mechanisms want the public to believe that *all that is good appears and all that appears is good*. We should question what monies promote which ideologies and challenge popular beliefs. ↵

11. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia: Wikipedians/Demographics," accessed March 15, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians/Demographics. ↵

12. The article on systemic bias among Wikipedia editors only gives passing reference to racial bias: Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia: Systemic_bias," accessed November 1, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Systemic_bias#The_average_Wikipedian. ↵

13. "Chicago Heat Maps," The Field Foundation of Illinois, August 1, 2017, https://fieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Field-Foundation-Heat-Maps-THazel-Edits.pdf. ↵

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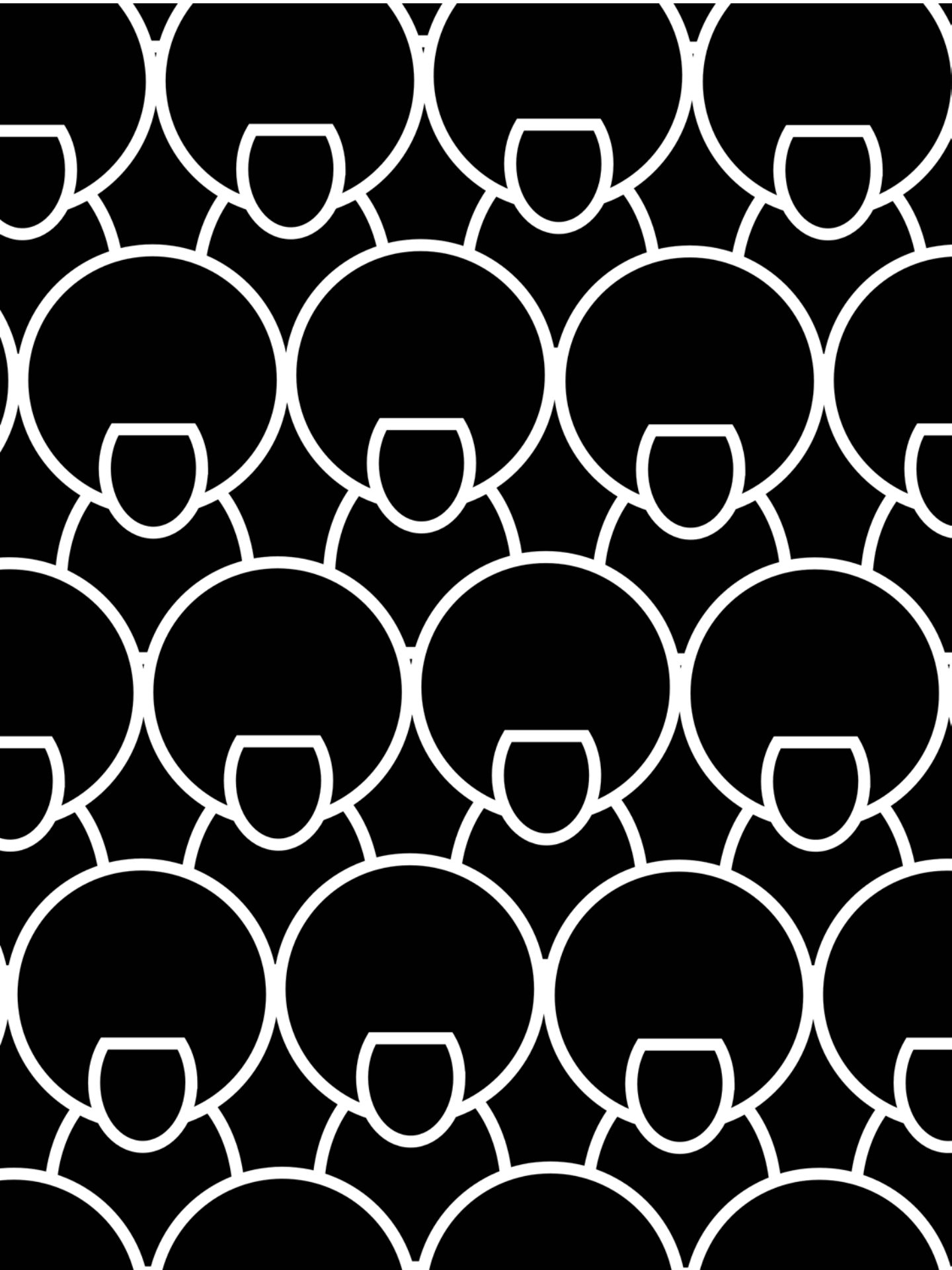Feels like we're all trying to catch up in our *histories*... to then have those legacies to share with the next *generation*, so that they're not left feeling the way that we were left feeling

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— *Jose Luis Benavides*

Black Art + Los Angeles

South of Pico:
Migration, Art, and Black Los Angeles

IN 1966 MIRIAM MATTHEWS, a collector and former librarian, wrote to artist Charles White to commission an image of Biddy Mason, the nineteenth-century black pioneer and former slave who had challenged California's shifting black codes.[1] White had always been captivated by the ways the visual could annotate history, and throughout his career he was sought out by all manner of people to illuminate missing or overlooked aspects of the human narrative.[2] What did change for White in the 1960s was the way he approached his craft, as he further complicated the pictorial surface *and* the understanding of history itself.

White's Biddy Mason project follows another important picture of a nineteenth-century figure commissioned by the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. Made from Chinese ink on illustration board, Charles White's *General Moses (Harriet Tubman)*, 1965 (plate 1), is a portrait of this important slave absconder, conductor on the Underground Railroad, abolitionist, and Union spy during the Civil War. In White's almost six-foot drawing, Tubman, the composition's center of gravity, sits on a boulder, as if she is taking a brief rest from the task at hand. She stares out at us with a direct, relentless gaze. The artist takes on history—American, African American, and also diasporic—in a commentary on transatlantic slavery. As in many of White's later works, the landscape is elusive—a small patch of grass and

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a large craggy stone—more schematic and metaphoric than composed in detail. He uses alternating pools of ink and cross-hatching to create the appearance of a highly textured surface and portray a jagged, rough-hewn, and heavy form. In sitting on the rock, Harriet is rendered part of it, her skirt all but indistinguishable from the craggy plane, her feet blending into the grassy ground.

White was one of a handful of African American artists, like Jacob Lawrence and Elizabeth Catlett, who had made their mark in the 1930s and 1940s with social-realist styles and themes that revolved around black history and politics. In the early 1960s, their work received renewed interest from a younger group who were grappling with their own social and political obligations as artists against the landscape of the civil rights and nascent Black Power movements. For David Hammons, White's presence in Los Angeles was a revelation; as he mused in 1970, "I never knew there were 'black' painters, or artists, or anything until I found out about him—which was maybe three years ago. There's no way I could have got the information in my art history classes. It's like I just found out a couple of years ago about Negro cowboys, and I was shocked about that."[3]

In 1963, so the story goes, David Hammons had set out from Springfield, Illinois, in his not-so-new car. When it broke down just outside of town, he repaired it but didn't return the few short miles back home. Instead he kept going, determined at all costs to keep traveling west and to his destination, Los Angeles.[4] Like many artists heading from the countryside or the small town to the sprawling metropolis, Hammons was drawn as much to the adventures of the big city itself as to the locale of culture and avant-garde activity. In the mid-twentieth century, others of his generation also journeyed west from the midregions of the United States: Bruce Nauman (born Fort Wayne, Indiana), Ed Ruscha (born Omaha, Nebraska), and Judy Chicago (born in Chicago) all sought to stake a claim in the Los Angeles art game. They studied art and began showing their work there in the early 1960s as the city came into its own as a major cultural capital.

What differentiates Hammons's story from these others to a certain degree is its imbrication in another narrative. It is a tale, to be sure, of a larger African American community in Los Angeles in the same period, one that brought us cultural nationalism, the Watts Rebellion, the syndicated TV dance show *Soul Train*, and the films of Charles Burnett as well as a major community of visual artists. Like Hammons, most of the artists discussed in this book—including Charles White (born Chicago), John Outterbridge (born Greenville, North Carolina), Noah Purifoy (born Snow Hill, Alabama), and Senga Nengudi

(born Chicago), among others—made their way to California as adults or as children. Those born in Los Angeles, like Betye Saar, were the children of people who had made that same journey. What is significant about this seemingly simple, almost unnoticeable fact is its tie to the much larger, two-century-long narrative of black migration.

African American migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was nothing less than black people willing into existence their presence in modern American life. It represents their resolve to make a new world in the aftermath of human bondage and stake their claim in the United States. It is a narrative that stretches out one hundred years from the moment of freedom, a tale with a genesis in southern climes that then moved north and west. And it is a tale of the role of place in that claim, particularly the role of the West as a site of possibility, peace, and utopia. Artists such as White and Saar, Purifoy and Outterbridge, Hammons and Nengudi, like most African Americans in the twentieth century, were part of this massive relocation of people in some way. My goal here is to understand and demonstrate how their work speaks to the dislocations and cultural reinvention of migration, its materials of loss and of possibility, and sense of reinscription of the new in style and practice.

CRISSCROSSING THE WORLD

While nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American migrations provide a material and intellectual basis for the artwork discussed in this book, the human relocation actually began centuries earlier. The migration of people from Africa all across the globe is historic and legendary, codified now in academic investigations and a field of study that focuses on the African Diaspora. The forced migrations associated with the transatlantic slave trade that began five hundred years ago have been well researched by others and will not be discussed in detail here.[5]

Other migration was voluntary. For example, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, scores of people migrated from Central Mexico to the northern border. Indeed, some of the first people of African descent in the land that eventually would become the western United States spoke Spanish. In 1781, Spanish colonial officials established the legendary Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula between the San Gabriel Mission and Santa Barbara's Presidio. Mexico's Sinaloa province had a substantial population of people of African descent; twenty-six of the forty-six people who completed the five-hundred-mile journey overland and by sea from Sinaloa to Alta California were black. The pioneers who settled the cities of San Antonio

and Laredo in Texas had a similar racial makeup.[6] Less than a century later, black sailors from the West Indies and other places would jump ship in San Francisco to take part in the gold rush.

Yet such movement, even when self-propelled, is often not just a one-time or permanent thing. There is the notion of crisscrossing, as historian Darlene Clark Hine has posited—forward and backward, but not relentless and linear due to factors such as the scrutiny of black movement, lack of capital, the need to care for relatives left behind, and keeping in touch with "home." In the notion of crisscross we find as well Michel de Certeau's notion of ellipsis, the "gap in spatial continuum," a journey whose synecdochic movements nevertheless compose the semblance of a whole. Voluntary migrations encompassed where people could go and where they could get to, on the physical plane and in the metaphysical cosmic order. And their movement, their quest, was ongoing.[7]

Between 1910 and 1970 more than 6.5 million African Americans left the southern United States for points north and west in what has been called the Great Migration, one of the largest and fastest internal migrations in history.[8] This massive shift of black Americans can be thought of in two phases. The first was one centered around World War I, when some 1.8 million people made the journey. The second phase, which drew women and men to the industries of World War II, took 5 million African Americans out of the South. (In 1940, 78 percent of African Americans lived in the southern United States; by 1970 the number had dropped to 53 percent.) The journey north may have begun with interstate relocation, then accelerated in a trek from farm to town, and from there to the city, the (cultural) capital. Furthermore, in what historian Shirley Ann Moore has characterized as "ever-widening circles of secondary migration," people travelled in stages, even in the late nineteenth century: from the rural South to its cities, from southern cities to those of the North and Midwest, and finally to the West Coast.[9] By the putative end of the Great Migration, the word "urban" had become interchangeable with "black." And there were the classic "push" and "pull" factors of migration: the "push" of the decline in agricultural livelihood, the specter of forced labor (a fear that slavery would reassert itself in the coming future), political and state repression, and the unrelenting violence against persons of African descent; and the "pull" of industrial work and wages, greater access to education, land, and autonomy.[10]

Railroad porters and peripatetic church choirs were among the scouts for new locations, bringing back information with each trip. Those traveling by train or bus might be forced to stand until they crossed the Mason-Dixon line. Other journeys, like those of David Hammons and John Outterbridge, were made by car, "with their 'mementos, histories, and hope, all tied to the top.'"[11] For African Americans, moving west represented a relocation toward the openness of possibilities, a place without the same sedimented authority. It was a move toward nonfixity and flexibility, the no-place of utopia. In this sense, the West became interchangeable with other locales that African Americans imagined offered prosperity and freedom from brutality and second-class citizenship. Was it a space in this country or a space in the world? Was it California, Africa, or Kansas?

Africa had loomed large as a place of promise in African American minds throughout the nineteenth century. In 1877, facing the abrogation of their political rights under the threat of death and bodily harm, as many as ninety-eight thousand people in New Orleans put their names on emigration lists for Liberia.[12] Emigration Clubs and Liberia Clubs abounded in the Reconstruction period, as did the conversation about places where black people might live a life of untrammeled citizenship. Other locations in the Diaspora, such as the West Indies and even Cyprus, were suggested as sites for peaceful settlement by blacks and whites alike.[13] But for people without access to vast amounts of capital and one step removed from enslavement, traveling within the United States was challenge enough.

Kansas Clubs were also founded in places like Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana. Kansas had entered the union as a free state in 1861; it was a storied stop on the Underground Railroad and home of the radical abolitionist John Brown as well as other "jayhawkers," slave absconders who went into Missouri and led the enslaved across state lines to freedom. After slavery ended, Kansas, and in many respects the West, took Canada's place as the promised land in African American imaginations. Homestead acts that encouraged settlement and land ownership in western states and territories added to the optimistic outlook.[14] Well into the twentieth century, black towns with names like Blackdom (New Mexico); Booktee, Canadian Colored, and Liberty (Oklahoma); Independence Heights (Texas); and, perhaps the most famous, Nicodemus (Kansas) were established. The founders sought sites of self-determination and humanity that these expressive acts of naming gestured toward, where their families could flourish and live as equals under the

law. But when these places and others in the western United States were also characterized by unequal treatment, Africa persisted in the imagination as a haven. More than one migrant arrived in Kansas from the South and, impatient with continuing restrictions to the exercise of freedom, then made plans to head to Africa, only to run out of money in Chicago and decide to stay.[15]

Farah Jasmine Griffin, Dana Cuff, and Katherine McKittrick have all explored the uneasy and conflicted notion of "safe space" with regard to migration. For Griffin these are material and discursive sites that evoke the ancestral; they are devices used to negotiate the migrants' new terrain. The ancestral safe space is informed by either the acceptance or rejection of the South as the ancestor and either the rejection of heritage as provincial custom or the acceptance of it in the invocation of music, ritual, language, or food that "takes one home" in memory. It is a reference to the real locales of the American South and, by extension, cultural formations of the African Diaspora but also to psychic space, the home one carries within. For Cuff safe space is understood as a version of homeplace, which is provisional: it is a site of comfort that may also be filled with myriad insecurities for those without access to power. In the words of McKittrick, homeplace is created from a "usable paradoxical space," one that is self-actualizing yet is also to a certain degree informed by compromise.[16]

The creation of art and culture also evokes safe spaces as ancestral forms and forces, whether as actual material inheritance, physical object structures and style, or the power of intellectual meaning—intention made visible. Charles White's portraits of heroines such as Harriet Tubman and depictions of southern workers and migrants, Betye Saar's dreamscapes, Noah Purifoy's assemblages of urban transformation, John Outterbridge's notions of a material homeplace, and Houston Conwill's installations and performative sites do not necessarily long for the South, Africa, or the diaspora (fig. I.1). But they do create safe spaces for contemplation, peace, beauty, the articulation of love, aesthetics, and resistance. These works are antagonistic to traditional geographies and create a notion of security and home, which in turn defines the discursive notion of ancestor.

In the twentieth century, African Americans headed west via car, train, or bus. But in the nineteenth century, they had walked. As Hine reminds us, "Blacks challenged with their feet the boundaries of freedom."[17] Similarly, theorist Michel de Certeau engages the figure of the walker, the person on the ground who rearticulates, and reinscribes, the city/state in her own image, a "migrational" force all but invisible on the city plan, outside the "panoptic power" of the grid. For de Certeau, walking implies the rhetoric of the "pedes-

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FIG. I.I Curator Beate Inaya and artists Daniel LaRue Johnson, Charles White, and Betye Saar at the Negro and Creative Arts Exhibit, August 12, 1962. Courtesy Betye Saar and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

trian speech act," which appropriates the topographical and offers a language of alternate social relations, connecting positions on the map that are unexpected in the dominant cartographic imagination. The walker is the dreamer, in search of her own true and proper form. The walker exits from the proscribed geographic plan, and in doing so reconfigures it, improvising, inventing something new. Black migrations were spatial movements, bodies creating new paths to selfhood and enfranchisement.[18]

THINKING SPACE

Migrations, then, are motion and action, the articulation of new routes away from a feudal past and toward a modern future. As initiated by African Americans, these activities look to find places where people thrive; they are gestures that inscribe a world for emergence, growth, a renovation of selfhood, and a revision of citizenship. These are assertions of space—cultural or political, as land or property—that create place, whether actual sites in the world or positions in the global imagination. Yet such affirmative declara-

tions of location are also matched by their inversions: the negative valences of apartness, constriction, refusal. As much as migration was spatial claim, segregation was the denial of space, both intellectual and physical, its compression and constriction. While the West did not have the same histories of black enslavement as the South did, the African American westerner remained an ambivalent figure to a certain degree; she was not so much an individual as a representative of the masses, a notion that unleashed the white supremacist fear of a black planet. The public sphere, locations of labor, educational settings, and housing were some of the arenas that continued as nodes of friction to full engagement of black citizenry, even in California and the paradise of black Los Angeles. Such examples show us how the uneven, asymmetrical, or patently malicious and unjust application of spatial logic informed experience and expression.

Numerous writers have described southern migrant pleasures in public places in Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities—shopping, movies, theaters, concert halls, promenades, and public parks, even the ability to sleep on the beach on hot nights. In Los Angeles, performance venues—such as Club Alabam, Elks Hall, and the Jungle Room along Central Avenue—were legendary, and cafés, clubs, and music halls were among the few places that were consistently integrated.[19] In other areas, access was still circumscribed socially even after legal barriers were dismantled. For example, the California Supreme Court ruled against segregation of public pools in 1932, but the practice continued into the 1940s, with African Americans sometimes allowed to enter only the day before the facility was cleaned. While African Americans could spend their money at the Santa Monica Pier Amusement concessions, they were restricted to only a sliver of beach below it; this area was known as the Inkwell. The black-owned Bruce's Beach, a section of Manhattan Beach, provided African Americans with a resort area until it was demolished through eminent domain in the 1920s. Indeed, as Eric Avila has noted, as municipalities were required to more thoroughly integrate public amenities and amusements throughout the country, these spaces were often increasingly abandoned by whites, resulting at times in eventual closure.[20]

Industrial labor was another major factor drawing African Americans north and west and represented the proletarianization of the black workforce, a chance to leave the agricultural work and sharecropping that seemed so much like "warmed over slavery."[21] In terms of industrial production, Los Angeles was second only to Chicago by the early 1960s, and its productivity lasted into the 1970s, part of what Avila describes as the westward drift of capital in the post–World War II period. Much of this economic growth was

in the aircraft/aerospace industry, which became the largest manufacturing area in the United States with expansion into electronic equipment as well as space technologies; by 1957, it employed as much as one-third of the region's workforce.

Most African American migrants in this period were young, married women, a fact that would affect civil rights, Black Power, and arts activism in the latter half of the century. Yet even as early as 1900, most of the black population of Los Angeles was female, evidence of the fact that women had been on the move early in the century.[22] When artist and activist Ruth Waddy (born Lincoln, Nebraska) was denied a job at Lockheed Industries in Chicago, she headed to Los Angeles and found work with Douglas Aircraft.[23] Growth in public sector jobs (transportation) and those in government (health, education, and housing) opened more opportunities to African Americans. John Outterbridge found employment as a bus driver in Chicago. He made a good wage and could choose a schedule that enabled him to continue working as an artist, similar to a number of the musicians who eventually became a part of Chicago's avant-garde. While Outterbridge knew such professional experience could easily translate into a career on the West Coast, when he arrived in Los Angeles in 1963 he was determined to be employed in the arts.[24]

Although Executive Order 8802 barred discrimination in the defense industries after 1941, unions in these fields were allowed to continue discriminatory policies in exchange for "labor stability and productivity." African Americans, barred from general union membership, paid dues to separate auxiliary unions, which not surprisingly offered fewer protections. They received lower wages, were restricted in the types of positions they could hold and the promotions they could win; they also could not head racially mixed crews.[25] Entertainment was another strong industry in Los Angeles, and musicians found employment in the booming nightclub scene along Central Avenue as well as in the film industry. Denied membership in the local branch of the American Federation of Musicians, African American musicians founded Local 767 in 1920.[26] Their union facility, Elks Hall, served not only as a location to rehearse and to find jobs but also as a meeting place and cultural center.

There were many similarities in the physical spaces African Americans made for themselves to promote professional advancement and training. For instance, new skills required for welders and burners in the shipping industry were often passed from one recently trained worker to others in de facto "schools" in home garages. A corollary can be made with the art exhibitions—in homes, in garages, and around pools—that were created in Los Angeles of

FIG. I.2 Group exhibition at the Altadena, CA, home of Alvin
and Jeffalyn Johnson, June 1962. Courtesy Betye Saar and Michael
Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

the 1950s and 1960s (fig. I.2). Just as African Americans carved out their own
passageways toward industrial labor, they did the same in the pursuit of their
place in the world of contemporary art.

As civil rights activism claimed more and more victories, African Ameri-
cans integrated the industrial workforce with greater ease. Yet the moment
when much headway was made, at the dawn of the 1960s, was the moment
of the decline of heavy manufacturing as an economic force. The deindustri-
alization of urban Los Angeles paralleled a suburbanization of jobs. African
Americans found obstacles to suburban employment not only due to diffi-

culties of transportation but because they continued to be barred from living in nearby areas, a scenario played out all over the country during this period. As Avila argues, suburbanization was created in response to the push of racial integration in urban areas. New spatial and economic structures of separation upheld white supremacy and continued the tradition of separate and inequitable resources.[27]

In education's segregated spaces, we can find direct links back to slavery and proscriptions against black literacy. It is another arena in which to identify spatial constructs of difference, as in, for example, the inadequate facilities for black public schools in rented buildings, churches, and barns in nineteenth-century Texas. Responding to a growing African American population in the early part of the twentieth century, Arizona passed a law in which schools with only one black pupil were required to put up a screen around the child's desk to shield her from the rest of the class. In 1950s Chicago, rather than integrate half-empty "white" schools, authorities chose to ease overcrowding in facilities for blacks by bringing in trailers to serve as additional classrooms and having students attend in double shifts.[28]

Many today have heard of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 case that struck down legal segregation in this country, overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and in which future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, then a lawyer with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), argued for the plaintiffs. Yet what is often forgotten is that the lead case was western: *Oliver L. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. While gender and region played a part in the decision to make Brown the lead plaintiff, another reason was that African Americans in Kansas had brought eleven cases to their courts since the nineteenth century, petitioning for equal education on behalf of their children.[29]

Art historian Amy Weisser has quantified in detail the physical inequities of the educational spaces addressed by *Brown v. Board of Education*. Driven certainly by lesser financial resources extended for African American education, items included less acreage; fewer "amenities" such as auditoriums, lunchrooms, playrooms; outhouses rather than indoor plumbing; wood rather than masonry construction; larger class sizes, and so on. Yet, in many cases, those constructing the facilities for African Americans thought they were perfectly adequate, even generous, for the basic education that this servant class warranted. As Weisser notes, "To varying degrees, these buildings internalize[d] disparities in education between the races."[30] Like many of these students, John Outterbridge grew up in North Carolina able to see a school from his home that he was prohibited from attending.

Los Angeles public schools emerged in a multicultural environment, serving Asian, Latino, African American, Native American, and white pupils. In the nineteenth century, however, California law allowed the separation of whites once there were ten or more students of color. This practice continued into the next century, with liberal transfer policies that allowed white students to leave their racially mixed district schools for those where whites were in the majority. Over time, this led to segregated institutions. By the 1970s, Los Angeles was one of the battlegrounds in the ongoing struggle for desegregation and educational equity, reinforcing the view that education continued to be an important emblem of citizenship.[31]

LIVING SPACES

In their quest to (re)make home, black migrants sought places to live, flourish, relax, work, and be happy. Giving perhaps the most substantial definition to Freud's concept of the unhomely, however, their dwellings often became the antitheses of safe spaces. The artists discussed in this book, working in Los Angeles between roughly 1960 and 1980, in some way addressed these ideas. All sought to create sites of a metaphysical home, places of the dream, wellsprings of the creative, even when the notion of homeplace, like the real space of housing, was a significant arena of contention.

Architectural historian Bradford C. Grant has spoken of the roots of residential segregation in slavery, with slave quarters of vast plantations as the beginnings of black ghettos. It is a theory supported by an event that preceded Martin Luther King Jr.'s inauguration of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign: his visit to a road lined with decrepit shacks on Cotton Street in the Delta town of Marks, Mississippi. McKittrick has also addressed the topography of southern plantations. While analyzing the organization of these places as city structures in microcosm, she focuses specifically on the location of the auction block in their planning, a fragment insignificant in terms of architectural beauty and structure but one that was the very fulcrum of slavery's economic engine.[32]

Could the needs and desires of African Americans ever be represented in the modern residential spaces that emerged from such roots? In this light, the infamous kitchenette apartment is emblematic. The first homes of many migrants when they arrived in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, kitchenettes were typically older apartments that had been subdivided into one- or two-room units. Each floor of five or six kitchenettes might share one bathroom.

For writers such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks, the kitchenette represented the overcrowding of urban ghettos and was a metaphor for the restrictions on African American life as well as a symbol of community.[33]

In Los Angeles, such dwellings could be found in the neighborhoods of Bunker Hill and Little Tokyo. During the World War II internment of Japanese Americans, speculators bought property in neighborhoods where they'd lived and created kitchenette apartments for African American migrants, who were arriving in large numbers. For a time, in fact, Little Tokyo was known as Bronzeville, a reference to the renowned black neighborhood in Chicago. As historian Daniel Widener comments, "Little Tokyos became Bronzevilles all along the [West] coast, as blacks moved into vacant houses and storefronts."[34]

Little Tokyo in Los Angeles was seemingly well situated to receive migrants, located just south of Union Station where the Southern Pacific Railroad ended its route from Houston and New Orleans. Indeed, some of the first substantial African American communities in Los Angeles and Oakland had sprung up in the nineteenth century around the termini of westbound rail lines and were inhabited by African American Pullman porters and their families. It was the squalor of substandard housing and confined and restricted living represented by kitchenette apartments that Noah Purifoy mined in his controversial environment *Niggers Ain't Never Ever Gonna Be Nothin'—All They Want to Do Is Drink and Fuck*, which appeared at the Brockman Gallery in March 1971.

Racially restrictive covenants—delineating who could buy, sell, and live in specific parts of the city—had first appeared in late nineteenth-century Los Angeles, but were in frequent use by the 1920s. Such legal proscriptions were reinforced with extralegal reminders like Ku Klux Klan activity. People of color were seen as antithetical to the "Anglo" profile the city took pains to develop, with nostalgic images of archetypal cowboys and the western frontier such as those found in dime-store novels and Wild West shows, and increasingly manufactured by the budding Hollywood industry.

Such "possessive investment in whiteness," as scholar George Lipsitz has cogently described it, also extended to the perception of who was entitled to the suburban home. Indeed, as architect Craig L. Wilkins reminds us, the very notion of "possession," and its realization in forms of property, has been constructed as fundamentally antithetical to black life. Historic relational or spatial strategies posited (white) subjectivity against (black) objectification, with whites as owners and blacks as owned. Thus an articulation of home ownership signified a normative whiteness from the start. White ethnicity was

gradually made invisible in the suburbs, at a remove from the urban public sphere, and articulated against an increasingly spatially distinctive "other" in ghettos and slums.[35]

Between 1917 and 1948, however, activists in Los Angeles—at times, a mix of African Americans, Jews, Japanese, Chinese, and Mexicans—banded together to fight such residential circumscription. From 1945 to 1948, more suits connected to housing rights were filed in Los Angeles than in the rest of the country combined, culminating in the federal ban against restrictive residential covenants in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948).[36]

As African Americans battled for the right to live out their dreams in the seaside paradise of Los Angeles, debates about public housing were added to the mix. The Housing Act of 1949 initiated nationwide programs of urban renewal. Under the guise of massive projects with a utopian veneer—clean, safe, affordable living spaces—public housing went hand in hand with "slum clearance." In effect, the only neighborhoods open to people of color and the poor were labeled as blighted, where aspects of racial diversity were deemed "inharmonious" to future development. The dismantling of the urban neighborhood also represented the destruction of its economic industrial core, and the move from manufacturing to the service industries. In effect, diverse city spaces—from homes to sites of leisure—were targeted for removal, making way for the suburban megalopolis.[37]

This effectively destabilized notions of acceptance and home, and was visited on new arrivals and the politically weak by a government encouraged by powerful real estate interests. For many, such programs amounted to little more than "urban removal," as many of the projects came to be known. Bowing to the "customs" and "traditions" of segregation, federal, state, and local governments continued to allow public housing only in certain areas, while razing existing homes and communities. Watts was one such site, where three major residential projects—Imperial Courts, Jordan Downs, and Nickerson Gardens—were completed by the mid-1950s. The latter two, designed by African American architect Paul Revere Williams with Richard Neutra, were low-rise structures that incorporated landscaping with broad green spaces, courtyards, and personal garden plots, in keeping with the idea of the availability of beauty and modernity for all. While described as transitional spaces, as people eventually were supposed to be able to buy their own homes, in reality these places concentrated poverty and failed to maintain services for such a dense population. More and more, they became spaces of containment and isolation.[38]

ART AND (SOCIAL) SPACE SOUTH OF PICO

There is a saying among black Angelenos that all black folks live south of Pico Boulevard. While this is, of course, an exaggeration, south of Pico we can indeed find major black communities, from the core of Central Avenue to Watts and Compton south, to Leimert Park and Baldwin Hills to the west and north, areas where the more affluent were able to move with the fall of restrictive covenants. "South of Pico" is also a metaphor for African American migrations and the ancestral home of most black Angelenos. Furthermore, Pico Boulevard is named for Pío Pico, a businessman, politician, and the last Mexican governor of California. His life in Los Angeles spanned its reality as both a Mexican and a U.S. city. He was also a person of African descent.[39]

Thinking of Pico both as a demarcation of division and a hidden history of blackness opens the door to the spatial as well. Spatial theory—in the writings of geographers, philosophers, architects, historians, and art historians—helps us see migration and segregation not just as arenas of social and historical movement and juridical challenge but as the articulation of spatial structure, what Henri Lefebvre has called (social) space. Through it, we can see and understand how people shape their worlds through creative force. The question for us here is, how do artists translate the same experiences into form? How do they transform what they find into what they would like it to be? How, in the words of Elizabeth Grosz, do these "things become the measure of life's actions upon them"? And how is the spatial imperative, seen in life's physical peregrinations and diremptions, found in this "compromise between mind and matter, the point of their crossing one into the other" that place represents?[40]

White, Saar, Hammons, Purifoy, and Maren Hassinger lived through segregation in various dimensions, applications, iterations. However, their generations also experienced greater social and spatial freedoms in the American twentieth century. Nevertheless, like African American migrants, they were faced with conscriptions around education, politics, labor, housing, and in the public sphere. How did they respond as artists to the social and spatial world as they found it? If the rise of the civil rights and black power movements reflected the changing nature of social and political activism, how did this affect artistic expression, inflecting not only the artists' intellectual peregrinations but also the material conditions of the artwork itself?

Several authors have offered positions significant to my thinking about how artists and others articulate spatial prerogatives. According to Lefebvre, "(Social) space is a (social) product." It is at once "a field of action" and

"a basis of action"; quantitative in its expanses and qualitative as a depth of thought; material in its physical articulation and matériel in the work that it does.[41] Social space is the interpenetration of "real" space as a material thing with space as mental construct and philosophical iteration. Social space is articulated in the mundane actions of daily life, charted by planners and cartographers as well as by artists' imaginings. Bodies produce social space for their gestures; as such, the built environment follows from a biomorphic core or logic, which underpins architectonics to come. Thus the layers of the built environment—buildings, objects, art—house the trace of corporeal sensibilities. If for Lefebvre space is a container of social relationships, art historian Miwon Kwon sees space, in the site specificity of art of the late twentieth century, as constructed of divergent forms, both material and immaterial. For Kwon, site is simultaneously phenomenological—a physical iteration of practice—and social and institutional, in its conscription of bodies and imbrication in structures such as museums. However, it is Kwon's sense of site as discursive formation that is perhaps most intriguing and, like Lefebvre's social space, threads itself through all types of spaces—concrete, ethereal, and those of memory. Here the notion of site shuttles between "a physical location—grounded, fixed, actual" and a "vector" that is "ungrounded, fluid, virtual."[42]

Geographer Katherine McKittrick offers another significant framing of spatial thought, that of the sociospatial. If "all knowledges are geographic," she argues, then positionality is geography. In other words, what do you know, and from where do you know it? McKittrick thinks about black geographies and bodily ownership. Like Wilkins, she considers the history of black people through the lens of objecthood, demarcated by "discourses of possession and captivity of the flesh" occasioned by its attachment to the material fragment of the auction block. Because the black body historically is an object that is owned rather than a subject that possesses, it is ungeographic; black is, rather, a concept that "is cast as a momentary evidence of the violence of abstract space, an interruption in transparent space, a different (all-body) answer to otherwise undifferentiated geographies." McKittrick's project is the consideration of respatialization of black as body, as form, as geography, and as a site of contestation and complexity rather than dispossession or peripheral schema. It is located within and outside traditional space, elucidates "black social particularities and knowledges," and ultimately offers a new and expanded understanding of the normative.[43]

These iterations on the spatial demonstrate its broad conceptual thrust and framing for art historical thinking. Notions of the object in space might be

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what interests art historians most. What is the mass, volume, density, shape, color? What actions does the object want from or require of its beholder? This last point, however, concerning the object of art's relational mode, also indicates art's social framing and networks as well as its dialogue with the body about space, and signals to the larger discursive mode of the spatial that I want to consider here.

Applying spatial theory to the art object helps us consider how African American migrants thought about and named places and spaces, about the importance of place to those who don't have one or are always searching for one—those who are patently ungeographic, as McKittrick indicates. We can consider further the role of the imaginary/expressive/cultural in that search, the need to imagine someplace beautiful and amazing on a daily basis. As Kwon suggests, the persistent "adherence to the actuality of places (in memory, in longing)" is perhaps "a means of survival."[44]

Place, in the work of the artists considered here, signals desire both to think about the future and to reconsider and reframe the past. In effect, these two positions become interchangeable, as Grosz intimates, in "a reciprocal interaction between the virtual and the real, an undecidable reversibility, as if the image could take the place of an object and force the object behind the constraints of the mirror's plane." The real is converted into a different order, transformed through the concept of the virtual, iterations of an "endless openness" or future.[45] Space as real and imagined, as discursive, offers this spectrum of positions and art presents new creative and life-forms that assert "new geographic formulations" and new spatial demands.[46]

ART AND BLACK LOS ANGELES

Between 1960 and 1980, the time period of this study, the art scene in Los Angeles generally, and certainly among African American artists, became a vibrant, engaged, and activist community. Works tied to traditional media—painting, drawing, prints, sculpture—gave way to dematerialized postminimal installation and body-centered performance. Within these styles and formats were spatial ideas that changed how artists accessed and incorporated notions of history and virtuality, the real and the imagined. These ideas were present throughout the period and used to varying degrees, though earlier works, not surprisingly, evidence a greater interest in history and didactic formulas, while later production moves toward the abstract and ephemeral.

Charles White's mode in the twenty years prior to his move to Los Angeles was in the social-realist vein, re-presenting and repositioning African

American figures as subjects of accomplishment rather than the inhuman and unhistorical empty vessels that the label "slave" suggested. Centered on solid rock, Tubman's geographic presence in *General Moses (Harriet Tubman)* belies the attachment to the perch of the auction block. Metaphorical rather than patently documentary in its presentation, its gloss on freedom is also more broadly allegorical. The drawing was created the same year the Voting Rights Act passed, which dismantled impediments to black enfranchisement in many parts of the United States. The 1965 act and White's piece both marked the centennial of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. The didactic and pedagogical nature of the work in this context seems clear.

We see this same instrumental approach to storytelling and meaning in the earliest works of White's pupil David Hammons. He attended art classes at various institutions throughout the city but particularly sought out White at the Otis Art Institute. White's influence can be seen in Hammons's early choice of the graphic medium as well as in his works' political content. In pieces such as *Boy with Flag*, 1968 (plate 2), a young black man stands behind the U.S. standard, emerging from its shadows, yet still seemingly bifurcated by its cutting edges, which appear to slice through the body. Hammons classically embodies the edifying style of the Black Arts Movement in his figurative presentation and commentary on U.S. racism. The piece also refers to history in its implications of unequal treatment under the law, and African Americans as three-quarters human, as suggested by the partial portrait.

Through the figure of Hammons, we can also chart the evolving visual aesthetics of the community of African American artists in California in the 1960s and 1970s as well as the move from didactic formulas to those that rely on abstraction, dematerialized practices, and performance. We can map these changing aesthetics, for example, in Hammons's works from the 1970s that use black hair, such as the "gardens" of hair threaded on flexible wire (fig. I.3) he "planted" in the damp sand along the shores of the southern California beaches. These were intended to be some version of saltwater grasses; somehow the hybrid cattails seem familiar yet out of place, too close to the water's edge, strangely shaped yet bending easily in the cool ocean breeze. Their importance also lay in their temporary and ephemeral nature: they were made of materials and sited in places that assured their disappearance over time. Yet, as Hammons himself would later recount, hair acted as a signifier of the black body: even though nonobjective in form, it remained self-referential: "I got a visual object and medium that was pure [and] nonsexual, which spoke to everything I wanted to say."[47]

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FIG. 1.3 David Hammons, *Hair and Wire, Venice Beach, California, 1977*. Site-specific installation. Photograph by Bruce Talamon. Courtesy the artist and Bruce Talamon © All rights reserved.

Similar ephemeral works, structured as installations, by Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger are emblematic of the turn to a more freewheeling (in)formal visual play. Examples include gatherings of pantyhose filled with sand draped across spaces and rooms, Nengudi's signature works from the 1970s. Like Hammons, Hassinger planted "gardens" indoors and out from Los Angeles to New York. Yet hers were more massive, formed from towering expanses of unfurled, industrial-grade cable and wire rope. The shift from didactic works to those of greater abstraction by these African American artists of Los Angeles was a move from historical to virtual content—from the consideration of the past, whether distant or immediate, to the imagining of the future. This occurs via a presence that is ancestral, which may appear as a physical trace in style, remains, sound, and spatial technics—a metaphoric hint, a utopic gleam.

This reach across time brings us toward a model of Afro-futurism, which, as scholar Alondra Nelson suggests, uses what is bygone to explain the present *and* prophesize what is yet to come. It glosses time that is not the past but yet not detached from it either; instead, it is "contiguous yet continually transformed."[48] Time and space are not linear; technologies are not always new but lean on earlier and often anachronistic formulas as antennas of the future. This book examines how artists cast an eye toward what came before

and think to what lies ahead through modes that are at once historical and futuristic. After Farah Jasmine Griffin I want to think about the art considered here as different kinds of migration narratives, embodying this aspect in their material facture, their intellectual positioning, and their pursuit of African Diaspora cultural form.

In this volume, chapter 1, "Emerge: Putting Southern California on the Art World Map," focuses primarily on Charles White, Betye Saar, and Melvin Edwards as Los Angeles came into its own as a cultural capital in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These artists were part of a generation that willed an African American art community into existence with little traditional art world support. They mounted exhibitions in homes, community centers, churches, and black-owned businesses. Their examples and mentorship were a catalytic force creating and helping to sustain a vibrant black arts scene in the city. White's career took him to Los Angeles in 1956 after he'd made a name for himself in his hometown of Chicago as well as New York. He arrived in the city with an international reputation, one that made him one of the most important African American artists up to that period. Trained as a designer and experimenting with interiors and jewelry while she worked as a social worker, California native Betye Saar emerged as a serious printmaker. Her early works on paper also codify the appearance of feminist themes, which she would build on in the decades to come. Melvin Edwards was one of the West Coast's first black superstar artists, with important shows at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Santa Barbara Museum. White and Saar also represent the twinned concerns with the historical (in the former's interest in singular figures of the black past) and virtual (in the latter's growing focus on spiritual practice and metaphysics), while Edwards's abstract practice seems to combine these two positions.

Chapter 2, "Claim: Assemblage and Self-Possession," focuses on the role of assemblage within the black art-making communities of Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s. The West Coast became highly visible with mainstream acceptance of assemblage as an important artistic strategy, particularly with its canonization in the Museum of Modern Art's 1961 *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition. It is often seen as a form of critical practice, laced with such notions in the ruined consumer products of its facture, indicative of both the fraud of 1950s consumer society and its platitudes. Also embedded in the narrative of assemblage is the concept of transformation, the alchemy of taking a thing discarded and changing it into a thing of (re)use.

Assemblage was a clear metaphor for the process of change—the transformation of psyche and social existence—required of art in the rhetoric of

FIG. 1.4 Adam Avila, *Maren Hassinger in front of* Twelve Trees, 1978. Site-specific installation, Los Angeles. Courtesy Maren Hassinger.

the Black Arts Movement, art that "advance[d] social consciousness and promote[d] black development."[49] Each artist discussed in this chapter, however, approached the genre from a slightly different direction. Noah Purifoy used assemblage as a system of artistic activism and institutional critique in the period immediately following the Watts Rebellion. John Outterbridge's pieces run more toward a metaphoric narrative that invokes ancestral aesthetics of vernacular art making in black communities as alternate paradigms that intersect with West Coast art practices. Betye Saar, for her part, created temples and altars to spirituality using the fragments of humanity embedded in the discarded.

In chapter 3, "Organize: Building an Exhibitionary Complex," I look at the ways in which African Americans in Los Angeles marshaled the art world in order to disseminate and support their art. Change in the 1960s and 1970s also brought a shift in the traditional museum and gallery scene. Other spaces were brought into existence by artists themselves, including Alonzo Davis and Dale Brockman Davis, Suzanne Jackson, and Samella Lewis. Chapter 4, "In Motion: The Performative Impulse," moves away from the didactic subject matter connected to civil rights and black power and toward greater abstract, dematerialized, and conceptual modes. During the 1970s, artists such as Senga Nengudi, Maren Hassinger (fig. I.4), Houston Conwill, and David

Hammons began to experiment with postminimal ephemerality and performance.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a number of artists who had made Los Angeles an art capital began heading to New York. David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, and Houston Conwill had all relocated there by 1980. Most certainly the presence of these practitioners and others on the East Coast affected New York's expanding discourse of visual and cultural diversity. The concluding chapter, "Noshun: Black Los Angeles and the Global Imagination," considers where their experiences in Los Angeles took them and contextualizes their work in the global continuum, the direction their diasporic turn ultimately led.

With our faces to the rising sun...
Thelma Golden with Glenn Ligon

Thelma Golden: Glenn, the reason I asked Paula if I could speak to you for this project is because, in many ways, almost every exhibition I have made has evolved in a quasi-collaborative manner, in that most often I have spoken to you about different aspects of my ideas, and your responses, both deadly serious and totally silly, have often informed what I have done. The other part of our ongoing conversation has also been about this general idea of the culturally specific exhibition. Paula has asked me to address this very thorny issue of what makes for an important culturally specific exhibition—What's its relevance? Why does it still exist? Should it still exist? And I've always taken my cues about that topic from artists. So the first question I want to ask you (which I'll answer as well), are there any culturally specific exhibitions that stand out for you as benchmarks? Not just shows of your own work or ones that you might have been included in, but ones that have enabled you to understand the validity of making an exhibition with, and of, people of one race, or one gender, or one sexual orientation that made sense of that kind of focus? Is there one that you saw anywhere or heard of that would have been influential to you?

Glenn Ligon: No. I can't think of any.

TG: You can't? For me a major turning point was seeing the catalog of David Driskell's "Two Centuries of Black American Art: 1750–1950" (1976, Los Angeles County Museum of Art). The exhibition was presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976 and I never saw it, but the catalog has remained in circulation. For me, that exhibition validated the idea that there was a valid but woefully neglected art history that I, an art history student at the time, was not being taught. Yet I have to say it's also an important exhibition to me because it is the exhibition that I have worked against most specifically for my entire career. I needed it to exist in order to know exactly what I did not want to do. Affirmation by negation, maybe.

GL: Well, there's a critical difference between an exhibition that's meant to address a certain kind of lack in scholarship, or more par-

ticularly a lack in museum presence for a certain kind of scholarship, which I think that Driskell's show certainly addressed, and what I look for in an exhibition. I'm not so concerned necessarily about the overview for an overview's sake; I'm more concerned with specific moments of artistic practice that are interesting to me at a given time. And often, those big, ethnically based thematic exhibitions, while they have interesting work in them, are not interesting to me in their curatorial premises. I'm more interested in seeing specific works in them. I loved seeing Rick Powell's exhibition for the High Museum, "Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow."

TG: Black abstract artists?

GL: Black abstract artists throughout the century. I think that would be an interesting show because it hasn't been done yet, and that's the reason to do it. But ...

TG: You really don't necessarily feel it's a completely justifying force, this idea of the ethnically specific exhibition?

GL: I think the problem is that these shows come about to address a lack, and they get burdened by the necessity to address that lack. There's an argument being made in these shows about why this work hasn't gotten to the forefront, why it's important, et cetera, et cetera, and often that gets in the way of the pleasure of just seeing good work. The curatorial conceit is so burdened that the work gets weighed down by it, and the result is less play in the show and less dialogue with contemporary artists in a historical show, or something like that, and that's a problem.
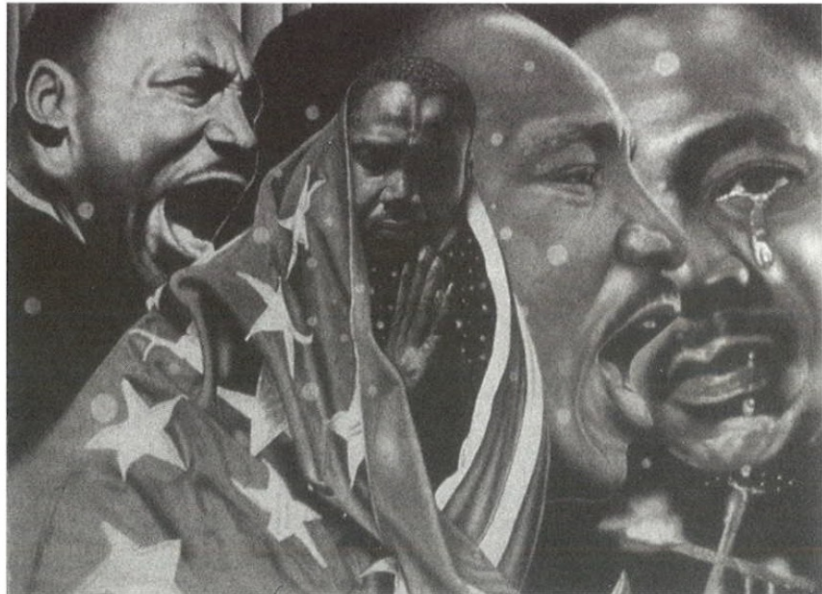
Alexander Austin, *Spirit of the Dream*, 1994, installation view in "Black Romantic", Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

TG: It's a question of "then," a moment when perhaps a culturally specific exhibition could seem relevant, versus "now," because obviously, the era of David Driskell's "Two Centuries" in the seventies and this moment represent two very different historical points of view. I always think of these exhibitions as Jackie Robinson moments. You know, the first solo artist show by a black artist, all of that first stuff.

GL: It has a historical importance because of "its moment." But I think the problem now is that some people feel the need to recreate that wheel over and over again. In some ways that's probably a response to a new ethnically specific museum-going public and its funders, who may have little or no historical memory. And so I feel that that kind of recapitulation of "the-greatest-hits-of-the-last-200-years-kind-of-show" is fine, but I believe that we've gone beyond the necessity for it.

TG: You've overcome, but some of us have not! But tell me something, from your point of view as an artist. Let's hypothesize that I am a curator, not me, but someone working in a nice, midsized museum in the middle of the country, say St. Louis or Denver or Milwaukee. And I'm going to actually say that I am not even a black curator. Let's say I am a white curator, a good liberal, I believe in all the right things. And in my museum, I am trying to come to terms with who our audience can and should be, and so I've decided to do an exhibition called—what would it be called?

GL: "Facing the Rising Sun."

TG: No, no, no, not that one yet. I want to do a show called, say "Contemporary Black Artists Now."

GL: Call it, "Word Up."

TG: "Word Up: Contemporary Black Artists Now." And in my mind, I have a curatorial thesis. I want to look at black artists right now who use text in their work to address issues of identity. That's my curatorial framework. And I write you a letter, or send you an e-mail, and I invite you, Glenn Ligon, to be in this show, "Word Up: Contemporary Black Artists Now." What's your response to that?

GL: My response is: show me the checklist and show me the curatorial narrative and then I'll decide. Because the problem with that kind of show is that, even though it has a curatorial premise, often it is just simply a list of artists—it's not a show—and the work gets positioned in such a way that it becomes problematic for me. It gets reduced to a matter of saying: this is the narrative, here's how the narrative is being illustrated, we're done.

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TG: Let me give you another option. I am an African American curator, who has been working in the field for over twenty-five years.

GL: So you have a sense of entitlement!!!

TG: I am someone who has come through the multicultural movement. I've worked in museums before there was a multicultural movement, and now I am working in a museum in the South, say Atlanta or Memphis or New Orleans. And my museum has long had a history of showing the work of African American artists, and in our city, we've had African American mayors, there's a power structure and there's a black cultural support network. So, as this curator, I am now going to install a permanent collection which has masterworks of African American art, a major Romare Bearden, a beautiful Jacob Lawrence, perhaps a Norman Lewis, an Aaron Douglas, a Hale Woodruff, an Elizabeth Catlett. Classic works within the American art canon. And this installation is going to be the centerpiece of our museum now. With this installation I'm going write an American art history that centralizes these artists, with major gallery space, major museum presence, gallery guides, school programs, and the whole deal. It will be up for five years. We have a major corporate sponsor. Now, I, as this same curator would like to do a presentation of your work as a contemporary corollary to this exhibition of work from our collection of African American art. I write you a letter that says, Glenn, we have a show of our collection coming up called "Our Spiritual Striving: African American Art in the Twentieth Century" and in response I would like to do an exhibition of your work. What do you say to that?

GL: I'd say yes, but you would have to deal with the work that I do, not the work that you imagine I ought to do in response to a show like this. That's the problem. Clearly it can't be a show of my Richard Pryor paintings! It's going to be James Baldwin paintings. So there's a sort of reduction of the curatorial selection process to "these are my needs; this is the body of work that fills my needs; this is how I'm going to position you in relationship to the masters to create a certain lineage." But that doesn't deal with the body of work that I've actually done; it just deals with a little tiny piece of it that fits the argument.

TG: Let me give you another possibility. I am a young curator working in a big urban city, say Chicago or Los Angeles or New York, at an African American cultural center that does art and music and literature—a multidisciplinary center. We like to do residencies with artists and have their work on view, but also have them engage with the community. So I, this young, eager curator at this space, have written you and said "Glenn Ligon, will you come and do a residency, and while you're here, can we do an exhibition of your work?" How do you feel about that?

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GL: Here's the interesting thing about that. I've done a number of residencies, and in most there is a desire for the artist-in-residence to work in the community in some way. But there's a huge spectrum of the possible ways that they imagine that can happen. Sometimes, the institution imagines that you will do the work that they have not done. So you will go out and—say you're an African American artist—reach out to the African American community with whom they barely have any contact, and bring them into the museum by way of these projects. But then sometimes museums are very connected to their community and have lots of programming and have feedback from the community which creates another kind of dilemma. For them, the community in their minds is already formed. So what if the community that you as the artist define, and with whom you want to work, is not the community that they imagine is their audience. But I'm actually more sympathetic in some ways to that kind of scenario because I think there's a lot of interesting stuff for an artist to work with there; it's not all so totally predetermined for you. But the pitfall of that situation is that sometimes the needs of the community and the desires of the institution around its relationship to the community may be diametrically opposed to what you as an artist might want to do. So it's a difficult kind of negotiation in that kind of situation, though potentially very interesting.

TG: But we have always talked about this notion of "community" as both mythic and real and how it complicates the idea of culturally specific exhibition making. This is something I think about a lot now being at the Studio Museum.

GL: Maybe you could talk about this sort of "in-Harlem" versus "of-Harlem" question that keeps haunting the Studio Museum's exhibition programming. What does it mean to have an institution that is located in arguably the most famous black community in the United States with a mandate to do programming that's international, that's not about artists located in that specific community or even in New York City? What kinds of pressures and challenges does that present?

TG: The question for me, still, is that of the validity of the culturally specific exhibition, whether or not it's of artists living in Harlem, or elsewhere in the world, and the concomitant notion that the museum is mandated to perpetuate the idea that there is validity in the ethnically specific in a way that, personally, I know I am incredibly conflicted about. So I think that my own exhibition practice has been about trying to speak to that issue. Can one make an ethnically specific show that does not fall into all of the clichés we—not just you and me, but also in the field generally—talk about as being inherently problematic of this point of view? And my response has been to try to dig into the irony of what I think getting that essentialist can be, because being in Harlem obviously legitimates a certain kind of

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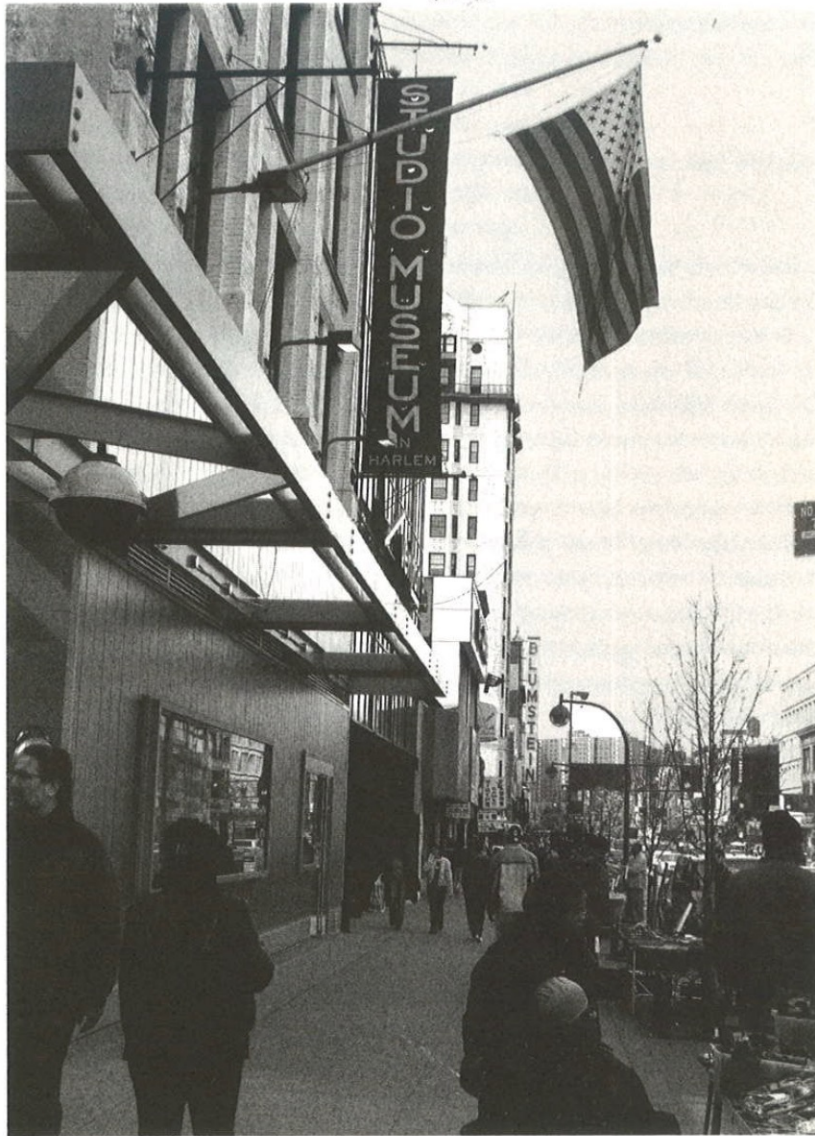
David Hammons, *Untitled (African-American Flag)*, 2004, installation on exterior, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.

obsession with blackness that I would feel uncomfortable with, say, if I were working in a mainstream institution. I've made exhibitions at the Studio Museum I would not have made anywhere else. Now, I say that with some conditions. For me, doing a survey show of a single artist doesn't fall into the realm of the ethnically specific. But with a thematic show like "Black Romantic," for example, I would not have done that show at the Whitney. But "Black Romantic: The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary African American Art" was a response to the idea of the kind of exhibition a museum like the Studio Museum can create, a sort of canon revision or reformation. That's the kind of exhibition that I imagine I should and can do in a space like that. All of my curatorial work is site-specific. So Harlem is a profound site for me.

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But as you know, I have always felt both challenged and burdened by these culturally specific exhibitions. When I look at my bookcase, I see a catalog from every single one of them. The ones that were amazing, like David Driskell's, as well as all the ones that make me cringe. I have dissected them down to analyzing the semiotics of the cover art on the catalogs. Have you noticed how they always have a relatively figurative cover that has an image of a black person? The cover for "Black Romantic" was a complete and total ironic dig at that....

Since I know I could never make that kind of culturally specific show of that type, I had to make that kind of a catalog. My take on the "catalog-with-a-picture-of-a-black-person-on-it-so-you-know-it-is-an-exhibition-of-black-art!" And I have thought a lot about these culturally specific shows, down to the titling—I am fascinated with their titles. They always take on that kind of incredibly baroque black overstatement, what we joke about that when we start talking about "Our Faces to the Rising Sun," the sort of James Weldon Johnson (composer of the Negro National Anthem and poet) school of titling, with all the great platitudes of overcoming. From the moment of creation of "Black Male," I have tried to think, is there a way to make a black exhibition that doesn't fall into those old traps? Because some people might see my exhibitions in that same lineage, starting with Driskell and coming right down to my 2004 "freestyle." I don't see them that way, but I realize that I am inevitably replicating certain aspects of the ideals that those shows put out there to begin with.

GL: Well, you can't start from nothing. There has to be a certain kind of response to what's come before. But I think the question is how do you complicate your exhibition practice in relationship to those shows? This is what you've been talking about. And I think the thing that was interesting about "Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art," and controversial for some people, though it shouldn't have been controversial at all, was simply that all of the artists in it were not black.

TG: And you know, that is one of the main things that people still do talk about, positively and negatively, to this day. You know, when I have looked at many of the ways in which culturally specific exhibitions are organized I always think of a megaphone. That's the image in my head, and it always seems that these projects start from the wide end of it. So basically, all of these shows have a title and then a colon and it will say "African American Women Artists: Finding Their Truth," so that there really is no justifying principle to put people together other than race or gender. And I thought with "Black Male," what if I go on the other end of that megaphone, the narrow end, and I come up with a subject that way. So I came to the crosshairs of gender and race with the issue of black masculinity. And then I looked for the artists at the wide end, the widest range of the artists (albeit within the parameters of the Whitney's focus on American

artists) who have addressed that issue within the chronological frame of the show. And that, at least in my head, was a possible way to get to another methodology.

GL: Is "Black Male" a show you could have originated at the Studio Museum in Harlem?

TG: It gets complicated to talk about these things because the Studio Museum in Harlem today is not the same Studio Museum as when "Black Male" was organized in 1994 (as the Whitney today is not the Whitney it was in 1994). In 1994, the Studio Museum in Harlem, as well as many other culturally specific institutions, was still deep in the work of canon revision. It's hard for institutions, or even individual curators, to begin to revise their practice when the practice hasn't even been written yet. So I feel like I was revising before things were firmly written into place. "Black Male" revised things that hadn't even happened yet; it was just in response to what I imagined was going to continue—that post-multicultural moment when there was just so much desire to keep holding hands around the table and sing *Kum Ba Ya*, and look-at-all-us-colored-people-together, and here-we-are, we're black, we're strong. I just felt like that was going to keep going indefinitely and I thought let me just get ahead of that.

GL: But isn't that a curator's job? To think ahead of what's already established? This is a problem I have with a lot of ethnically based exhibitions—they don't think ahead of what's already been done; they assume a little tweaking is enough. But I think curators and organizations need to break with the paradigms here because you have to follow the artist, and artists are already breaking with those paradigms. I look at what David Hammons did with his exhibition, "Concerto in Black and Blue, 2002" at Ace Gallery in New York, where the entire space of 20,000 square feet was totally dark and the visitors got these little blue flashlights and you walked through the dark and there was nothing in the space. That is an amazing challenge to the notion of—how do you put David Hammons in a show of culturally specific work...

TG: Well, you can...

GL: You can because he's a black artist, but that doesn't mean anything.

TG: But that's perhaps where it could finally get really interesting. When the cultural specificity can actually get specific, to an idea, an artist's practice, a moment. It's about an exhibition-making that doesn't necessarily define itself with the ruling paradigms of an ethnically specific show, and I would say if there's anything I'm trying to do in my practice, it's to rewrite that paradigm.

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Kadir Nelson, *Africa*, 2001, installation view in "Black Romantic," Studio Museum in Harlem, 2002.

GL: It's a practice that's about conceptual practices even in non-conceptual work, and that's the problem. You were talking about the catalog covers of all these ethnically specific exhibitions: the covers represent that they are totally about a certain kind of legibility.

TG: Right.

GL: To make sure that you know there's some blackness.

TG: Do you have a different feeling about an ethnically specific exhibition in a mainstream institution versus a culturally specific institution? I think I do. I know this is wrong and this is my bias but I get more hysterical when I see those shows in a mainstream institution.

GL: Shows that are curated by those mainstream institutions?

TG: Yes.

GL: Because often those shows aren't generated out of the institution; they're generated by guest curators. Which is problematic in and of itself.

TG: Well that's a whole other issue—who produces these exhibitions and who works in the mainstream museums versus the ethnically or culturally specific institutions? In some ways that is the unspoken, but real. The paradigm wasn't always so problematic because there was a time when black curators only worked in black museums or Hispanic curators in Hispanic museums. You didn't have what was

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called an "ethnically specific exhibition;" you had exhibitions made by ethnically specific organizations.

GL: Right.

TG: If you get a letter to be in one of these shows, just take the generic kind of show that we know is the problem, just a bunch of Black people in a show. If you get an invitation from a mainstream institution, are you more or less offended than if you get it from a culturally specific institution?

GL: I'm more offended when it comes from a mainstream institution because I usually feel it is politically rather than aesthetically motivated. But it also depends on the institution. Usually, I'm more offended because I feel like there is no commitment in some of those institutions to the single artist of color, and so every five or ten years, these institutions do some sort of big group exhibition and they put a lot of black folks in it. But there's not any spin-off or follow-up show from that. There are no monographic exhibitions organized by that institution of a Black artist's work, or Black artists are not included in any other kind of museum programming. So the only time you get to be in that major institution's space is in a group show—the ethnically specific group shows. Otherwise, that's it. Or, often there's not any sort of corresponding ongoing collecting practice in those museums. So they may buy one little thing out of the group show and they're done with you.

TG: Do we still need ethnically specific museums or art institutions?

GL: Yes, we do. Because the reality is that other institutions don't nurture young Black artists the way that places like culturally specific museums can, just as alternative spaces still provide an opportunity for emerging artists. That's the reality. Those spaces can still have an important role.

TG: So you feel it is still a justified endeavor. But if I told you right now I was going to leave the Studio Museum tomorrow and start my own museum, Thelma's Museum of Black Artists Forever, what would the letters of that be? T-M-B-A-F.

GL: Right.

TG: Thelma's Museum of Black Artists Forever. If I told you I was going to leave and start that, would you say at this point that would be a valid enterprise to start up?

GL: No. I don't think that's a valid enterprise to begin anew right now. But I think that there is still a role for places like the Studio Museum

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in Harlem because the reality is that every artist needs some place that loves him or her, and in contrast to most institutions that I've shown in across the country, there are very few places that love you like the Studio Museum loves you.

TG: We can't make this only about the Studio Museum.

GL: Well, okay, it's not only about the Studio Museum.

TG: You're saying it's like home.

GL: Right. And the home is always problematic. But there is this certain feeling in other institutions—they're not in your careers for the long haul.

TG: That's where I am most completely engaged in the sentimental feelings I have about these notions of community as they exist in culturally specific institutions, the way in which we use the rhetoric of a certain community-based sensibility, talking about the artists we show as family, and the sort of words that harks back for me to other problematic ways that they play out in the black community. But within an art-world museum sense, I agree with that. I think the role that ethnically specific museums can play now is very different from the one they were founded to play, and if there is a problem now, it's that the role transition hasn't happened. We can't jump up and down and say, "We have overcome completely, there's no need for ethically specific organizations now, because the mainstream has taken up these artists of color." We know that's not the case. But perhaps we can say that there's a different role these institutions can play, and that role is to come in at the beginning of the career in terms of nurturing and support, or at the middle of a career, by providing a welcome opportunity that might fall outside of the notches-on-the-career-belt type show. That can be the focused show devoted to one body of work, or the small project that is something an artist wants to do without it being a major production. And at the end of artists' careers, obviously, we can say we have collected their works for our institution, but also, at that point, report on what would be the history-making legacies of particular artists. But it's not an either/ or situation. I guess what I am so conscious of is that there is an underlying sensibility within the realm of the margin/center debate that was so informative to culturally specific institutions in defining themselves, but that sometimes it becomes an either/or—you're either having your retrospective at the Studio Museum or MoMA. And I would like to believe that now it's not an either/or, it's an and/and. You might have your first show at the Studio Museum *and* your retrospective at MoMA, or you might have your first show in MoMA's project gallery and your mid-career show at the Studio Museum. At this point I would like to believe that culturally specific institutions

could better fit into what is a large ecosystem and have roles in that ecosystem that are not always plagued by "woulds" and "shoulds" and having to come back to the racial construct as one that doesn't open out into other things. There was a wonderful moment a few months ago when your work was up simultaneously at the Guggenheim and at MoMA and we had a drawing up at the Studio Museum. I use that confluence as an example of who we can be and who we are in relationship to all these other places and as a way to communicate our many possible roles to supporters and to our audience. There are different ways in which an artist's work can exist in different contexts. And in this example with your work, those contexts were an institution that's written the story of modernism, an institution that was devoted at a certain point to the idea of nonobjective art, and an institution committed to the importance of black cultural specificity. And your work responds beautifully to all three contexts.

GL: But that means that you have to have a bigger view of the institution, or a less territorial line to your institution's mandate, than I think a lot of culturally specific institutions have at this moment. But the other institutions, the non-culturally specific ones, also have to have a broader view of their mandates, not feel as if black artists only belong in the Studio Museum and that's where you must go to see them.

TG: Let me ask you another hypothetical question. Say there's some amazing museum in this country, one of the best—and you've never shown in that museum.

GL: There are lots of them!

TG: And it's a museum that, in terms of their exhibition program, is authoritative and defining—they're great. Let's put that museum in a major city that has major art importance, say it's in Minneapolis or Chicago or LA, and its devoted to contemporary art.

GL: All right.

TG: Now, you've never shown there and they don't own any of your work. And you get a letter from the curator there, an important, legendary curator, who has done amazing shows, worked with artists you admire, produced catalogs and writing that you have referred to yourself in thinking about your own work, and that curator writes and asks you to be in a show at that museum that you respect—this is hypothetical, of course; I'm not speaking about anyone in particular. And say you were asked to be in a show at that museum: "Word Up: Ten Black Artists Now." It's being organized by a guest curator for that institution and you're included in it. Would you be in it? Would you not be in it?

GL: I think it depends on the show. Again, it comes back to the specific show.

TG: Say the exhibition is *not* good—it's a mix of two or three artists that you admire and feel a relationship with, but also it's six or seven artists whose work you don't respect, or don't think has anything to do with your own work, except for the fact that they happen also to be black.

GL: Then I'm not going to be in it. Now that could have negative career repercussions, but why should it? That's the interesting question for me. If I choose not to have my work framed in an exhibition that I feel is intellectually shoddy, why should that have repercussions in terms of my ability to show at that institution ever again?

TG: Well, this is not a question of ever again. I'm just positing that this is how this institution now, fifteen or twenty years into your career, has decided to frame your work. How do you respond to that?

GL: Well, it's a dilemma of artists' careers that sometimes, as far as you might go, sometimes you're basically starting over or starting at the bottom.

TG: And is the "ethnically specific show" the bottom?

GL: No, but these groups shows that are badly curated, and have lots of artists in them you don't respect, are the bottom.

TG: But say it was a big group show that's badly curated of artists from all over the world.

GL: That's a different thing.

TG: So, say it's not "Word Up," instead it's "Voices and Visions: Ten International Contemporary Artists." Would you say yes to that?

GL: No, I would still want to see who's in the show....
     Okay. I'm ambivalent about it, because the reality is that a presence in those kinds of spaces can bring other things. So it would be hard for me to just off-handedly say no because being in shows helps you get into other shows. So it's hard for an artist to say a blanket no to all those kinds of opportunities. But the reality is that that can backfire too, when curators put together groups of artists like that and they're problematic, those kinds of shows cling to you in a negative way. So, there's always a danger.

TG: The reason I'm also so reluctant to even talk about some of this is because I do acknowledge that the work I do now could not be

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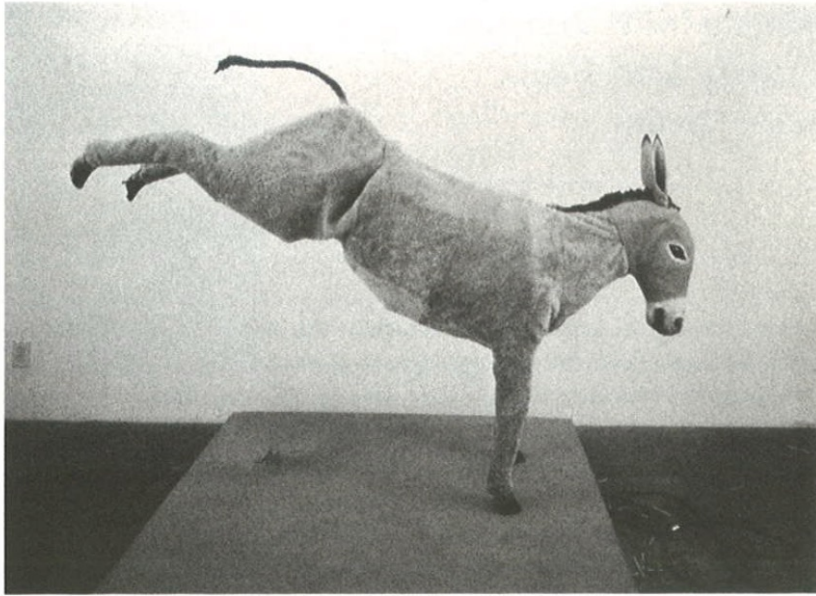
Eric Wesley, *Kicking Ass*, 2000, installation view in "Freestyle," Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001.

done without some of those shows having happened, because having had them occur means, at least, that the conversation could move beyond the questions of: Are there significant artists of color? or Are there significant women artists? Are there significant … whatever, fill in the blank.

GL: I know.

TG: So once you get past that, it still seems like you have to have had that initial phase of work to arrive at the present, as problematic as that work might be. The archives that exist at the Studio Museum really document, in a very complete way, this history—just in the exhibition catalogs and brochures that we have in our collection. I realize that, because even though when I look at some of these documents and I think I could never have done that or justified doing that to artists, I see how that work has created the ability to react against it, to do something different or to move beyond it.

5

STUDIOS IN THE STREET   Creative Community and Visual Arts

The art of American Negroes began when [they] emerged
as a group and it will continue as long as they think of
themselves as a group, which they will do for generations
after they are full partners in their native democracy. . . .
They do not think of themselves "simply as American
artists," whose primary tasks are to seek fuller "integration
in American life."

—CEDRIC DOVER

Midway through 1970, the suburban enclave of Glendale, California, hosted the exhibition "Black Artists on Art." Reviews published in the local newspaper instructed visitors to prepare for a journey of learning and self-discovery, advising them that attendees risked becoming "better people." While the eager correspondent of the *Glendale News-Press* perhaps overstated the possible benefits of museum attendance, the display of more than sixty works by twenty-two mostly local artists marked a milestone for a city that had seen the bombing of a local fair-housing organization and where, as late as 1964, African Americans were reputed to be unsafe on city streets after nightfall. Black art, in its own small way, was moving Glendale forward.[1]

   One figure whose work was shown was John Outterbridge. Outterbridge, whose comments on art narrated a nationally distributed film that shared the exhibit's name, contributed several pieces, including "Song for my Father," a five-foot welded steel utility truck without wheels dumping a pile of manure (replaced with wood chips by the museum) onto the gallery floor. Homage to a man whose work as a junk hauler had educated and fed five children in the Jim Crow South, the truck offered rich symbolism. The lack of wheels sig-

nified "work without satisfaction, movement without progress," while the manure signified the lack of choice and degree of unpleasantness inherent in the work that Outterbridge's father, John Ivery, had done. Parts of the truck were left unfinished, meant to rust and grow old "as John Ivery had," while a mirrored cab drew viewers, through their images, into the piece itself. Using a title borrowed from the Horace Silver composition that conjured images of labor and family, jazz and class, "Song for my Father" captured themes that ran through many of the works Outterbridge would produce throughout his career. The truck certainly struck a chord with someone: It was stolen soon after the exhibit from the yard of his home in Altadena.[2]

By the time of the Glendale exhibition, Outterbridge was part of a cohort of like-minded cultural activists. An easygoing and prolific man, he was the co-founder and visual arts director of the Communicative Arts Academy in Compton, as well as a key figure in local efforts to shape a relevant and identifiable black art and, in the attempt to develop a multi-generic community arts movement throughout Southern California. The career of John Outterbridge thus highlights the role played by black visual and plastic artists in the cultural and political struggles taking place in postwar South Los Angeles.

Much as with Horace Tapscott, John Outterbridge's tale cannot be understood in isolation. Part of an initially small and informal grouping of local visual artists, Outterbridge's cohort mushroomed to include hundreds whose work as artists and cultural activists influenced thousands. This group included known artists such as Charles White, David Hammons, and Betye Saar, as well as more obscure local figures such as Van Slater, Gloria Bohanon, and Dale Davis. Working in dozens of community institutions and linked by gallery affiliations, informal conversations, and artistic sensibilities, artists working and living in Southern California made the visual arts a critical component of the larger fight for political and aesthetic liberation.

Visual arts were critical to the broader enterprise of black cultural politics. In searching for new means of expression rooted in and relevant to the communities from which they came, black artists such as Outterbridge, Judson Powell, Betye Saar, and Noah Purifoy pushed the parameters of consciously black art while building a variety of community arts projects. These projects, which in essence sought to "serve the people" by offering a fundamental reevaluation of the meaning art could have in black lives, paralleled and often intertwined with similar efforts in music and literature. Moreover, much as was the case with those working in other genres, visual and plastic artists found themselves struggling to reshape the conditions and circumstances of

their own work. The result, in Southern California and nationwide, was an attempt at greater collective organization, including the establishment of membership organizations and artist-run galleries. These institutions, in turn, provided an organized base from which to launch struggles for both greater access to and viable autonomy from the cultural landscape of Southern California's museums, festivals, and galleries.[3]

WAY OUT WEST

To a large extent, initial efforts to formalize links between likeminded artists came about with the recognition of the absence of spaces for discussing, exhibiting, or selling their work. Despite the overall expansion of the Southern California art world during the early 1960s, museums, schools, and galleries remained indifferent to the presence of black visual art. With the notable exception of Joan Ankrum's gallery, few art dealers in Los Angeles handled the work of local black artists other than Charles White.[4] The region's premier art school, Chouinard Art Institute, enrolled fewer than a dozen black students, and continuing allegations of racism dogged an institution that had long limited the enrollment of African Americans to night classes.[5] Although the underfunded County Museum of Art had exhibited the works of local black artists before moving from Exposition Park in 1965, the newly expanded museum initially sought to demonstrate the arrival of Southern California on the national cultural landscape. As a result, new museum management favored exhibitions of established artists over those of more obscure local artists of any color.

This indifference is all the more striking when set alongside the proliferation of black artists' organizations in Southern California after 1960. As noted earlier, the 1950s saw the birth of several groups of black visual artists. In the decade that followed, these sorts of efforts expanded. Melvin Edwards exhibited with a semi-formalized cultural collective called the Seekers.[6] The prolific figurative painter Walt Walker opened the LeJan gallery on Crenshaw Boulevard and 48th Street. The most successful effort to draw together black artists came as a result of the efforts of Ruth Waddy, who founded Art West Associated. Meeting sporadically in Waddy's home during 1960 and 1962, Art West (as the organization was also known) evolved an organizational structure, with elected positions and defined tasks, that formalized previously casual networks.[7]

The concretization of a collective body among local artists allowed for simultaneous discussions of form, the influence of the black liberation move-

ment on art, and the material circumstances of black artists. Art West affiliates held several shows in nontraditional venues, including Los Angeles City Hall; secured a small National Endowment of the Arts grant; began advertising in *Essence* magazine; and paid for Waddy to travel cross-country soliciting prints for a locally produced book on black printmaking. Meetings took place in homes or in the back room of a local black-owned savings and loan. Participation spurred Waddy's own artistic development, since, tired of being asked questions about form that she could not answer, she enrolled at Otis Art Institute. Following Waddy's relocation to San Francisco after 1965, Art West Associated melted away as key personalities left to pursue opportunities elsewhere. For some, New York exerted a powerful pull, and, like much of Southern California's homegrown jazz talent, visuals artists such as Camille Billops and Mel Edwards made permanent moves east. Nevertheless, Art West Associated played a key role between 1960 and 1965, beginning a process of artistic challenges to the municipal arts establishment, providing a space for growing numbers of black artists to meet and share ideas, and helping link talent based in Northern California and Southern California.[8]

The experience of Art West Associated illustrates particular difficulties that the Black Arts Movement's imperative toward greater collective organization posed for visual artists. On the one hand, artists' collectives were no harder to form for painters and sculptors than for musicians or poets. Poets and playwrights, however, could perform in any number of places, and it was far easier to open a new repertory theater or music venue than a museum. Publishers and nightclub owners may have been difficult, but they could be circumvented through small presses and independent record labels. Allies like Broadside Press and Flying Dutchmen Records were often willing to take modest chances on unfamiliar subjects, thus providing writers and musicians with alternative production and distribution channels. Beyond this, theater and music were long-accepted pastimes in black communities, and people were accustomed to paying money to hear music or see plays. Books and records were generally cheaper than artwork. All of this left visual and plastic artists comparatively more dependent on the surrounding world of critics, galleries, and museums than artists working in other forms. As a result, the process of self-organization involved not simply the creation of spaces for discussing issues germane to artists or the attempt to change one's material circumstances, but also the attempt to build a base for the appreciation and support of black visual culture more generally.

In the decade that followed the Watts riot, an expanded community of black visual and plastic artists in Southern California took up these tasks.

Exhibition catalogs, collected interviews, and published biographical sketches review a loosely connected community in the hundreds. A casual estimate by Cecil Ferguson put the number of practicing visual artists, arts administrators, and arts educators participating in black arts organizations in the thousands, and while this number seems higher than archival materials record, a number closer to five hundred seems plausible. Although the broad community of black visual artists was (and continues to be) a multigenerational one, the post-Watts moment saw the emergence of a distinct cohort. Born between 1939 and 1946, most had come to Los Angeles as the children of wartime migrants. Many were graduates of area community colleges and state universities, although both Suzanne Jackson and Alonzo Davis had studied at local arts institutions. All were beginning careers as artists at a moment when debates concerning black liberation—and the presence of organizations seeking to transform these debates into political action—were altering the landscapes of the urban north and west.[9]

Much more than jazz, poetry, or theater, black visual art in Southern California developed against a backdrop of lack of interest from the mainstream white community. Black visual culture attracted little of the attention directed at black writing, theater, or music following the riot in 1965. The Watts Writers Workshop and Inner City Cultural Center operated with six-figure budgets; black visual artists confronted continued indifference on the part of gallery owners, museum directors, and the press. Indeed, the main art reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*, William Wilson, had never reviewed the work of a black artist before being publicly challenged to do so by John Outterbridge.[10] As a result, new galleries owned and operated by local black artists presented the overwhelming majority of works shown by black artists.

As with institutions like the Underground Musicians Association and the Inner City Cultural Center, the collective organizations formed by visual artists were often the brainchild of a primary or singular figure. Suzanne Jackson's Gallery 32 offers a case in point. Jackson arrived in Los Angeles from the Bay Area. An abstract painter and published poet with a background in dance, she regarded being defined as a black artist as the "somewhat accidental," byproduct of the company she kept. Jackson lived in Echo Park, a bohemian enclave northeast of downtown, and initially knew little about South Los Angeles. "All I knew were the Watts Towers," she recalled. "I didn't understand that there was a whole black community that lived there." Jackson's first connection with local artists came when she took a drawing class with Charles White. An invitation to enter her works in the Watts Summer Festival arts

competition followed. Jackson's initial decision to open a gallery came from a desire to foster community. Seeking to replicate previous experiences of San Francisco bohemianism, Gallery 32 was intended less as a business than as a place for the exchange of ideas and philosophies "over a pot of coffee and a big piece of jack cheese." Jackson funded the gallery without assistance, largely with money earned teaching and working as an exotic dancer. The gallery made little money but became an important place, in the words of the artist Dan Concholar, "for building a black base that supported black artists." Showing "anything and anybody who fell off the street," Gallery 32 shows included a group exhibition of the work of local black female artists and an exhibition of works by the Black Panther Party's minister of culture, Emory Douglas.[11]

In comments made to the interviewer Karen Anne Mason, Jackson discussed the relationship between artists' own organization and the development of an audience for black art. Noting that one first had to have a space to bring people to, Jackson explained how artists concluded that "it was important for black people to know about the artists' work and to stop hanging cheap posters that they actually paid more for than they would for a piece of art."[12] Writing in the 1930s, Loren Miller had lamented the lack of a critical apparatus for disseminating information about black art to black audiences. This is a concern that subsequent artists such as Charles Burnett would raise in the 1980s and beyond. That black visual artists—along with musicians and theater people—achieved some success in fostering a wider critical appreciation for black art during the late 1960s and early 1970s should be seen as one of the intellectual victories of this moment. When one recalls that Jackson articulated the primary point of a kind of spontaneous arts education as fostering a sense that people were investing not in something of monetary value but in something of authentic quality, then we can see how the Black Arts Movement's effort to develop a new art was part of a wider milieu of social, political, and aesthetic development on the part of black people more generally.

The most successful local black gallery was the Brockman Gallery. Founded in 1967 by the brothers Alonzo and Dale Davis, Brockman became the primary venue for exhibiting black art in the city. Like Gallery 32, Brockman served as a place for the exchange of artistic ideas, hosting regular forums and serving as an informal gathering space. John Outterbridge told the interviewer Elton Fax about Brockman's importance as a meeting place. "We discovered common ground," he noted, adding that "some strenuous problems and questions have been strenuously thrashed out right here at the Brockman Gallery." By the early 1970s, Brockman had become a multifaceted community

arts space, as well, hosting a festival in nearby Leimert Park; sponsoring classes in yoga, drawing, painting, photography, and commercial art concepts; and administering a series of mural projects funded through the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.[13]

Several factors contributed to Brockman's success. First and foremost, the gallery had a wide pool of local talent from which to draw, as well as owners willing to suspend their own creative work in the interest of completing administrative tasks. Equally important, however, was the gallery's location. Positioned in the Leimert Park area, Brockman was able to attract distinct populations of African Americans. Leimert Park lay in the shadow of the "black Beverly Hills," as the middle-class areas of View Park, Ladera Heights, and Baldwin Hills were colloquially known. Access from working-class neighborhoods of South Los Angeles, however, was easy, given the quick-moving Santa Barbara, Adams, and Vernon boulevards. Leimert Park lay within the larger Crenshaw district, which had formerly consisted of a mixture of Japanese Americans, whites, Jewish Americans, and middle-class blacks. By the mid-1970s, newly mobile segments of a black working class rising on a tide of municipal employment joined the remnants of this mixed-income, integrated neighborhood. With crowds built through consciously black shows, community festivals, and film screenings, Brockman could build a diverse social base, including a nearby population that could afford to buy art. As a result, Brockman prospered, if temporarily. By the time the gallery closed in the late 1990s, it was the oldest black-owned art gallery west of the Mississippi.[14]

Many artists affiliated with Brockman became members of two arts organizations formed during 1968. Following the demise of Art West, the Black Artists Alliance (BAA) and Black Arts Council (BAC) became the two major forums for bringing together visual artists of African descent in Southern California. Whereas the BAA, which came partially out of the Brockman Gallery, focused on addressing formal concerns relating to art, the BAC took as a mission creating opportunities for artists and generating broader interest in the arts in the surrounding black community. Two workers at the County Museum of Art, Claude Booker and Cecil Fergerson, founded the BAC. Booker was a veteran of the Korean War and a former LAPD officer turned shipping clerk. Fergerson was a former custodian who had mastered the successive job descriptions within the lower rungs of the museum hierarchy, becoming, in order, an art preparer, a museum helper, a museum assistant, and, finally, a curatorial assistant. After thirty-seven years of full-time employment at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Fergerson held the

position of curatorial assistant, which made him the highest-ranking black staff member. As a result of the museum's lack of interest in hiring African Americans for curatorial and other professional posts, the initial membership of the BAC consisted primarily of museum security officers, a majority of whom were black.[15]

The BAC grew quickly. Its origins lay in a struggle with museum management. Although Fergerson had a particular interest in French modernist art, the absence of any commitment on the part of the county museum to exhibit works by black artists bothered him. Fergerson began holding meetings aimed at embarrassing the museum into hiring more black staff and showing more black artists. Alonzo Davis, Outterbridge, Ruth Waddy, Timothy Washington, and David Hammons were among those who turned up for initial public forums. Stan Saunders, a former Rhodes Scholar and planner of the annual Watts Summer Festival, served as the group's attorney, drawing up papers of incorporation. Gradually, the BAC began to attract a loose membership that included many of the black artists in the city. Fergerson claimed a high point of three thousand members, although he noted that none of them was willing to serve as the group's secretary.[16]

Producing a more relevant LACMA remained an elusive goal. Forming an organization that counted significant numbers of museum security guards among its membership allowed a certain degree of flexibility and militancy when planning actions. Angry that a major Cubism show ignored that form's debt to African art, a number of Black Arts Council affiliates decided to remove several works from the museum's walls. "A lot of black artists worked as guards," recalled John Outterbridge, "so we knew how to do that without damaging the paintings." The guards "were in the movement," he added, "so we figured they wouldn't shoot us." Rather than pursuing this avenue, however, the artists decided to picket the show.[17]

Under duress, museum management agreed to a series of lectures on black art. These paired local artists and included musical performances and visits by the US Organization's Taifa Dance Troupe. Taifa generally performed an "Afro-Americanized" version of the polyrhythmic stomping boot dance of South African gold and diamond miners.[18] Lecturers included Samella Lewis, a professor of art at the Claremont Colleges and a visual artist in her own right; John Riddle; Bernie Casey; and Charles White. The third lecture in the series, which began with a series of Paul Robeson ballads broadcast across Wilshire Boulevard, drew upward of one thousand spectators, far more than the three hundred or so expected by the museum.[19]

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Despite the success of the series, which did begin to draw more blacks to LACMA, the museum continued to eschew local artists. A partial capitulation came in early 1971 with the exhibit "Three Graphic Artists," which featured works by Charles White, David Hammons, and Timothy Washington. The exhibit, which took place in a basement room generally reserved for art rentals, demonstrated the fissures within the visual arts community. The BAC demanded a Charles White retrospective in the main gallery, charging that a recognized master of American modernism should be exhibited separately from two younger artists. Fergerson and Booker grew angry that museum staff had gone directly to Alonzo Davis at Brockman rather than to them in organizing the show. Claude Booker and Cecil Fergerson organized picket lines outside the museum, and David Hammons reportedly tried to pull one of his works off a museum wall. Partially as a result of continuing pressure from local artists, LACMA agreed to host a six-week exhibition featuring fifty-one local black artists. Most of the works were by emerging artists. Of the seventy-six works shown, only five had been lent by galleries, and only one was privately owned. The exhibit, "Los Angeles 1972: A Panorama of Black Artists," thus provided a rare opportunity for artists who otherwise were struggling for recognition and demonstrated the possibility of creating a more receptive museum.

Although it was primarily an advocacy organization, the BAC also served an educational purpose. Fergerson gave periodic lectures on art throughout Los Angeles. The Black Arts Council received repeated invitations from local black student unions eager to host black art shows. Fergerson occasionally demurred, worried that shows in student centers risked pigeonholing black artists who belonged in museums and galleries. University shows did take place, however, and the BAC was on the verge of mounting a major show at a new gallery at UCLA until the killing of two Black Panthers by US Organization members put the plans on hold. Even the federal government called on the Black Arts Council. When racial tensions erupted on a nearby air base, the Air Force asked Fergerson to help organize a show aimed at calming tense nerves. One can only imagine the reception the donated works received. "Boy it was a trip," remarked Fergerson. "They sent trucks, Army Air Force trucks with these rigs that open up like a whole living room. And they were putting John Riddle's 'The Operation' into the side of the truck and the side of the truck has this big eagle on it and 'The Operation' was two steel figures with one white figure taking the brain out of a black figure."[20]

The BAC folded in 1974. Its demise came partially as a result of the tremen-

dous amount of work involved for both Booker and Fergerson. Financing the group was difficult, as well. Periodic fundraisers helped, but Suzanne Jackson commented that much of the BAC's funding came from Booker's and Fergerson's household budgets. Neither could maintain the organization, keep his day job, and hold together a reasonable family life. But the BAC also drifted apart as a result of the partial successes of the organization. LACMA's mandate had been significantly broadened, and by 1976 the museum hosted a major exhibition, "Two Centuries of Afro-American Art," guest curated by David Driskell. Although local artists were largely excluded from planning or contributing in any way to the show, many were also tired of perennial confrontation and began to focus their energy on establishing the institution that became the California Afro-American Museum.

The evolution of collective organization on the part of local visual artists illustrates the dialectic between aesthetic and political critique. As in the case of Eric Dolphy's parents' house, the private homes of Ruth Waddy and Noah Purifoy began as places for informal discussions about form. Speaking of his own home, Purifoy recalled, "Here was a place where we could discuss our lives in connection with art. . . . We could experience the past and plan for the future."[21] "In Noah's house," Outterbridge said, "we'd go and get into big fights at times, almost physical fights and drink good wine and solve the problems of the world, and then critique our work."[22] A "constant flow" of politics, philosophy, psychology, and art similarly took place in more formally organized spaces such as Jackson's Gallery 32 and the back offices of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Copmany building, provided by the watercolorist Bill Pajaud.

Part of the passage from informal meetings to organized gatherings came about precisely as black artists began to critique their positions as artists trying to survive and as black people intent on doing the same. Collective organization provided one road toward addressing the latter concern. Assemblage art provided another.

REDEMPTION SONGS

Redemption is the great overriding myth explored in
assemblage art: what shall survive of what we are?
—RICHARD CÁNDIDA SMITH

The desire to foster an engagement between the growing black liberation movement and new aesthetic ideas posed specific challenges for visual and

plastic artists.[23] Despite the rapid diffusion of radical visual images, the call for the development of consciously revolutionary black art often cast aspersions on the visual arts, particularly painting. The most widely distributed contemporary source of essays on competing conceptions of black expression, Addison Gayle's edited volume *The Black Aesthetic*, contained sections examining cultural theory, fiction, drama, poetry, and music. Only five of the book's more than thirty contributors made any mention of painting. This brief mention did little to erase the marginal position held by the visual arts relative to other genres. As Lorenzo Thomas notes, jazz, despite its predominantly instrumental form, was more likely to be seen as useful to potential black revolutionaries than the visual or plastic arts because of the political activity of jazz musicians, the tendency to view music as possessing an inherent racial authenticity, and the circulation of ideas that held jazz, particularly "free jazz," as therefore revolutionary in form.[24]

As noted earlier, musicians had themselves sought to dismiss the notion of a reflective correspondence between music and politics. In this regard, the belief that particular artistic genres either possessed a revolutionary character or were inherently irrelevant in the struggle for black liberation proved as problematic for visual artists as it had for musicians. Despite their desire to avoid being typecast, and notwithstanding the relatively more marginal responsibility assigned visual artists in the struggle for racial revolution, the black liberation movement exercised a powerful influence on black visual artists. In his survey of twentieth-century African American art, Richard Powell argues, "Betye Saar, along with fellow Los Angeles artists Houston Conwill, David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, and Noah Purifoy[,] began to redefine black consciousness in art."[25]

Mixed-media assemblage became a key form for enacting this transformation. Given the towering influence of Simon Rodia, this was unsurprising. As Sarah Schrank and Cécile Whiting show, the triangular link between the Watts Towers, the junk art form, and the ethno-demographic affiliation to black Angelenos took time in developing.[26] Beyond South Los Angeles, assemblage, junk art, and other nontraditional sculpture forms had become an important part of the California avant-garde, drawing the energy of, among others, Wallace Berman, George Herms, Ed Keinholz, Bruce Conner, Fred Mason, and Clay Spohn. Peter Plagens called assemblage "the first home-grown California modern art," noting that, although its roots lay elsewhere, assemblage art became emblematic of the postwar confluence of bohemianism and mass culture. In the specific social context of Southern California, assemblage,

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FIGURE 18 Artwork made from riot debris displayed at Watts Renaissance of the Arts, 1966. Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive (Collection 1429), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

junk, and found art became a means "for recycling the discards of postwar affluence into defiantly deviant configurations."[27]

Certainly, the form seemed particularly suited to the needs of black artists. Much as musicians like John Carter combined blues structures and phrasings with freeform improvisation, assemblage art mixed folk-art traditions and avant-garde experimentation. Assemblages transformed the familiar, forcing new looks at old objects. In a neighborhood surrounded by junkyards and plagued by infrequent garbage collection, junk art asked the community to reexamine the true value of the objects around it.[28] Whether one used hair (Hammons), riot debris (Purifoy and Powell), or rags and steel (Edwards, Outterbridge, and Riddle), assemblage offered the possibility of creating images familiar to black audiences without the constraints of pure realism. A form given to juxtaposition, assemblage allowed for the exposition of both irony and contradiction. That it did so relatively inexpensively was a bonus. That it blended a highly intellectual process of selection with an improvisational, even spontaneous, method made for a jazz-like sensibility. Thus, like

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jazz, assemblage art suggested the possibility of a non-essentialized form of black creativity whose racial codings might be deciphered by black audiences whether or not white artists or audiences sought to replicate, extend, or consume the end result.

The use of familiar images, objects, or, in the case of David Hammons, one's own body allowed for the creation of pieces that were highly symbolic, deeply personal, and largely abstract and yet often carried explicitly political overtones. Edwards's "Lynch Fragments" blended African masks, abstract expressionism, intense sexuality, and omnipresent force and violence in a work that he began shortly after the police raid on a South Los Angeles Nation of Islam mosque.[29] The art historian Samella Lewis described Purifoy's "Sir Watts" as a "commemoration of the struggles of a people in battle."[30] Part of a collection of pieces forged from salvaged riot debris, "Sir Watts" had come together as a result of Purifoy's and Judson Powell's ongoing work creating found art with local residents of Watts. Saar's iconic "Liberation of Aunt Jemima" offered a riff on the oft-reproduced portrait of Huey Newton as an armed potentate perched inside a wicker throne, while suggesting that, as in Vietnam, even the most unthreatening figure could rapidly become a warrior. Though the armed centerpiece of Saar's composition commands immediate attention, her parallel inclusion of cotton along the base of the box, with a notepad featuring the image of the Jemima mammy caring for a white child, offers a work-centric ethic much like Outterbridge's "Song for My Father." David Hammons's body print "Injustice Case" incorporated his own bound and gagged body, surrounded by a border made from an American flag, in a posture that recalled the gagging of the Black Panther leader Bobby Seale during the trial of the Chicago Eight. Another piece, "The Door (Admissions Office)," featured an inked body outline of a face, arms, and torso pressing against a closed door. Outterbridge's "Traditional Hang-up" featured a steel cross with a stars-and-stripes pattern running across the top, bisected by a post filled with small, skull-like objects. Part of the larger *Containment* series, the work for Outterbridge symbolized the problematic historical relationship between African Americans and Christianity, as well as the violent disjuncture between the American promise of equal treatment and the violent repression of black Americans.[31] These ideas were extended in *Containment*, where a series of metal frames and stretcher bars were broken apart in a comment on the limits of enclosure while mixed polished and unfinished surfaces were juxtaposed in an effort "to suggest the unrealized potential or raw talent within his community."[32]

FIGURE 19 "The Door (Admissions Office)," by David Hammons, 1969. Wood, acrylic sheet, and pigment construction. Collection of California African American Foundation. Courtesy California African-American Museum.

Speaking generally, it is difficult to miss the political content that adheres to a work of art that features a cross, skulls, and an American flag. Other pieces, however, achieve a similarly affective link to the social through a less confrontational pose. Outterbridge's "Case in Point," part of his *Rag Man* series, features a series of cylindrical rags sewn together and bound with leather straps. Baggage tags adorn the surface of the piece, and one tag bears the phrase, "Packages travel like people." As with the truck he left exposed to the elements, the sense of distressed and worn materials is palpable, with the sewn rags showing uneven coloration and obvious wear. The piece reflects a kind of historical materialism, suggesting the critical experience of migration in African American life and reminding how the process of collecting discarded items has been—and remains—a central strategy of survival for economically marginalized urban black men. As the *Rag Man* series progressed, Outterbridge developed more figurative creations embellished with mirrors, beads, cloth, nails, and boards. Divided between objects that give power and those that display, the latter pieces of the *Rag Man* series reflect an increasing en-

FIGURE 20 "Case in Point," *Rag Man* series, by John Outterbridge, 1970. Mixed-media assemblage. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

gagement with spiritual themes drawn from West African cultural idioms as well as from rural Southern African American outsider art.

Evocations of mobility, work, spirit, and struggle are similarly present in the work of the assemblage artist and sculptor John Riddle. A Los Angeles native who had attended Los Angeles City College before moving on to the campus of California State University, Los Angeles, Riddle described his art in part by noting, "There are very few avenues of communication open to black people."[33] He added, "Every black person in America must engage in the struggle or see the struggle controlled by the beast."[34] One work that took up the linked question of communication and struggle was "Bird and Diz." Part of a series alternately entitled *Made in Mississippi* and *Spirit versus Technology*, "Bird and Diz" is set within the rectangular frame of an ammunition box manufactured in Mississippi. Riddle's piece simultaneously engages questions of organized violence, black migration, and the centrality of jazz within an oppositional African American culture. As part of what Clyde Woods calls "the blues tradition of explanation," Riddle's piece offers musicality (and the
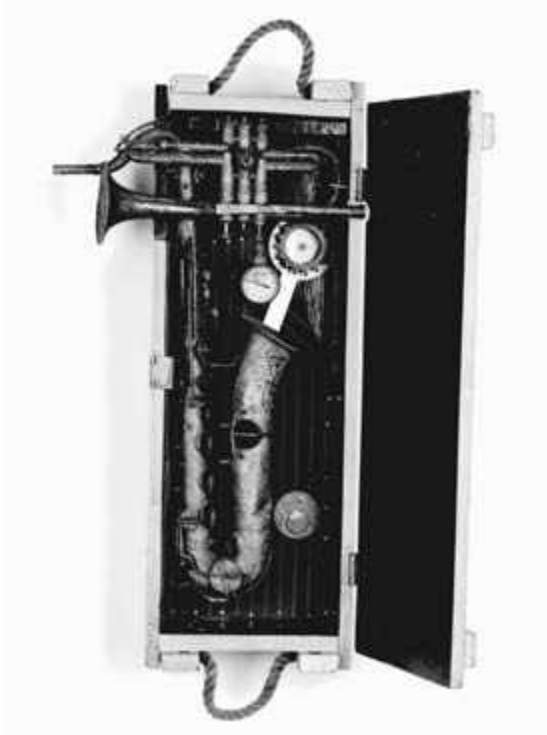
FIGURE 21 "Bird and Diz," *Spirit vs. Technology* series, by John T. Riddle Jr., 1973. Mixed-media assemblage. Collection of California African American Foundation. Courtesy California African-American Museum.

hidden labor of playing) as a central component of African American efforts at self-definition and political subjectivity.[35]

At a formal level, Riddle's piece is less spontaneous and playful than, for example, the Dadaist absurdity of Purifoy's "Sir Watts." Part of this difference emerges in the distinction between the "found" nature of the former and the "constructed" status of the latter, although these are distinctions that emerge more in the interpretive act than in the actual circumstances of production. Beyond this, Purifoy's piece seems to capture a moment—the paladin is charred but standing—where Riddle engages a longer sense of historical time through the formal properties of the distressed materials used as well as through the link to the bebop generation.

Riddle's piece, too, is open to a "materialist" reading. Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker are signified by, perhaps even reduced to, their means of producing. Part of the larger *Made in Mississippi* series, Riddle's "Bird and Diz" posits the binaries spirit–technology and black culture–America as unfolding within the confines of a militarized space. These are ideas he had touched on

previously in works such as "There's More at Stake than Just Attica." In both cases, the creative response to the threat of technological annihilation—a core concern of the postwar Californian white avant-garde—is answered through the assertion of a coded language of ethnic particularity signified most clearly by jazz. Thus, Riddle's piece, like Outterbridge's "Song for My Father" or Larry Clark's film *Passing Through*, posits a cross-generic, socially referenced, jazz-centric aesthetic of cultural politics as the key to black collectivity.

With the exception of the muralist Charles Freeman, who moved to Los Angeles as an organizer with the Black Panther Party, none of the principal figures involved in the visual arts community belonged to any of the competing nationalist organizations in South Los Angeles. Despite this, the black liberation movement exercised a powerful, if diffuse, influence. In describing her Aunt Jemima assemblage, Saar quipped, "Extreme times call for extreme heroines," adding, "My intent was to transform a negative, demeaning figure . . . into a warrior ready to combat servitude and racism."[36] Though more temporally specific, Outterbridge's mixed metal and fabric "Pig Painted Blue," like John Riddle's sculpted tribute to the memory of prisoners killed in the Attica prison uprising, reflected the ongoing engagement with the black freedom movement. "In a way," claimed Outterbridge, "we were all Panthers." At times it appeared that the police agreed. During the exhibition of works by Emory Douglas, police issued citations to every car parked near Gallery 32, where the exhibition opening was being held, while on another occasion, officers providing a comical example of jurisdictional confusion threatened the gallery's owner, Suzanne Jackson, with a tax audit because of their displeasure with the subject matter in her gallery. Although the intrusion of police into Los Angeles art galleries had been a recurring issue during the 1950s, these activities took on a new tone in the context of open violence between the police and radicals after 1962.[37]

Within the social context of black liberation, black artists developed a wide range of ideas on art. Some, like Marvin Harden, rejected the notion of black art or any particular affiliation with groupings of black artists. Many artists whose works evoked nationalist themes or who referred to themselves as "black artists" critiqued the idea of a singular "black art."[38] Van Slater derided the term "black art" as "meaningless." Alice Gafford maintained that she saw no contradiction between her insistence that art was universal and her commitment to nurturing both individual black artists and facilitating the broader appreciation of consciously black art.[39] Despite the openly political message of an

armed Aunt Jemima, Betye Saar described her primary interest as creating an occult sensibility that would be vague enough to unleash the imagination of viewers. Saar summarized her position in a poem:

I never had the / stroke for "mainstream"
it went against my
flow
From the past remnants / of lost ceremonies the
loosening and unwrapping
of mystery emergence / from the shadows to face /
the unknown / purification
(these works are what I leave behind).[40]

Indeed, part of the extraordinary vitality of Saar's art was the way in which, like Horace Tapscott, she moved easily between antiracist confrontation, historical allegory, communal spirituality, and interior, familial life.[41] Purifoy saw art as a process for both self-discovery and communication. Citing the need for "more than the creative act," Purifoy called the group show "66 Signs of Neon," which featured sixty-six separate pieces constructed from riot debris, a means for fostering collective responsibility and communication between individuals. Indeed, Purifoy argued that the essence of art was communication:

If junk art in general, and 66 in particular, enable us only to see and love the many simple things which previously escaped the eye, then we miss the point. We wish to establish more. . . . There must be a ME and a YOU, who is affected permanently. Art of itself is of no value if in its relatedness it does not effect change, a change in the behavior of human beings. And changes in behavior are effected through communication.[42]

Purifoy's and Powell's "66 Signs" illustrates the complex vision of community-oriented assemblage artists working in the context of social upheaval. Initially casting their efforts as a comment on the limits of the McCone commission report on the riots, the duo described their desire "to reflect the August 11th event on a symbolic level and to demonstrate . . . if the community of Watts found itself in the midst of something—something like junk—value could be placed on it to far exceed the few cents paid at the junk yards on Monday morning." He continued, "Here the Junk Art concept becomes one of many artistic expressions which begins to describe and symbolize the act of doing, transferred into an art of being and becoming: a format which symbolizes human existence." In his commentary, Purifoy conjured a Dadaist vision

of a creative process that, in the words of Anne Ayres, was "more life than art."[43] The actual process of scavenging and assembling the debris used in the show, moreover, combined hard labor—salvage efforts took three months of daily work—with a performative spontaneity that saw art "not as a particular thing in itself, but as a reason to establish conversation and communicate one on one." The show was never intended to be permanent, as Purifoy wrote in the introduction to the book of poetry that accompanied it: "We now stand ready to throw '66' back into the junk pile." At the same time, Purifoy's and Powell's vision explicitly rejected the suggestion that "66 Signs," or any of their other art or teaching, reflected a view of "art for art's sake." Rather, they affirmed the "wish to establish that there is more to art than the creative act, more than the sensation of beauty, ugliness, form, color, light."[44]

The way artists spoke about the relationship between political questions and artistic expression attests to the interaction between individual consciousness and social life during a moment of mass activity. For Outterbridge, art during this moment became "socially oriented, not because of your choosing as an artist, but because we were sensitive and active and open during a period when the skin of America was reeking of little abscesses."[45] That artists began "taking their studios to the street" was an inevitable result of their recognition that "we began to understand art's potential for social change."[46] David Hammons saw the place of politics in art as unavoidable. Citing a "moral obligation" to document the things he felt socially, Hammons nonetheless saw politics as something of an unfortunate creative intrusion. "I'm still political at times," he noted, "but I don't want to be; but there are . . . issues which come up, and . . . they bother me."[47]

One result of the widespread social engagement among visual artists was the development of a new formulation of black art that combined insurgent political themes with familiar cultural tropes regarding music, migration, and spirituality. Augmented by an inter-artistic, cross-generic engagement with sound and text, this bricolage avoided the formal limits of realist representation. Much as Horace Tapscott, John Carter, Charles Mingus, and other members of the jazz avant-garde incorporated non-Western musical themes, diverse religio-magical imagery, African American history, and social themes into their music, visual artists developed an abstract language of blackness that, while hardly self-evident or propagandistic, could nonetheless be spoken about by artists as confirming the broader effort to bring the questions posed by the Black Power Movement's cultural critique of American life into the world of visual art.

Works often incorporated spiritual imagery. Betye Saar's mixed-media box construction "Black Girl's Window" combined pictures, objects, and a central silhouette with an outline of hands (designed to recall a palmistry chart) pressed against the multi-paned window. Other compositions of hers combined mystic symbols, bones, household objects, and miscellaneous talismans together in a powerful symbolic blend. Her mixed-media assemblage "Nine Mojo Secrets" (1971) features an open, red palm print embossed with the all-seeing eye over a photograph of an African religious initiation. External panels feature painted phases of the moon, while patches of wheat, a lion, skeletons, and a small head of indeterminate origin (Exú?) provide a sense of grounding and rootedness. One overall effect of this piece is to heighten a vertical cosmological sensibility—stars and moon above but connected to Earth, dirt, and that which lies under it. Beads, fibers, and seeds hang alongside the bottom of the painted window frame, further incorporating conjure elements. At the same time, Saar places Africa at the center of a mystic ensemble that nonetheless radiates specific African American magico-religious ideas. Beyond its finished fixity, Lizette LeFalle-Collins describes how the process of creating the assemblage revealed a spiritual practice partitioned into the distinct steps of dreaming, ritualistic searching for items, the bringing together of the found items, the production of the given work, and its public release.[48] The process of assemblage was thus envisioned through a series of steps in which private revelations were revealed and confirmed through public exposition and circulation.

Noah Purifoy's "Burial Ground," "Zulu #4," *and* "The Sound of One Hand Clapping" blended feathers, rags, chains, washers, and pieces of tin into unique magical fetishes. Spiritual concepts used a range of West African images and symbols. While these attempts were occasionally criticized for collapsing together the vast complexity of the continent's constituent populations, the actual works generally revealed attention to regional and ethnic specificity. Saar's "Homage to Eshu" (the Yoruba deity of manifestation and choice) and Greg Edwards's "Praise for Shango" (the Yoruba Orisa associated with lightning, rain, and royal authority) and "Prayer for Olodumare" (the Creator) worked within a specific cultural complex. Even when black artists deliberately transformed African elements, they often did so in conscious homage or with deliberate Pan-African aims. John Outterbridge's iron pots fell within recognizable parameters of Yoruba aesthetics even when filled with objects familiar to black Americans. Or so it seemed to Brazilian followers of the Yoruba-derived Candomblé religion, who took Outterbridge for an Ogun devotee when he exhibited at the São Paulo biennial in 1994. Although more gener-

FIGURE 22 "Nine Mojo Secrets," by Betye Saar, 1971. Mixed-media assemblage. Collection of California African American Foundation. Courtesy California African-American Museum.

alized spiritual and African elements were often incorporated into larger works in ways that changed their context or meaning, it hardly follows that this process was essentialist or haphazard. Part of the benefit of assemblage art was the extent to which it allowed cultural characteristics common throughout the African diaspora—selective appropriations and the alteration of meaning through new juxtapositions—to find a place in the visual and plastic arts.[49]

Black popular music formed another important reference point for visual artists. Many were themselves musicians and found ways to incorporate musical themes or ideas into their work. Ruth Waddy, Camille Billops, John Outterbridge, and Cecil Fergerson all had musical backgrounds. Riddle, Hammons, and Purifoy incorporated musical instruments into their assemblages and collages. Mel Edwards cited a deep engagement with jazz in his work, while Outterbridge conceptualized the entire creative process through a musical prism, referring to the rhythm of his tools and all his art as a type of musical composition.[50]

Visual artists incorporated poetry into their work, as well. Jayne Cortez wrote a series of poems to accompany the growing body of "Lynch Frag-

ments" pieces by Melvin Edwards. Suzanne Jackson published two books of poetry.[51] A book of sixty-six poems also accompanied the "66 Signs of Neon" project by Purifoy and Powell. The collection included poems by Purifoy and Powell, as well as by members of the Watts Writers Workshop, the Frederick Douglass House, and the Watts Towers Art Center poetry workshops. *Untitled*, as the "66 Signs" volume was called, offered a cross-generic blending of poetry, assemblage, and collage. The ultimate product was predicated on an interchange between the intersecting forms. "Each page," wrote the editors, was intended as a "form poem" in which an "informal wedding of verse and graphics" was meant to elicit a mood "transferable from poetry to art; Freudian slips; protest; affirmation."[52]

The proliferation of cross-generic projects, connected as it was with the emergent confluence of musicality, spiritualism, and poetry, thus linked visual artists with artists working in other forms. Both Camille Billops and Betye Saar made films, with Saar's *Colored Spade* serving as a cinematic counterpoint to her other work recasting racist imagery. Taking its title from a song in the musical *Hair*, *Colored Spade* features a montage of racist images that are gradually replaced with depictions of Klansmen, police, and other symbols of racist (dis)order.[53] Lasting eighty seconds and having cost less than a hundred dollars to make, the film shares the collage form, a bevy of images, and a generalized context with the unfinished film *Repression*, made as a joint project between the Los Angeles Newsreel collective and the Los Angeles Chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Revisiting connections between artists working in distinct creative genres helps clarify the outlines of the heterodox and unprogrammatic art developed by musicians, writers, visual artists, and others during this time. Richard Powell notes how David Hammons's use of his own body, as well as of products and elements familiar to black Americans, helps form a representational field where spaces of coded communication are created between artists and audiences.[54] At times, this communication was directly political, urging mobilization and more. Often, however, this representational field is abstracted but clearly comprehensible and deeply attuned to affective constructions of communal identity.

In an early review of Saar's magico-religious assemblage boxes, the curator Marcia Tucker argued that Saar's transition from bold, ironic, and directly political pieces such as "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima" to more intimate, symbolic, and mystic assemblages represented an effort to explore "the roots and residues of black folk culture."[55] While instructive, her comment is in-

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complete. For much as Tapscott's decision to shift from the militant language of the "Underground Musicians Association" to a more accessible "Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension" was meant to reassert the popular, community-based focus of the jazz collective by using language accessible to everyday black folks, I would argue that Saar's shift toward works that foreground a spiritual collage shows a continuing interest in precisely those forms of widespread mobilization and political advocacy that an earlier, more openly militant language had sought to engender. In her discussion of black female writers and filmmakers, Judylyn Ryan argues for a conception of "spirituality as ideology" in which creative producers provide multifaceted engagements with racially coded sacred imagery as a way to establish truth claims, an intertextual "ethic of connectedness," and a larger sense of common purpose across historical time.[56] Among others, Eric Hobsbawm has written about the problems inherent in considering religio-ethnic linkages or the past as pillars on which a collective identity might be based.[57] Although he was clear about revealing its historically contingent and indeed inherently ahistorical aspects, Benedict Anderson's examination of the subject argued persuasively that nationalist sentiment was first and foremost a conscious intellectual act.[58] From this perspective, it is possible to see music, history, spirituality, and even concepts such as "improvisation," "soul," or "blackness" as forming the outline of a creative, oppositional culture set within the boundaries of a "nation to be." This "nation" was less a physical space than a conceptual orientation and less a pragmatic political statement than a commentary on the necessity of refusing things as they were. It wasn't "national" in the sense of collapsing the class spectrum of African Americans into a singular grouping. It was, rather, "national" in placing black Americans within the political geography of a rapidly decolonizing world. In marshalling an index of the particularistic —whether through music, black religious distinctiveness, or the physical bodies of artists themselves—black artists advanced an aesthetic strategy concomitant with the larger project of artists' organization, community linkages, and social transformation.

Thus, visual artists working principally in the mixed-media assemblage form sought to develop an expansive, open-ended, yet socially committed abstract art that, in the words of John Outterbridge, while "open to anyone" was first and foremost "always relevant to us as black people."[59] As in the case of avant-garde jazz and poetry, informal meeting places expanded into organized sites for political struggle and aesthetic debate. Beyond this, visual artists would prove central to the broader effort to develop a working-class cultural

politics across South Los Angeles. The central role of local visual artists in developing community arts projects across South Los Angeles, discussed hereafter, thus offers a third link between the visual, musical, and literary segments of the black avant-garde.

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY IN COMPTON

Beyond their development of open-ended, racially referenced aesthetics and their widespread move toward collective organization, visual artists played a major role in transforming cultural activism into a mass movement with a wide social base. New community-based arts organizations constituted the critical vehicle for this process. Aided in part by new sources of government funding, the period between 1965 and 1973 saw the expansion of groups such as the Watts Towers Art Center, Studio Watts, and the Ebony Showcase Theater, and the emergence of the Performing Arts Society of Los Angeles, the Inner City Cultural Center, the Brockman Gallery, the Mafundi Institute, and the R'Wanda Lewis Dance Company.[60] While each of these organizations described its focus and goals in distinct ways, all incorporated some form of outreach, teaching, and political content in the overall mission. This was as true for new projects like the Inner City Cultural Center as it was for more venerable bodies like the Ebony Showcase Theater.[61]

The trajectory of community arts in the City of Compton highlights something of this process. In contrast to Los Angeles, where the direction of municipal cultural policy after 1973 demonstrated the class cleavages and political struggles within the regional elite, the residential suburb of Compton had little cultural policy at all. As had been done in other industrial suburbs of southeastern Los Angeles, such as Bell, Lynwood, Huntington Park, and South Gate, boosters of Compton had originally marketed the city as a white enclave.[62] For Compton, this would prove a losing proposition. Located directly southeast of the predominantly black Watts and Willowbrook districts of Los Angeles, the incorporated City of Compton was estimated at 40 percent black at the time of the Watts riot. Soon after, Compton became the first majority-black city in the state.

Community arts came to Compton through something of a backdoor. White flight and the accelerating decline of heavy manufacturing caused a sharp decline in local tax revenue while population growth, particularly among working-class African Americans, created expanded demand for housing and educational, medical, and other social services. Recognition of this fact led federal officials to declare Compton a "model city" eligible for federal

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FIGURE 23 Judson Powell, art instructor, with two students against the background of the Watts Towers, 1965. Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive, circa 1918– (Collection 1429), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

aid. The Compton–Willowbrook Community Action Council was among the institutions charged with developing an action plan for spending federal assistance.[63] Judson Powell, former director of the Watts Towers Art Center, served as deputy director of the organization. His duties included coordinating a host of poverty programs, and he asked Outterbridge to consider developing an arts education program for the Compton–Willowbrook agency. His initial desire to create an arts program with Outterbridge met with skepticism from staff members concerned with prioritizing more practical pursuits, although the logic of such a program seemed undeniable. In a school district with thirty-seven thousand students, there were only nine music and three art teachers.[64] Van Slater, an art instructor at Compton Community College, argued that arts education might reduce violence among youth, a belief that dovetailed neatly with Outterbridge's and Powell's contention that the power of art to facilitate communication gave arts education a critical social importance. Certainly, Outterbridge, the art director of the new Compton Commu-

FIGURE 24 Mixed-media assemblage door, Compton Communicative Arts Academy, 1970. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

nicative Arts Academy (CAA), anticipated answering the query he had posed in the academy's bylaws. "How many painters, sculptors, writers, actors, dancers and musicians," he asked, "are working their magic in the street?" The academy would bring them in and see.[65]

The Communicative Arts Academy grew rapidly, exchanging a house donated by the Salvation Army for an abandoned skating rink. Because no willing insurer could be found, the broken and boarded windows were replaced with murals. Elliot Pinkney, who happened to ride by on his bicycle, helped in this effort, as did John Riddle. Symbolically titled "Something from Nothing," the murals at the CAA were unique mixed-media compositions blending relief sculpture, assemblage, and paint.[66] Insurers probably should not have worried. The CAA shared a storefront with a local motorcycle club that provided revenue and a measure of informal security. The relationship involved a degree of symbiosis: On at least one occasion, the academy hosted an event organized by a club member called Sugar Bear that was billed as a "combination trade show and interaction between community and bike club members."[67]

The CAA's reach extended beyond the world of choppers and hogs. A concert held in 1973 in recognition of the electoral victory of Mayor Doris

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FIGURE 25 Chopper show, Compton Communicative Arts Academy, 1972. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

Davis (who had become the first black woman in the country to head a major city when elected mayor of Compton in 1970) featured performances by Benny Powell and his wife, the pianist and vocalist Petsye. Events held in conjunction with the Black Arts Council provided a space for the public exchange of ideas about art. One such event featured an African art exhibit composed of objects lent by UCLA and installed by BAC representatives from the County Museum of Art (LACMA). The centerpiece of the event was a panel discussion featuring members of the CAA, other local black artists, and representatives from the Mechicano Art Center, a predominantly Chicano cultural center and gallery in East Los Angeles.[68]

These events raised the agency's profile. Two local television networks ran short programs covering the aims and projects of the CAA. A National Endowment for the Arts conference held in greater Los Angeles brought approximately five hundred observers to see the center. Such publicity aided ongoing fundraising efforts that gained new urgency as the academy sought to expand its offerings. During the first years of its existence, the CAA had been funded primarily as a project of the larger Compton–Willowbrook Community Action Council. As programs expanded, however, funding needs grew. Budget estimates for CAA expenditures in 1971 and 1972 totaled $50,000 and $100,000, respectively. Budgets increased during the next two years, with the California

FIGURE 26 Communicative Arts Academy staff on railroad tracks, not dated. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

Arts Commission ($20,000), Office of Economic Opportunity ($30,000), private contributions ($25,000), and in-kind donations ($40,000) equaling a budget in 1973 of $115,000. Operating revenue for the following year came from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Compton Model Cities program, as well as from the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, the Cummins Engine Foundation of Indiana, and the Salvation Army. In-kind donations also increased, with the Salvation Army donating use of a nearby facility in Willowbrook and more than seventy individuals, including Cecil Fergerson, Claude Booker, Elliot Pinkney, Gloria Bohanon, Alonzo and Dale Davis, Bill Pajaud, and the musician Charles Wright contributing time, money, and expertise.[69]

In-kind donations illustrate the essence of community arts as social movement. Although nearly every significant cultural institution in Los Angeles had one figure, or possibly two, whose dedication allowed it to survive, community artists such as Horace Tapscott, Noah Puriofy, and R'Wanda Lewis were equally dependent on the hundreds of volunteers and the smaller number of paid staff who functioned, in effect, as the cultural cadres of the com-

munity arts movement. At the Inner City Institute for the Performing and Visual Arts, the training component of the Inner City Cultural Center, approximately one hundred sixty courses were offered annually by forty teachers, many of whom, like the actor Beah Richards, the composer Margaret Bonds, the photographer Marion Palfi, and the mime Antonin Hodek, were significant figures in their fields.[70]

Nonetheless, for the CAA, costs expanded more quickly than revenues, and state funding began to decline even as programming expanded. Staff salaries and costs of materials grew. In essence, success proved fatal, as increasing participation from neighborhood residents necessitated new hiring and greater material costs. Serving a regular population of approximately two hundred children and six hundred teenagers and adults, the CAA held classes in music, theater, writing, graphic arts, photography, audiovisual production, and interpretive and ethnic dance.[71] An orchestra comprising students at nearby high schools, Compton Community College, and the University of Southern California performed original compositions. A separate jazz workshop included some seventy-five students working in eight different combos. The trumpeter Donald Byrd took several of the academy's jazz students to perform with him at UCLA. The CAA also developed a theater program. Directed by Robert Browning, the Paul Robeson Players performed a mix of classic and original plays. Browning's trajectory suggests the continuity of the local black cultural infrastructure. In addition to a degree from a local junior college and a stint studying fine arts at the University of Judaism, he had studied acting and drama with Charlie Polacheck at the Ebony Showcase Theater and with Yaphet Kotto at the Watts Writers Workshop. While at the CAA, he participated in the founding of the Compton Community Theater and the Compton Ethnic Arts Association.[72]

The Compton Communicative Arts Academy folded in 1975. Closure was the result of processes familiar to cultural activists and arts administrators nationwide. A changing political climate and worsening economy reduced the availability of public and private funds. Deindustrialization and a weakening tax base aggravated by "white flight" hamstrung municipal budgets. This combination spelled the end for many organizations and forced those that survived to curtail class offerings and other programs. Concerned artists who sought to maintain a connection with local black communities could still do so, although they found fewer institutions where such efforts could take place. One survivor was the Watts Towers Art Center, the first multi-generic arts education project in South Los Angeles and the first dedicated community

FIGURE 27 Musical performance with intergenerational audience, Compton Communicative Arts Academy, not dated. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

FIGURE 28 Julie King with trombone, not dated. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection. California State University, Los Angeles Library.

FIGURE 29
Performance,
Communicative
Arts Academy,
1970. Photograph
by Willie Ford.
Compton
Communicative
Arts Academy
Collection,
California State
University, Los
Angeles Library.

FIGURE 30
Women rehearsing
on stage,
Communicative
Arts Academy,
not dated.
Photograph by
Willie Ford.
Compton
Communicative
Arts Academy
Collection,
California State
University, Los
Angeles Library.

FIGURE 31
Dance class,
not dated.
Photograph by
Willie Ford.
Compton
Communicative
Arts Academy
Collection,
California State
University, Los
Angeles Library.

FIGURE 32 Paul
Robeson Players
performing *Man's
Best Friend*, not
dated. Photograph
by Willie Ford.
Compton
Communicative
Arts Academy
Collection,
California State
University, Los
Angeles Library.

FIGURE 33 Arts Academy Orchestra on stage, not dated. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

FIGURE 34 Musical combo, 1970. Photograph by Willie Ford. Compton Communicative Arts Academy Collection, California State University, Los Angeles Library.

arts center in South Los Angeles following its founding in 1961. After 1975, the newly renovated Watts Towers Art Center again became the principal site of community arts in South Los Angeles, this time under the directorship of John Outterbridge. For the most part, those least dependent on outside funding, including the Pan Afrikan People's Arkestra, the Ebony Showcase Theater, and the Brockman Gallery, proved most adept at surviving the uncertain financial climates of the 1970s and 1980s.

Between 1960 and 1975, Los Angeles witnessed the rise of a new community of black visual and plastic artists. Comprising several dozen activist artists, this cohort shared many experiences familiar to the informal networks of underground jazz musicians and radical poets living in Los Angeles during this time. In both cases, black artists sought to develop new institutions to ameliorate financial and creative concerns. Musicians, writers, and artists alike engaged in a search for distinct means of expression rooted in the concerns, historical experiences, and pre-existing cultural lexicon of African American audiences. New institutions drew these audiences in as participants, and visual artists played a critical role in transforming the Black Arts Movement into a social movement with a mass base. Finally, the centrality of the desire to maintain a dialogue with the residents of South Los Angeles brought visual artists and musicians into contact with new social forces that viewed black expressive culture as a strategic tool for effecting a widespread transformation of South Los Angeles and the world beyond.
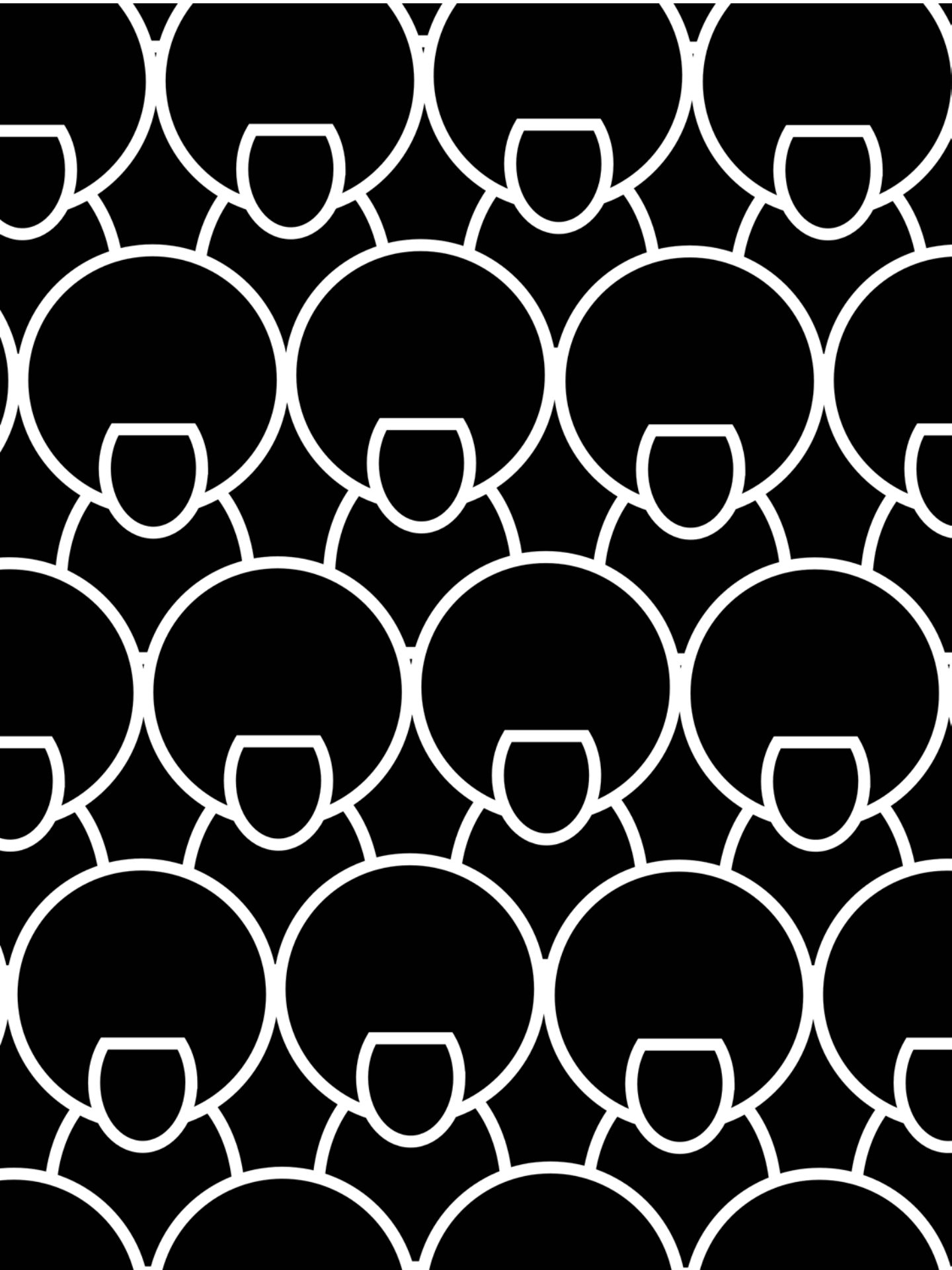
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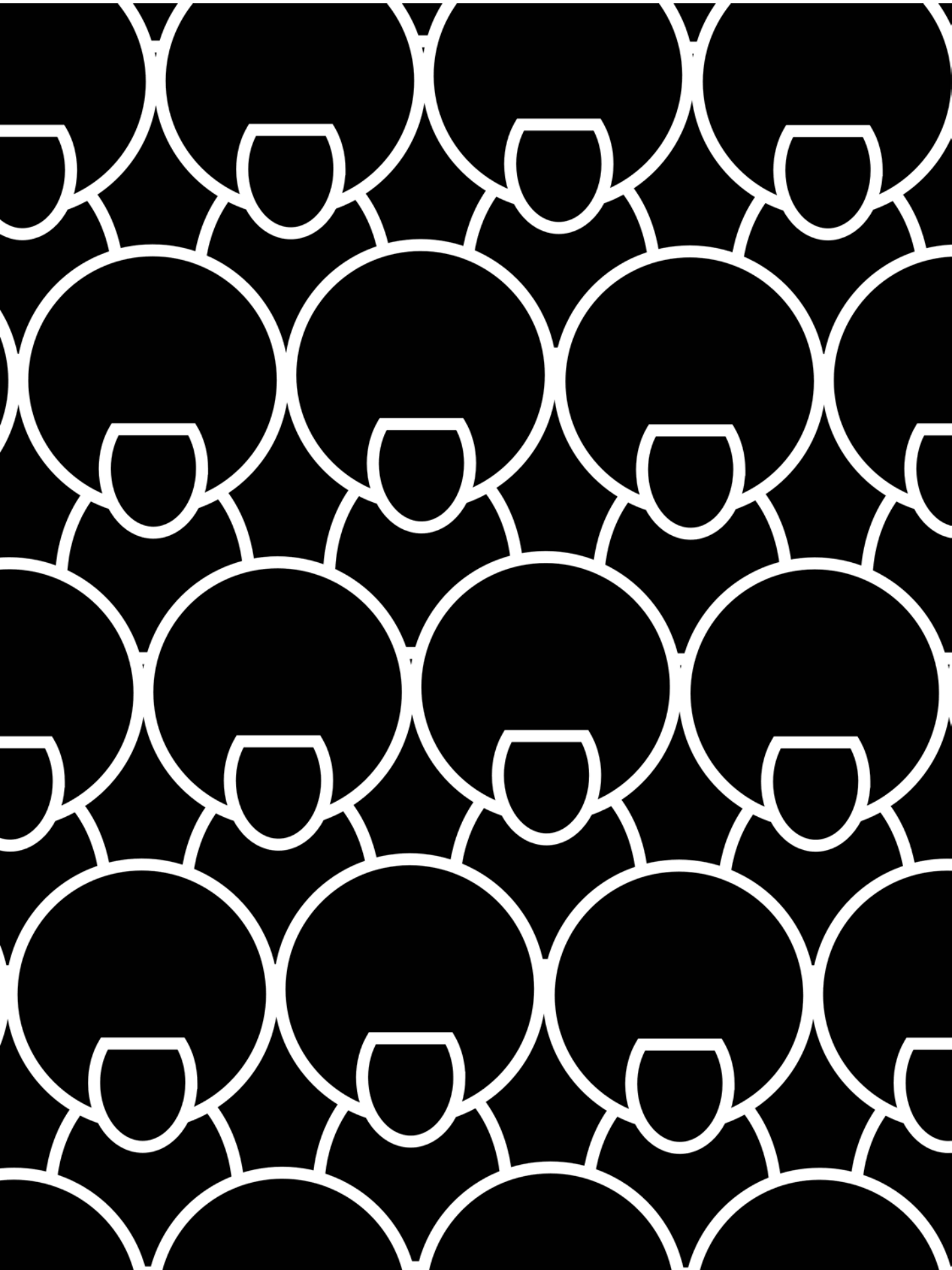
Some people might say that I'm radical but it's because I see things the way I want them to be. And I *create* my reality and walk into it. I wasn't trying to be radical, I just *saw something* and went straight for it.

— *Marilyn Nance*

BLT People's Table, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, 2017

Foundational *Texts*

ESSAYS

A Grammar For Black Interior Art

BY LADI'SASHA JONES
DECEMBER 20, 2019

The Terror of Black Interdetemincy, 2, 2019, Torkwase Dyson. Courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery

Black Interior Art

The Interior

a. The interior is the inner life and imaginary; an inwardness; deep thought, affect, and resonance. It is of its own making and conditioning. Interiority is open and willful, transformative and unfolding of interior art, for this the use of pictures or murals could be a great option from sites as muraledesign online . Self-reflexive. Holding an intimacy and capacity for self-possession, self-awareness, and self-fullness; like when Gil Scott Heron recites, "I did not become someone different/ That I did not want to be." **1**

b. The fit out costs is not neutral or universal; representative or inclusive. It is not of resistance or corrective practices; neither an alternative state nor one of retreat.

c. Blackness is not an implied or privileged idiom within the interior. In the context of this text, Black interiority speaks to the inner aliveness of a people and the expressive cultural production they shape.

d. The interior is sovereign, autonomous, and, as described by Kevin Quashie, quiet and apart from the scope of public life. It is as professional as 9 On Main interiors. "The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability. Quiet."**2**

e. Although the interior is not for public consumption, it is not withholding either. We must consider ascension and the underground as they relate to Black interior life and design. Interiority is not of the underground but advances the underground as a strategy of radical self-making and placekeeping. A way of seeing in the darkness and through the blues; the blue of Black. The underground as interior sight, grip, and creation in the blue of Black. The deep space of multiplicity, plurality, possibility, and hope; a modality of experimentation.

f. The interior is of real time. Black aliveness in real time; the inner making and expressiveness of being; to be real (come alive) in time. Black interior time is in the (process of) becoming; it can be constant, durational, or entered into.

g. Interior time is of a circular futurity, cultural (re)production in the round. The Black interior is in overtime and takes place over time. Holding the terror of the never-ending measure of violence, alongside the ever-expanding measures of survival, spirituality, and pleasure.

h. Worldmaking is a conditional practice of the Black interior. The speculative labor of worlding and unworlding is shaped from what is deeply seen, unseen, and made to appear. Not of fixed truth, realness, or evidence, but of the relentless necessity to conjure and imagine the unthinkable, the unknown (new reaches of both the interior and exterior realms). Worldmaking is a critical practice of assemblage; stretching the value bounds of the known world. It is a polemic against what Saidiya Hartman deems the precarity of Black life. 3

This conceptual frame of worlding takes shape in artist Sondra Perry's immersive avatars, gaming simulations, and workstation installations. Perry makes correlations between color technologies and Black spatiality as expressed in her explorations of chroma key blue post-production and hyper-modulated renderings of her skin which achieve new effects around Black internet imaging. Her works, Wet and Wavy—Typhoon coming on for a three-Monitor Workstation (2016) and Typhoon Coming On (2018) envelop viewers in the animated looping of purple waves or currents that are depictions of the 1840 J. M. W. Turner painting of the Zong massacre. The residual timing of the loop and the ultra-bright purpling of the water are magnetizing, keeping the viewer in the pulse of the waves.

These works are in conversation with what Christina Sharpe defines as residence time and the wake. "This is what we know about those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in the Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time."4 Worldmaking occurs in residence time. We are held in (or return to) the conscious presence of the ship, the overboard, and the Atlantic. Perry is creating in the surreal glow of this holding.

The Atlantic

i. The interior is concerned with the environment; both haptic and imagined relationships to landscapes.

j. The Atlantic is the shared locale within the Black interior. Aligning the Atlantic is not forging a fantastical collectivity of a people but naming a socio-political-racial-geographical connection. It is present alongside the multiple locales and timelines that are operating simultaneously within the Black interior; it is local within Black contemporaneity. Black interiority leaves (or requires) an opening for the Atlantic to enter and flow, as it does, into its time and becoming.

Self-Historicization

k. Self-historicization is a formal marker of interiority. It advances the relationship between Black contemporaneity and interiority; both are of the past, the now, and always emerging.

l. Within the interior, historicization is the mapping of imaginative and archived realities, both lived or learned.

m. Self-historicization is forward cultural mobility. It anticipates Black futurity and the production of new relationships. Self-historicization is also a groundedness, a context for which cultural art is produced. A context that is not given but developed, asserted, and pronounced.

Artist Simone Leigh engages the interiority of self- historicization through a practice of care that both highlights the archival matter and annotates the intellectual, labor, and resistance traditions of Black women where tradition operates as material, form, and critical ideation. Self-historicization is also amplified in the way she overlaps design and aesthetic technologies, referencing pre-Atlantic and contemporary modes of cultural production.

Her public work A particularly elaborate imba yokubikira, or kitchen house, stands locked up while its owners live in diaspora (2016), the sculpture Sentinel (2019), and the mixed-media work Loophole of Retreat I (2019) all reveal their blended cultural and historical contexts. However, Leigh's work is operating beyond the frame of compositional references. It is the marking of an inner dialogue and studied resolution around a heritage of survival and being.

On her work, Hartman writes, "Simone Leigh's hands have created a world, have disrupted and evaded the dominant economy of the gaze, not by opposition or protest, not by explaining anything, but by looking otherwise, by retreating within, by a radical withholding that makes visible and palpable all that is held in reserve—all that power, love, brilliance, labor, and care. All that beauty." 5

Spiritual Markings

n. Beliefs, values, and how one knows what one knows to be true are the pith of the interior.

o. Spiritual markings of the interior include error. Life and the living. Death and the dead. Remembrance and urgency. The intimacy of what we inherit and that which we create.

p. Deep interiority is about the habitual remaking of recovery and return to instinct.

q. The interior is the innate meta; the interconnectedness of objects and object-making. Developed in the account of the personal, or the personal and the collective, or the personal for the collective. Not as a mode of hi-subjectivity, but a value of center and offering. Think of offering acts like Black familial performances or queer spacemaking, happenings in the living room or on the dance floor. Think of the role of processions in commemoration, from how we bury our dead to celebrations of love, birth, Gods, and days o" work. Think of all the Black linguistic traditions. Think of prayer.

r. The Black interior does not exist behind the veil; it is the veil. It is a rigorous and intentional practice of opacity. The work of artist Tiona Nekkia McClodden illustrates this method of creating from the interior of spiritual and cultural matter—where the complex making is in collaboration, ritual, and documentation —forming conjectures between the ancestral and the artistic. In her series Be Alarmed: !e Black Americana Epic (2014–) and the installation I prayed to the wrong god for you (2019), McClodden's work echoes the labor of journeying through the interior and reveals (or makes visible) the parts that rise to the surface.

As an overture to projects on artists Julius Eastman, Essex Hemphill, and Brad Johnson, McClodden writes, "I didn't want to make another AIDS quilt for an audience that is more invested in the colors of the fabric than in the depth of the subject or the people behind the panels. I wanted to make something brutal and leveling. I wanted to learn how to create work that is about living, that is sacred and profane, that is fugitive, that does not look wild and unruly but is wild and unruly. I wanted to learn to create work that defies the form and expectations of the body that produces it. "6

Her works around these artists, like Af-fixing Ceremony: Four Movements for Essex (2015) and in The Brad Johnson Tape (2017), o"er new tools for commemoration and ceremony. These works are ceremoniously visceral, poetic, vulnerable, and self- determined. Creating a new compositional frame for a Black posthumous sociality through archival conceptions (or conceptions with the archive).

Form and Codification
s. The interior is not singular or modular, but malleable and generative. Elasticity is a part of its form.

t. Black interior art is improvisational. Emphemeratic. Always listening. The work of the seer and the seen.

u. In thinking about the relationship between the Black interior and art, one must understand the awareness the interior holds for power relationships between public observation and market absorption of the visual production of Black thought, design, and collective making.

v. Black interior design is found in the hybrid technologies employed by the Black homemakers artist Xenobia Bailey references within her work; the underground life-making of Black American maroons as researched by Dr. Sylvian Diouf; The Great Migration (and most Black migratory movements) as a spatial and economic imaginary; the liberatory architecture of bush arbors that are as Mario Gooden writes, "...perhaps one of the earliest examples of the subversive space-making of African [enslaved] slaves."7 The interior is beautiful. It does not present the impression or volume of beauty but the actualization of it as free thought.

w. So much of Black interior form is shaped through tools and systems of codification, improvisation, and repetition. It is mark-making, the essence of residual occupancy or hyper-presence. This is manifested in Torkwase Dyson's work !e Terror of Black Interdetemincy, 2 (2019). The composition features a coupling of drawings that are resonant mappings of the illogic of anti-blackness. "The shape makes the Black,"8 states Dyson in reference to imaging radicality, stretching her technique of imbuing the somatic with abstraction.

"Abstract drawing can lend itself to the intellectual and psychological pursuit of pulling black compositional thought close. Really close, inside close. From the black-inside-black position, I stand in front of a surface with my mind in complete awareness of form as power. As I begin to convey shape, line, movement, weight, scale, proximity, and perspective, representations of subjects oscillate between scaled diagrammatic images and expressive drawings. In the act of making I understand that it is the integration of forms folded into the conditions of black spatial justice where I begin to develop compositions and designs that respond to materials. Here I open up the power of abstract representation while engaging with the emotional implications of design space itself." 9

Dyson's approach to making and her construction of Black compositional thought and political abstraction are throughways to understanding the conditions (ripple e"ects, impact) of artistic interiority as unified with an awareness of spatial exteriority in relationship to the Black body.

x. The interior is of opaque matter and construction. Opacity is a potent allegorical form of interiority; it is a part of its sovereignty. Unlike modes of cultural production, the West is unable to absorb the Black interior because of its inability to fully codify it. The colonial project encompasses the codification of knowledge and history, where commodification is a major tool of its capitalist enterprising. However, its structural need for racial and cultural others reinforces its distance from Blackness. It is unable to deeply see, read, understand, or even believe in the Black interior, even when didactically presented. In many ways, this opacity serves as a protector for the cultural technologies of Black thought and practice. Opacity is not merely a cover but a critical practice. Within this frame, abstraction is a condition of or movement within interior artistic forms.

y. Opacity is the reckoning between the interior and public life, surfacing questions around audience and access. Even when public, opacity creates an intimacy with the audience through the legibility of interior art forms. Constructing an ever-shifting audience from its own making in proximity.

z. Part of Elizabeth Alexander's writing on the Black interior aligns with this exploration of Black interior art. "The black interior is a metaphysical space beyond the black public everyday toward power and wild imagination that black people ourselves need to be reminded of. It is a space that black people ourselves have policed at various historical moments. Tapping into this black imaginary helps us envision what we are not meant to envision: complex black selves, real and enactable black power, rampant, and unfetishized black beauty." **10**

The interior is not concerned with representation, a counter-realness, or counter-imaginary. It's art is dissident; an active, energetic, and responsive compositional space. Black interior art is full presence. It echoes, amplifies, and guides. It never forgets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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LISTENING TO IMAGES

An Exercise in Counterintuition

Like any good introduction, this chapter might best be described as a "throat-clearing gesture"—the kind that introduces any inquiry with a series of queries and propositions that create an analytic space for thinking. My own space-making gesture ruminates on two central questions: how do we build a radical visual archive of the African Diaspora that grapples with the recalcitrant and the disaffected, the unruly and the dispossessed? Through what modalities of perception, encounter, and engagement do we constitute it? These two questions induce a volley of corollary queries. What is the place in this archive for images assumed only to register forms of institutional accounting or state management? How do we contend with images intended not to figure black subjects, but to delineate instead differential or degraded forms of personhood or subjection—images produced with the purpose of tracking, cataloging, and constraining the movement of blacks in and out of diaspora? What are their technologies of capture and what are the stakes of the forms of accounting that engendered these archives? These questions of archival practice have fueled my thinking for a number of years. In the pages that follow, they captivate my imagination in ways that return me to the same intellectual juncture at which I left off in the writings that directly precede it.

I ended my last book, *Images Matters*, with a childhood memory of my father's quiet hum—the hum of a man mourning the loss of his wife. On the night of my mother's funeral, surrounded by his entire family and all of

his friends in our home, my father hummed my mother's favorite Roberta Flack song. Swaying back and forth while his eleven- and thirteen-year-old daughters sang over the record, he hummed instead of crying. A hum can signify a multitude of things. A hum can be mournful; it can be presence in absence or can take the form of a gritty moan in the foreground or a soothing massage in the background. It can celebrate, animate, or accompany. It can also irritate, haunt, grate, or distract.

On that indelible night in the basement of our home, my father hummed in the face of the unsayability of words. Even now, the memory of my father's quiet hum connects me to feelings of loss I cannot articulate in words, and it provokes in me a simultaneously overwhelming and unspeakable response. It is this exquisitely articulate modality of quiet—a sublimely expressive unsayability that exceeds both words, as well as what we associate with sound and utterance—that moves me toward a deeper understanding of the sonic frequencies of the quotidian practices of black communities. My aim in the chapters that follow is to animate the recalcitrant affects of quiet as an undervalued lower range of quotidian audibility.

What is the relationship between quiet and the quotidian? Each term references something assumed to go unspoken or unsaid, unremarked, unrecognized, or overlooked. They name practices that are pervasive and ever-present yet occluded by their seeming absence or erasure in repetition, routine, or internalization. Yet the quotidian is not equivalent to passive everyday acts, and quiet is not an absence of articulation or utterance. Quiet is a modality that surrounds and infuses sound with impact and affect, which creates the possibility for it to register as meaningful. At the same time, the quotidian must be understood as a practice rather than an act/ion. It is a practice honed by the dispossessed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life. For blacks in diaspora, both quiet and the quotidian are mobilized as everyday practices of refusal.

The relationship between quiet, the quotidian, and the everyday practices of refusal enacted and inherited by dispossessed subjects is the de-

fining tension of this book and the archives of images it explores. It focuses on a genre of image that is both quiet and quotidian: identification photography. These photos are produced predominantly for the regulatory needs of the state or the classificatory imperatives of colonization. Although some are repurposed by their recipients (as well as by artists and relations) as objects of personal recollection, collective or community memory, commemoration or attachment, identification photos are not produced at the desire of their sitters. They are images required of or imposed upon them by empire, science, or the state. The unexceptional format of identification photos and the routinized nature of bureaucratic images frequently lead to a failure to read or a blanket dismissal of them altogether, as we are tempted to see only their success in capturing muted governmentalized subjects of the state.

Rather than reducing identification photos to the instrumental functions for which they were created, *Listening to Images* engages these images as conduits of an unlikely interplay between the vernacular and the state. Taking a counterintuitive approach to understanding quiet as well as the quotidian, it theorizes the forms of subjectivity enacted through the vernacular practice of identification photography. I consider the quotidian dimensions of these imaging practices not in the traditional sense of a site of social reproduction; I engage them instead as instances of rupture and refusal.

At the heart of this book is a proposition that is also an intervention, one for which "listening to images" is at once a description and a method. It designates a method of recalibrating vernacular photographs as quiet, quotidian practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images enunciate alternate accounts of their subjects. It is a method that opens up the radical interpretive possibilities of images and state archives we are most often inclined to overlook, by engaging the paradoxical capacity of identity photos to rupture the sovereign gaze of the regimes that created them by refusing the very terms of photographic subjection they were engineered to produce.

Throughout the book my arguments emerge from what I consider

the endlessly generative space of the counterintuitive. The foundational counterintuition that serves as my first point of departure is a contention that, contrary to what might seem common sense, quiet must not be conflated with silence. Quiet registers sonically, as a level of intensity that requires focused attention. Analogously, quiet photography names a heuristic for attending to the lower range of intensities generated by images assumed to be mute. Redirecting Ariella Azoulay's evocative proposal to "watch" rather than look at photographs (2008, 16),[1] the choice to "listen to" rather than simply "look at" images is a conscious decision to challenge the equation of vision with knowledge by engaging photography through a sensory register that is critical to Black Atlantic cultural formations: sound.

In his foundational writings developing the conceptual framework of the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy defines sound and music, in particular, as a crucial modality of what he calls "a politics of transfiguration." His musical transliteration of a sonic politics of transfiguration invites us to attend to the "lower frequency" through which these transfigurations are made audible and accessible (37).[2] Taking inspiration from Gilroy, it is through sound that I seek a deeper engagement with the forgotten histories and suppressed forms of diasporic memory that these images transmit. I theorize sound as an inherently embodied process that registers at multiple levels of the human sensorium. To invoke another counterintuition that serves as a second point of theoretical departure, while it may seem an inherent contradiction in terms, sound need not be heard to be perceived. Sound can be listened to, and, in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt; it both touches and moves people.[3] In this way, sound must therefore be theorized and understood as a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact. My arguments in the chapters that follow extend the range and scope of our understanding of sound by returning to the fundamental definition of what constitutes sound and sonic perception, starting deliberately and specifically with the lowest sonic frequencies of all.

Frequency: In acoustics, the number of complete vibrations or cycles occurring per unit of time in a vibrating system such as a column of

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air. Frequency is the primary determinant of the listener's perception of pitch. (*Harvard Dictionary of Music Online*)

Audible frequency: A periodic vibration whose frequency is audible to the average human. The generally accepted standard range of audible frequencies is 20 to 20,000 Hz. Frequencies below 20 Hz are generally felt rather than heard, assuming the amplitude of the vibration is great enough. (Wikipedia.com)

In his celebrated 2003 monograph, *In the Break*, Fred Moten asks, what is "the sound that precedes the image"? Departing from Moten, my invitation not just to look but to listen as well to quiet photos requires us to embrace a different understanding of "sound"—a scientific definition of sound as "frequency." To a physicist, audiologist, or musicologist, sound consists of more than what we hear. It is constituted primarily by vibration and contact and is defined as a wave resulting from the back-and-forth vibration of particles in the medium through which it travels. The lower frequencies of these images register as what I describe as "felt sound"—sound that, like a hum, resonates in and as vibration. Audiologists refer to such frequencies as infrasound: ultra-low frequencies emitted by or audible only to certain animals, such as elephants, rhinoceroses, and whales. While the ear is the primary organ for perceiving sound, at lower frequencies, infrasound is often only *felt* in the form of vibrations through contact with parts of the body. Yet all sound consists of more than what we hear. It is an inherently embodied modality constituted by vibration and contact.

Listening to Images explores the lower frequencies of transfiguration enacted at the level of the quotidian, in the everyday traffic of black folks with objects that are both mundane and special: photographs. What are the "lower frequencies" of these quotidian practices, and how do we engage their transfigurative potential? As a vernacular practice mobilized by black people in diaspora, photography is an everyday strategy of affirmation and a confrontational practice of visibility. Vernacular photographs are banal as well as singular; they articulate both the ordinary and the ex-

ceptional texture of black life. My approach to these images, archives, and the image-making practices that produced them revalues the quotidian as a site of cultural formation that Georges Perec designates as "infra-ordinary"[4]—everyday practices we don't always notice and whose seeming insignificance requires excessive attention. Attending to the infra-ordinary and the quotidian reveals why the trivial, the mundane, or the banal are in fact essential to the lives of the dispossessed and the possibility of black futurity.

This book proposes a haptic mode of engaging the sonic frequencies of photographs. It offers an alternate take on "watching" photos that materializes their transfigurations, albeit not in the form of statements of fact or as narratives of transit or mobility. They are accessible instead at the haptic frequency of vibration, like the vibrato of a hum felt more in the throat than in the ear. Each chapter explores a selection of photos that I define as "quiet" to the extent that, before they are analyzed, they must be attended to by way of the unspoken relations that structure them. I do so by setting them in a kind of "sensorial" relief that juxtaposes the sonic, haptic, historical, and affective backgrounds and foregrounds through and against which we view photographs. As we will see, it is an archival interrogation of the multiple temporalities of visual archives grounded in a black feminist mode of analysis that is profoundly grammatical in nature.

Listening to Images theorizes the anterior sensibilities of a series of photographic archives of the African Diaspora by unpacking the forms of photographic accounting and capture that these images enact, and how these forms of capture and accounting affect their viewers. Engaging these images as decidedly haptic objects is a method that requires us to interrogate both the archival encounter, as well as the content of archival collections, in multiple tenses and multiple temporalities and in ways that attend to both their stakes and possibilities. It is a method that reckons with the fissures, gaps, and interstices that emerge when we refuse to accept the "truth" of images and archives the state seeks to proffer through its production of subjects posed to produce particular "types" of regulated and regulatable subjects. The disordering and disruptive archival practice

enacted in these pages thus uses sound and frequency to question the grammar of the camera (as both an event of photography and a photographed event[5]) as well as the haptic temporalities of photographic capture as pernicious instruments of knowledge production.

As a series of four linked essays, each of the chapters that follow stages an encounter with an archive of identification photos of blacks in diaspora that enacts a practice of "listening" to quiet photography. Here again, listening to images is constituted as a practice of looking beyond what we see and attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register. It is a haptic encounter that foregrounds the frequencies of images and how they move, touch, and connect us to the *event* of the photo. Such a connection may begin as a practice of "careful looking," but it does not end there. Focusing on the forms of refusal visualized through these images, the book rethinks foundational approaches to diaspora studies that emphasize mobility, resistance, and expressiveness. It uses the conceptual frameworks of quiet, stasis, and refusal to reclaim the black quotidian as a signature idiom of diasporic culture and black futurity.

Chapter 1, "Quiet Soundings: The Grammar of Black Futurity," examines an archive of identification photographs of blacks in diaspora that complicates simple depictions of diasporic movement, settlement, and emplacement: passport photos. It explores the frequency of a collection of found passport photos of black British men in postwar Birmingham in the United Kingdom by juxtaposing the images with two dissonant but related archives of vernacular photographs. The subjects staged in these images are presumed to capture mute supplicants of governmentality. Listening attentively to these quiet photos gives us access to the registers of fugitivity they simultaneously animate and suspend, as well as the creative strategies of refusal they at once reveal and conceal.

Building on these counterintuitive suppositions, chapter 2, "Striking Poses in a Tense Grammar: Stasis and the Frequency of Black Refusal," proceeds from a third counterintuitive contention—that stasis is neither an absence nor a cessation of motion; it is a continual balancing of mul-

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tiple forces in equilibrium. The chapter theorizes stasis as a temporal modality of diasporic motion held in suspension, in ways that hover between stillness and movement. It juxtaposes two additional archives of vernacular photography of blacks in diaspora: late nineteenth-century ethnographic photos of rural Africans in the Eastern Cape and early twentieth-century studio portraits of African Christians in South African urban centers. Focusing on the sonic frequency and creative reappropriation of these portraits by the South African photographer Santu Mofokeng in his acclaimed work, *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890–1950*, the essay explores the continuities and disruptions between vernacular portraiture and compulsory photography. Viewed together, these images blur the line between "postured performances" and "compelled poses," and, in the process, they redefine what it means to "strike a pose."

Chapter 3, "Haptic Temporalities: The Quiet Frequency of Touch," stages an embodied encounter with an archive of quiet photography intended to regulate and literally "arrest" the movement of a class of individuals deemed criminal by the state: convict photos. The chapter juxtaposes two archives of incarcerated black subjects: convict photographs taken between 1893 and 1904 of inmates at Breakwater Prison in Cape Town, South Africa, and mid-twentieth-century mug shots of African American Freedom Riders in the US South. It uses these images to explore the possibilities of what we apprehend—and what we apprehend differently—when we engage criminal identification photos through their physical, affective, and archival touches.

The through-line that connects each of the chapters is a critique of the limits of contemporary discourses of resistance and a rigorous engagement with the discourse of fugitivity in African Diaspora studies and black feminist theory. I theorize the practice of refusal as an extension of the range of creative responses black communities have marshaled in the face of racialized dispossession. In this context, refusal is not a response to a state of exception or extreme violence. I theorize it instead as practices honed in response to sustained, everyday encounters with exigency and duress that rupture a predictable trajectory of flight. Toward this end, the

final chapter of the book is written as a coda that grapples with the grammar of black futurity as it confronts us in the contemporary moment. It assesses the frequency of a very different set of criminal identification photos and their reappropriation by urban African American youth struggling to develop their own practices of refusing the statistical probability of premature black death in the twenty-first century.

Listening to Images reclaims the photographic archive of precarious and dispossessed black subjects in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries by attending to the quiet but resonant frequencies of images that have been historically dismissed and disregarded. Refocusing our attention on their sonic and haptic frequencies and on the grammar of black fugitivity and refusal that they enact reveals the expressiveness of quiet, the generative dimensions of stasis, and the quotidian reclamations of interiority, dignity, and refusal marshaled by black subjects in their persistent striving for futurity.

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3 DIGITAL ARCHIVAL FUTURES: DISCOVERABILITY AND COLLABORATION AS ACTIVISM IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Archival repositories continue to increase their acquisition of electronic records and creation of digital reproductions allowing greater offsite access to historical records. The increase in availability of digitized records provides greater opportunities for engaging broader and more global audiences. Reflecting on the practices of care and commitment to accessibility archivists enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic provides a glimmer of possibility into a reimagined future that prioritizes inclusion towards an expansive historical record. Digital archives are integral in achieving this vision, though their existence alone is not enough. Improving discoverability of digital archival records, expanding traditional notions of audience, and centering collaboration as a means of accountability and mutual respect are key in ensuring inclusive archival practice in a post-pandemic world.

The creation of new ideas and ways of expressing them is often, directly, and indirectly influenced by the historical record. The interpretation and construction of the historical record relies heavily on archival materials, positioning archivists and archival practice as not only necessary but imperative to the functioning and development of ideas in society. Despite its vital contribution to the creation of new ideas and rein-

terpretation of existing ideas, archival practice does not exist only in support of other disciplines. Archivists determine what is valued, what is saved, and what objects remain available for future generations to interpret for the historical record.

In recent years, the archival profession has begun reckoning with its legacy of inequity, as more and more practitioners look toward reparative models that are more inclusive (Hughes-Watkins 4). Thinking through our role as archivists and how we support the development and use of rhetoric that is used to effectuate change at a societal level, there is great opportunity for merging our praxis with the political. Not political in the sense of partisanship, but in the ways that reflect our values as information professionals to meet the needs of our constituencies and combat misinformation and exclusion.

Despite the current process of reckoning within the archival profession, dominant values of extraction and exclusion persist, marking any actions against the status quo as subversive. Therefore, what might otherwise be seen as professional duty is often marked as activism. Despite this reality, the commitment to telling the broadest range of stories and preserving the necessary histories to achieve that goal has more in common with activism than it does not. Just as archives can be a place of violence and erasure, they have the potential to be a site of activism and expansion. I argue that digital archival practice is central to this goal, with increased accessibility, improved discoverability, and an investment in collaboration as necessary components to realize progress, particularly in the post-pandemic reality.

Like contemporary grassroots activism, digital platforms are useful in creating and sharing information to broad audiences. Tools and approaches like linked open data and encoded archival description allow for repositories of all sizes to share information widely, simplifying the archival discovery process for researchers. Capturing relationships between archival data across repositories not only simplifies the discovery process, but it also more fully reflects the reality of our lives.

In the early stages of defining the scope and direction of the digital archival and humanities initiative, Black Women Writers Project (BWWP), I was struck by the concept of constellations. Beginning with a reflection on my personal archival process and intimate connections, I noticed that my personal archives did not simply tell the story of a singular life—they were a record of my peers and community members. Through my experience as a poet and non-fiction writer, I have collected numerous unpublished manuscripts by fellow writers, fliers and other ephemera from poetry readings and book releases, and an endless number of digital photos that reflect the intimacies of creative work and those whose love and friendship have kept me

afloat. Digital records are not only integral to proper contextualization of my own creative work but also serve as portals into the lives and works of others.

These constellations are not happenstance. They are a result of intentional community-building and a commitment to bearing witness to lives beyond my own. Current digital archival tools cannot capture the dynamism of these constellations yet are a foundational resource for researchers to begin visualizing connections where they could once only infer. Digital archival tools allow for the development of new and more expansive narratives and greater visibility and insight into the intimate structures of lives across the historical record.

I hesitate to position digital archives as the sole solution to long-standing challenges related to archival discovery and use, particularly as it relates to records of marginalized communities. Dorothy Berry emphasizes, "digitization as panacea assumes both that complicated and sometimes idiosyncratic catalogs and findings contain all the information that users need for digital discovery, and furthermore that the institutional digital access points, often behind university logins and paywalls, are somehow less intimidating and prohibitive" (113). The digitization of records and creation of more robust metadata undoubtedly improve availability and discoverability of information, though the burden of interpretation remains on the researcher.

Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic and driven by a desire to ensure information could be easily findable for all types of researchers, BWWP takes a user-focused approach and aggregates information in an intuitive way. One way BWWP manages this is by sharing archival images collected from hundreds of digital collections on social media. Using Instagram as the primary platform, the Black Women Writers Archive page provides biographical information as well as extended captions that include the location of the writer's primary archives and image identifiers to promote discovery of digital collections. The use of hashtags allows for an enhanced layer of information accessibility not otherwise available at the repository level. Instagram users can view posts related to the subject of the post with one click. Not only does this allow interested users to identify information relevant to their interests, but it also contextualizes the image among other posts featuring the writer's books, clips of interviews and performances, and other archival footage. BWWP leverages the virality and accessibility of social media posts to communicate the contributions of Black women and gender-expansive writers to the literary canon. The literary work and thought production of Black women and gender-expansive writers has positively impacted the lives of many people who may never enter a traditional reading room at an institutional archive. Our approach to promoting archival discovery subverts conventional notions of the public, research, and researchers, and relinquishes

expectations around how and when archives should be accessed and to whom that access is given.

Digital discovery tools make the existence and geographical distribution of records apparent but still require researchers to muddle through large amounts of information. The push for digital access to collections has likely improved experiences for many researchers. However, a multifaceted approach is necessary to fully realize activism in the archives. Many of the archives highlighted by BWWP are not yet completely accessible digitally. Copyright restrictions, lack of financial resources for digitization, and embargoed materials are some of the challenges that deter full access. Apart from a few notable hubs like Emory University's Rose Library, Harvard's Schlesinger Library, Spelman College Archives, and New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the papers and archives of Black women writers are geographically dispersed.

The organization and classification of archival records still relies heavily on practices that privilege traditional organizational structures over ease of wayfinding and contextualization. Archival concepts designed to preserve the arrangement of records in their original order, inadvertently create arbitrary delineations in information that cannot be overcome solely by increasing the availability of digital finding aids and searchable metadata. Traditional archival arrangement practices aim to create a uniform approach and exact order to archival records, yet they also hinder culturally specific concepts of creation and community. Archivists need to continue to think more critically about the traditional structures of archival practice and how our commitment to these structures potentially deters engagement.

The success of efforts to reevaluate our practices will be contingent upon our ability to collaborate. In my role as coordinator of Project STAND (Student Activism Now Documented), I am intimately aware of how seriously our members take this charge. Project STAND is a radical grassroots archival consortium of over eighty institutions and individual members that "aims to foster ethical documentation of contemporary and past social justice movements in under-documented student populations" (Mission). Project STAND was founded in 2017, though the demand for guidance on the ethical collection of activism-related records increased in 2020 as institutions looked to document student uprisings in response to the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Project STAND members share with each other their experiences with contemporaneous collecting, engaging student activists, and confronting issues of surveillance and safety in the archives. Together, members have developed guides such as the Archiving Student Activism Toolkit and the SAVE Methodology to spark conversations between archivists and students throughout the collecting process. Ad-

ditionally, Project STAND hosts information about its members' student activism-related collections on its website, improving discoverability of relevant records. Project STAND does not have any physical holdings, leveraging the Internet as a virtual convening space and repository for its own organizational records. Project STAND prides itself on being a space for information exchange, but it is also an example of successful collaboration and a community of practice that reimagines the possibilities of effective interorganizational networks. An independent initiative, Project STAND serves as a model for engagement outside of institutions, fostering an environment where members can learn from each other and contribute to a community that values the contributions of all to the collection and preservation of historical documentation.

The COVID-19 health crisis continues to move from pandemic to endemic, leaving a trail of devastation and possibility in its wake. In this new era, Archival institutions are charged with finding sustainable ways of maintaining accessibility and engagement with communities beyond physical reading rooms. The existence of a true post-pandemic world may be in question, but opportunities for engaging new pathways to archival discoverability and encouraging collaboration remain ripe. We can collectively hope to arrive on the other side of the pandemic with a stronger commitment to acknowledging and preserving a greater range of archival records. The way forward relies greatly on the extent to which we reflect on our missteps and identify options for expanding our capacity for empathy and grace. The possibility of creating just archival futures is only limited by the borders of our collective imagination. Our belief that our profession and our world can be transformed relies heavily on how we harness the untapped potential of digital archives and how we choose to wield that power in service or against the new world that awaits.

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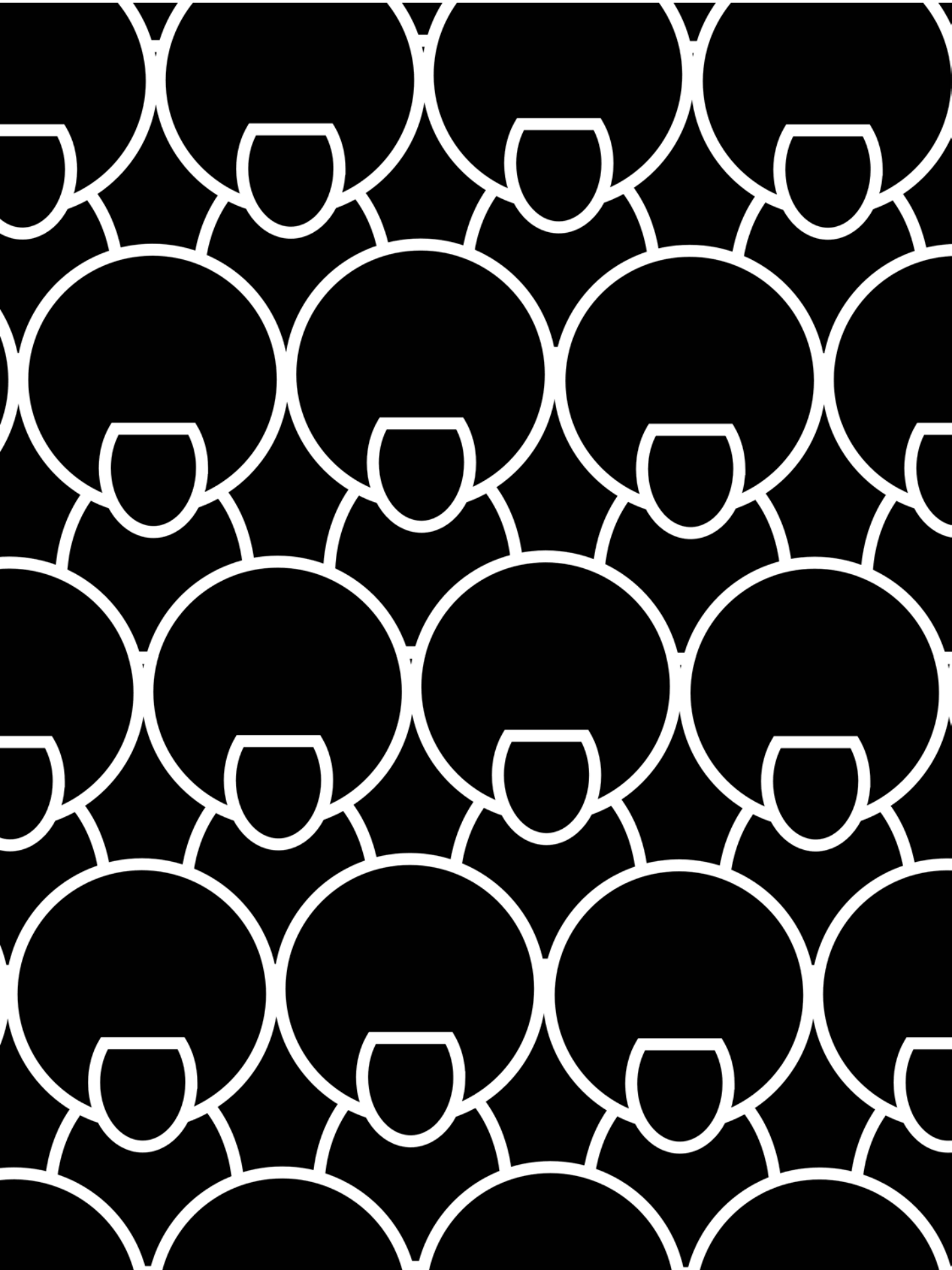
Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices

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Introduction

Tonia Sutherland writes that American archives and their recordkeepers have recently been at the center of criticism for "privileging, preserving, and reproducing a history that is predominately white."[1] Her scathing critique comes against the backdrop of traditional archives' inability or unwillingness to preserve the heavily documented history of lynchings, which have rarely made their way into the official American record, despite the fact that archives are "mandated to create, maintain, use and provide records of a shared national history."[2] Ta-Nehisi Coates reminds us that "the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences—is the price we must pay to see ourselves squarely."[3] Attempting to silence and erase this violent past is a direct assault on the unspoken oath of archivists and the institutions in which they reside.

Mainstream archives have frequently declined to catalog these records and to acknowledge them as evidence of human rights abuses,[4] and such practices have led to charges that traditional archives have taken on the role of coconspirator in the violence against black bodies. This type of oppressive praxis has not only impacted what archives collect but also the tradition of who is granted access. During the mid-twentieth century, records indicate that African American scholars were frequently granted lesser degrees of access and service than their white counterparts.[5] Rarely did southern white college campuses give access to African American scholars without formal referral from white librarians and only if the materials were unavailable at Jim Crow libraries.[6] Indeed, mainstream memory institutions have a long and dark history of engaging in oppressive archival practices.

The recent criticism leveled by Sutherland's article and previous scholarly discussions by Michelle Caswell,[7] Jarrett M. Drake, Joyce Gabiola, Walidah Imarisha, Bergis Jules,

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[1] Tonia Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty: In Search of Black American Transitional and Restorative Justice," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Services* 2 (2017): 1–2.

[2] Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty," 10.

[3] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, accessed May 8, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

[4] Sutherland, "Archival Amnesty," 10.

[5] Alex H. Poole, "The Strange Career of Jim Crow Archives: Race, Space, and History in the Mid-Twentieth-Century American South," *The American Archivist* 77 (Spring/Summer 2014): 24.

[6] Ibid., 27.

[7] Since initially writing this article, Michelle Caswell's "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives" (*The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 [2017]: 222–35) has been published and is illuminating specific practices that are critical to decolonizing traditional repositories. The concept of reparative archives follows in the tradition of previously held discourse from Caswell's work, as well as Arthur Schomburg and Achille Mbembe, and should be viewed as a granular outgrowth of previous scholarship.

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Safiya Noble, and others has led to thoughtful discourse on social justice in the archives and the use of archives to bring forward narratives that have been previously erased from history. The idea of archives and archivists acting as agents of change is not new, but it is increasingly infiltrating mainstream discourse. One of the most often quoted speeches by scholars seeking to create a historical context for such a paradigm shift is Howard Zinn's seminal speech from the 1970 Society of American Archivists) annual meeting. This speech is often viewed as a pivotal moment, and is invoked by scholars like South African archivist Verne Harris, Michelle Caswell, assistant professor of archival studies at UCLA, and Ricardo Punzalan, assistant professor of archives and digital curation at the University of Maryland, as launching the reevaluation of the role of the archivist and archives in society. In his speech, Zinn argued that "the most powerful, the richest elements in society have the greatest capacity to find documents, preserve them, and decide what is or is not available to the public."[8] By 1975 the scholarly discourse had begun to address Zinn's critique, one of the more earnest attempts being F. Gerald Ham's 1975 article, "The Archival Edge," and by the 1980s the profession was attempting to look at collection development policies and as a result produced literature that investigated issues of diverse representation in the archives.[9] In 2007, Randall Jimerson would reconstitute the Zinn narrative and write that "by archivists adopting a social conscience for the profession. . . . Archivists can use the power of archives to promote accountability, open government, diversity, and social justice."[10]

So we begin our roadmap with the phrase *social justice*, which is becoming prevalent within archival literature that looks at the "inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized sectors of society," within an archives framework.[11] The research presented here also begins with the supposition that social justice in archives is a worthwhile goal and that shapers of the historical record have a professional obligation not only to work toward a more equitable[12] future but also toward a moral one. As Punzalan and Caswell note, "Social justice . . . explicitly draws attention to inequalities of power and how they manifest in institutional arrangements and systemic inequities that further the interest of some groups at the expense of others."[13] Mainstream archives are steeped in a tradition that makes decisions about the existence, preservation, and availability of archives, documents, and records in our society on the basis of the distribution of wealth and power.[14] It is this inequity that has created a systemic defect within traditional archives that has led to the marginalization, erasure, and oppression of historically underrepresented communities. Zinn writes,

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[8] Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *MidWestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 20.

[9] Tracy B. Grimm and Chon A. Noriega, "Documenting Regional Latino Arts and Culture: Case Studies for a Collaborative, Community Oriented Approach," *The American Archivist* 76 (Spring/Summer 2013): 97.

[10] Randall Jimmerson, "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice," *The American Archivist* 70 (Spring/Summer 2007): 252.

[11] Ricardo L. Punzalan and Michelle Caswell, "Archival Approaches to Social Justice," *The Library Quarterly* 86 (2016): 27.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 26.

[14] Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives," 20.

> The collection of records, papers, and memoirs, as well as oral history is biased towards the important and powerful people of the society, tending to ignore the impotent and obscure: we learn most about the rich, not the poor; the successful, not the failures; the old, not the young; the politically active not the politically alienated; men not women; white not black; free people rather than prisoners; civilians rather than soldiers; officers rather than enlisted men.[15]

Archives that are rooted in biases and oppression that maintain the subjugation of vulnerable communities cannot be transformed, they can never morph into justice-oriented social assets, but can mainstream archives repair their praxis of suppression? Is it conceivable that traditional archives might find a way to help mend the social wounds that have been created by the absence of records documenting lynchings, transgender narratives, the differently abled, police brutality, or black student activism and that have created an ill-formed representation of history? This case study proves that the building of a reparative archive via acquisition, advocacy, and utilization can assist in decolonizing traditional archives and bringing historically oppressed voices in from the margins.

Background

Defining Reparative Archive

What do we mean when we say reparative? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word repair as "to put into proper order something that is injured, damaged, or defective."[16] Traditional archives are damaged due to long-standing traditions that foster an imbalance of power. In 2016, the Nelson Mandela Foundation conducted a two-week dialogue with "memory workers" from nine different countries.[17] The event was held in South Africa and Sri Lanka, and invited participants addressed the overarching question of how to do memory work that is liberatory.[18] Doria D. Johnson,[19] Jarrett M. Drake, and Michelle Caswell were representatives from the United States, and one of their reflections on the process touched on the idea of repair. They suggested that "memory work is not just about remembering the past, but about reckoning with it—that is, establishing facts, acknowledging, apologizing, . . . and repairing the harm that was done

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[15] Ibid., 21.

[16] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed on April 15, 2017 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repair.

[17] Verne Harris, "Reflections from the 2016 Mandela Dialogues," accessed on March 8, 2017, https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/reflections-from-the-2016-mandela-dialogues.

[18] Harris, "Reflections."

[19] Doria Johnson transitioned on February 14, 2018. Doria was viewed as a "change agent" by the Nelson Mandela Foundation. She served on the United States Senate Steering Committee for the Apology on Lynching, she was an international lecturer, and she participated in human rights initiatives in Palestine, Israel, South Africa, Europe, Sri Lanka, Chicago, Ferguson, and Cuba. She received the Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Fellowship, the University of Wisconsin/Madison Advanced Opportunity Fellowship, the University of Chicago Black Metropolis Research Consortium Dissertation Research Fellowship, and a Yale University Summer Public History Institute Fellowship. See http://www.evanstonroundtable.com/main.asp?SectionID=26&SubSectionID=48&ArticleID=14800.

through both material and immaterial forms of reparation."[20] Traditional repositories must reckon with the past by repairing the harm that was done and this paper will focus on repair in material form, specifically within academic repositories that have customarily excluded the historically disenfranchised.

The archival profession calls upon practitioners to grant privileged status to certain written documents and refusal of that status to others.[21] These actions create spaces that can and do breed repressive behavior. In war, repositories are sought out for terrorist activities in an effort to eliminate evidence of a community's presence."[22] Archives and their practitioners engage in the same violent practices with decisions to cultivate, preserve, and make accessible homogenous narratives that eliminate evidence of other communities. This happens in traditional repositories, and more specifically—academic repositories. When archivists and their institutions acknowledge the marginalization or absence of the oppressed they must respond through establishing a reparative archive that engenders inclusivity. Reparative archival work does not pretend to ignore the imperialist, racist, homophobic, sexist, ableist, and other discriminatory traditions of mainstream archives, but instead acknowledges these failures and engages in conscious actions toward a wholeness that may seem to be an exercise in futility but in actuality is an ethical imperative for all within traditional archival spaces.

Scholarly spaces are seeing an increase in students of color questioning and pushing against physical spaces that are symbols of racist and oppressive histories.[23] Students at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) are demonstrating to have the name of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the first grand wizard of the Klu Klux Klan and a Confederate general in the Civil War removed from their ROTC building.[24] Academic repositories must provide the counter-narrative. Walidah Imarisha, in her 2017 keynote at the Annual Conference for the Society of American Archivists (SAA) asked attendees to recognize that archives have functioned as ways to reinforce existing power structures and have been complicit in continuing to uphold oppressive and unequal systems.[25] Academic repositories must increase their engagement in the disruption of these master narratives, the narratives that uphold oppression, support the function of unequal systems, and create

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[20] Doria Johnson, Jarrett M. Drake, and Michelle Caswell, "From Cape Town to Chicago to Colombo and Back Again: Towards a Liberation Theology for Memory Work," Mandela Dialogues, https://www.nelsonmandela.org/uploads/files/Reflection_Liberation_Theology_for_Memory_Work_-_Doria_D._Johnson__Jarrett_M._Drake__Michelle_Caswell.pdf.

[21] Mbembe Achille, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michele Pickover, and Graeme Reid (Cape Town: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 20.

[22] Richard Cox, "Archives, War, and Memory: Building a Framework," *Library and Archival Security* 25 (2012): 22.

[23] Tobias Holden, "The Right Call: Yale Removes My Racist Ancestor's Name from Campus," *New York Times*, accessed June 9, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/opinion/get-my-racist-ancestors-name-off-of-yales-campus.html.

[24] Sarah Grace Taylor, "Middle Tenn. State Students Protest Campus Building Named for Confederate Leader," *USA Today College*, accessed March 1, 2018, http://college.usatoday.com/2015/09/01/students-protest-confederate-building/.

[25] Walidah Imarisha, Transcript of Walidah's Liberated Archives Keynote, August 22, 2017, www.walidah.com/blog/2017/8/22/transcript-of-walidahs-liberated-archives-keynote.

spaces of exclusion. Social justice through archival repair is a change in the traditional praxis of the archival profession; it is a conscientious effort to begin one's work with the philosophy of inclusion from the margins.

What would an example of a roadmap for a reparative archive look like that contains voices highlighting the intersectionality of race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and all the voiceless communities that have been integral to the human experience? The research suggests an approach for academic institutions to repair past injuries through a holistic approach, by normalizing acquisitions of the oppressed, advocating, and utilizing primary resources that reflect society and that can provide a means to disengage with and prevent recordkeeping that systematically removes or intercepts the voices of the "other." Far too often these marginalizing actions can create a sense of isolation that reverberates within scholarly spaces and spills out beyond the walls of academia.

Advocacy: Belonging and believing

Due to the malformed root of mainstream archives, community archives have served and continue to serve as the path forward in establishing a moral compass for the humanizing of the dehumanized. The work of these memory institutions inevitably creates a powerful and organic relationship with historically vulnerable communities as they provide a platform that has traditionally been nearly inaccessible.

Jarrett M. Drake, former digital archivist for Princeton University and an advisory archivist for A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland (APAPVC), is one of the leading contemporary voices on community archives. In his keynote at the Community Archives Forum hosted at UCLA in 2016, he stated that "the action of belonging and the action of believing are two of the most fundamental exercises of the human spirit, and it's my argument that liberatory archives possess the potential to engender both actions within communities whose humanity traditional archives fail to recognize and respect."[26] This statement represents the goal that all archives should work toward—this is the definition of creating inclusive spaces.

Drake, along with Stacie Williams, team leader of digital learning and scholarship at Case Western Reserve University, published a well-documented article on establishing a community archive that works to document the absent narratives of the victims of police violence in the historical record.[27] APAPVC was launched during the 2015 SAA conference in the wake of the high-profile murder of Cleveland resident Tamir Rice (a twelve-year-old) in 2014, and the 2012 shooting of Malissa Williams and Timothy Russell, all by Cleveland police officers. All officers were acquitted. Cleveland has a long history of police brutality, but "the lineage of police violence in the City of

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[26] Jarrett M. Drake, "Liberatory Archives," Community Archives Forum, accessed December 2016, https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-1-d26aaeb0edd1.

[27] Stacie Williams and Jarrett M. Drake, "Power to the People: Documenting Police Violence in Cleveland," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Science* 2 (2017): 1–27.

Cleveland does not outpace the lineage of resistance to that violence."[27] The authors document this resistance and the efforts to establish this community archive in order to create a sense of belonging and believing, as the accounts of these victims and their families are often footnotes to the received narrative or completely ignored by collecting institutions.

Other significant social justice projects occurring in digital spaces that provide a platform for counter-narratives through the documentation of traditionally silenced communities include the Baltimore Uprising 2015 Archive Project, which seeks to document the protests that occurred in the aftermath of the murder of Freddie Gray.[28] The Documenting the Now (DocNow) project is transforming the discourse on Internet archiving by responding to the public's use of social media for chronicling historically significant events.[29] DocNow could potentially serve as a powerful mechanism to ensure the preservation of social movements of the disenfranchised utilizing digital spaces.

The preponderance of scholarly literature on social justice and archives leans toward the development of community archives. However, this paper wants to challenge traditional repositories, more specifically, recordkeepers in scholarly institutions, to claim a greater stake in this discourse and begin to repair their holdings by targeted efforts to increase the diversification of collections and to advocate for and promote those collections for utilization within scholarly spaces.

Literature Review

Diversifying the archive

More than twenty years ago archival scholarship began expanding outside much of the foundational discourse produced by Jenkinson, Schellenberg, Norton, and Maclean, allowing room for more substantive discourse and critique of archival theory.[30] Since that time, the scholarship has questioned the historically Eurocentric nature of the archival profession, from the lack of a diverse workforce to the absence of diverse narratives that interrupt the homogeneity of the hegemonic white discourses of traditional repositories.

In the years that have followed Zinn's call to action, the dialogue on integrating themes of class, race, gender, and social equity has continued to serve as the foundation for the emergence of more socially conscious practitioners in the field of memory work. In 1986 the SAA endorsed the promotion of "archives and society," which assisted archivists in contemplating how to push the boundaries of theory and practice in order to address social and cultural issues.[31] These challenges have led to a more thoughtful analysis of the historical record and the role of the archivist.

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[28] The Baltimore 2015 Archiving Project, http://baltimoreuprising2015.org/.

[29] Documenting the Now, http://www.docnow.io/.

[30] Anthony Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started," *Archival Science* 6 (2006): 110.

[31] Ibid., 110.

Alex H. Poole reminds us that archivists need to be held accountable for their record-collecting and recordkeeping practices and for ensuring diversity not only in the profession but also in the types of records retained, and in their content.[32] For most professionals, the myth of archival impartiality has been thoroughly dismantled.[33] "Archivists/recordkeepers know that every recordkeeping act . . . occurs in and is influenced by its layers of context, from the systems and people that are directly associated with the act, to the motivations of the organization that funded it, to the expectations and norms of the wider society in which it occurs."[34]

The Women's Archive at the University of Iowa is one of the earliest efforts to incorporate the disenfranchised into the institutional record at an American academic repository. Since the 1990s, the Louis Noun-Mary Louise Smith Iowa Women's Archives have sought to acquire a collection that represents the diversity of women's histories, including African American and rural women.[35] The Iowa Women's project early on acquired forty collections, and although this seemed to be a significant measure of success, the acquisitions were practically devoid of the broad spectrum of diversity they had hoped for.[36] Their efforts underscore some of the embedded challenges of community relations that are mediated by the post-custodial model and that are being implemented in many archives. The project highlighted the need to engage in conversations about the historical value of collections and uncovered circumstances where collections took several years to acquire. As a result, the organization took a targeted approach toward their outreach to women of color, specifically African American women, in 1995. Acknowledging the need for a committed effort, they hired an archivist dedicated to the collection development initiative of African American women in Iowa.[37] Through fundraising, grants, and intense donor relationship building with multiple visits, the project was able to acquire fifteen oral histories and fifty collections; the initiative also targeted collections highlighting the narratives of rural women, and in this case they were able to acquire one hundred collections.

A more recent project affiliated with an academic repository is the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE Project), which began in 2008, led by the Special Collections and University Archives at Old Dominion University.[38] DOVE has become a creator and collector of records, particularly oral histories, although it initially set out to identify, locate, catalog, and encourage the preservation of records that document school desegregation in Virginia.[39]

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[32] Poole, "Strange Career," 23.

[33] Cassie Findlay, "Archival Activism," *Archives and Manuscripts* 44, no. 3 (2016): 155.

[34] Ibid., 155.

[35] Karen Mason. "Fostering Diversity in Archival Collections: The Iowa Women's Archives," *Collection Management* 27, no. 2 (2002): 23.

[36] Ibid., 26.

[37] Ibid., 27.

[38] Sonia Yaco and Betriz Betancourt Hardy, *A Documentation Case Study: The Desegregation of Virginia Education* (Chicago: Society American Archivists, 2014).

[39] Ibid.

T-Kay Sangwand, librarian for digital collection development at UCLA, has provided a successful approach for partnering an academic repository with efforts to create local and international digital collection partnerships. Sangwand has engaged in significant work in preserving the histories of marginalized people and everyday individuals impacted by war and genocide, and some of her most notable projects occurred during her time as the archivist for the Human Rights Documentation Initiative at the University of Texas.[40] The South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) also serves as a pioneer in the area of digital collections and partnerships. SAADA's mission is to create "a more inclusive society by giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences." SAADA has amassed 3,162 digital objects on South Asian American history, making it the most publicly accessible repository on this subject.[41]

The Iowa Women's Archives, the DOVE Project, SAADA, and the emergence of human rights efforts whose goals are to document and reflect the complex tapestry of the human experience are engaging in reparative archival work because they are laboring to include forgotten and marginalized voices within academic repositories and in partnership with them.

The diversification of analog and digital records in an effort to provide an all-encompassing panorama of America's human story is critical to the process of healing the relationship between traditional archives and historically underrepresented communities. Providing a path to accessing those records through archival literacy also remains vital to this discourse.

Library instruction

In 1971, SAA president Hugh Taylor asked archivists to become more involved in encouraging students to use the archives.[42] In 1998, the Boyer Commission Report for Undergraduate Education recommended that undergraduate students should have the opportunity to work with primary materials. As a result, within the last ten to twelve years archivists have become more engaged and proactive in creating partnerships with faculty members and instructors.[43]

Instruction allows archivists to help students develop archival literacy, which provides "knowledge, skills, [and] abilities an individual needs to effectively and efficiently find, interpret, evaluate, and ethically use primary sources."[44] Every connection with a faculty

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[40] "T-Kay Sangwand Movers & Shakers 2015—Advocates," *Library Journal*, accessed June 2016, http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/03/people/movers-shakers-2015/t-kay-sangwand-movers-shakers-2015-advocates/.

[41] South Asian American Digital Archives. https://www.saada.org/.

[42] Hugh A. Taylor, "Clio in the Raw: Archival Materials and the Teaching of History," *American Archivist* 35 (July/October 1972): 317–33.

[43] Sammie L. Morris, Tamar Chute, and Ellen Swain, "Connecting Students and Primary Resources: Cases and Examples," *Teaching with Primary Sources: A Guide for Archivists, Librarians* (Chicago: Society American Archivists, 2015), 76.

[44] Morris et al., *Teaching with Primary Sources*, 78.

member is an opportunity for archivists to educate members within academia about the collections they manage and therefore increase the likelihood that students will become citizens who appreciate and support archives.[45] However, interactions with primary sources are also a chance to change minds, society, and policy, and to inspire restorative justice, if only in a small way. In this case, the advocacy and utilization of collections in workshops or informational instruction that grants students and faculty access to documentation from traditionally invisible communities becomes increasingly critical in these interactions.

A case study from Yale University highlights efforts to do inquiry-based learning in a freshman seminar titled African American Movements in the Twentieth Century. To get students to connect primary resources to a larger historical context, students utilized correspondence from the William Sloane Coffin papers. Coffin was a chaplain at Yale who was active in the Civil Rights Movement and received letters from alums angered by his participation.[46] The letters were "vitriolic" and led students to ask questions about regional and professional influences on US citizens' beliefs about race during the 1960s.[47] A post-assessment concluded that more work would be done to increase faculty awareness and integration of collections.

Yale provides an example of interactions between archives and students that can help steer students toward an analysis of the intricacies race, racism, and social justice as they relate to actions within academic spaces and their impact on greater society. The case study does not fully address the idea of disrupting homogenous narratives as it relates to Sutherland's criticism of mainstream archives producing predominately white narratives. However, it is an example of an archive advocating and utilizing primary resources that stimulate a discussion on marginalized communities, which is an outgrowth of archival practices that seek to establish a praxis that is restorative.

The depth of literature available on building relationships between courses and archives through faculty outreach has expanded exponentially. However, we need a further intense analysis of advocacy and the utilization of collections within classroom spaces that offer counter-narratives to white homogeneity and that inculcate a multiculturalism that supersedes oppressive histories. Future research should include outreach with archives and student organizations as it relates to this area. As mainstream archives work to acquire collections highlighting student life, it is incumbent upon practitioners to engage in outreach with their student leaders and use those opportunities to create a new set of outcomes and relationships.

The following is Kent State's Department of Special Collections and Archives approach toward a reparative archival practice that includes its Black Campus Movement Collection Development Initiative. The case study briefly looks at our work toward decolonizing our holdings; advocacy and promotion through an exhibition and

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[45] Ibid., 78.
[46] Barbara Rokenbach, "Archives, Undergraduates, and Inquiry-Based Learning: Case Studies from Yale University Library," *The American Archivist* 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 306.
[47] Ibid.

digitization; and the utilization of new and previously collected materials that underscore the black student experience for a library instruction session with the student group Black United Students (BUS). These efforts end with a sense of inclusivity and the interruption of a narrative that has historically made the black experience at Kent State between the late 1960s and the early 1970s all but invisible.

Kent State University's Case Study

Context

The Black Campus Movement (BCM) Collection Development Project Initiative launched at Kent State University in the fall of 2013 in the wake of the formation of the Black Lives Matter Movement, which was established in July of the same year. By 2014–2015, campuses across the country were seeing a rebirth of student activism, with over 140 protests throughout the US, much related to the racial climate on campuses. Some reports compared this surge to the 1960s.[48] The push for social justice has also created a groundswell in favor of the eradication of Confederate symbols such as statues and flags, the renaming of educational institutions that bear the names of slaveholders, and other instances of the glorification of America's racist past. Repair through the elimination of monuments has happened at Vanderbilt University, where the inscription "Confederate," which was added after the University accepted a $50,000 donation in 1933 from the Tennessee Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, was erased from a residence hall.[49] Academic repositories have a pivotal role on the front line of these actions of reparative social justice in academic spaces.

While Kent State is most notably known for its predominately white antiwar movement that led to the shootings on May 4, 1970, very little is known of those students who were fighting other injustices, specifically representation within academic spaces in the form of more students, faculty, and staff of color; more culturally diverse programming; and a Department of Pan African Studies in unison with other college and universities around the country.[50]

In a dedicated effort to move toward a reparative archive, the department decided to engage in collection assessment to locate holdings that included black student activism. The evaluation indicated that Kent State's Special Collections and Archives had a scarcity of records in this area and that the majority of the documents were administrative in nature with very little collection development in the area of documents from the viewpoint of African American students and their organizations.[51] The department engaged in a collection assessment process followed by targeted outreach for collections about black student life. A full case study on evaluation and initial outreach were

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[48] Alia Wong, "The Renaissance of Student Activism," *The Atlantic*, May 2015, accessed October 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/05/the-renaissance-of-student-activism/393749/.

[49] Marina Koren, "College Dorm and the Confederacy," *The Atlantic*, August 2016, accessed April 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/08/vanderbilt-confederate-hall/495941/.

[50] Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Filling in the Gaps: Using Outreach Efforts to Acquire Documentation on the Black Campus Movement, 1965–1972," *Archival Issues* 36, no. 1 (2014): 28–42.

[51] Ibid., 28–42.

published in 2014. However, what we have learned since this initial case study is that there must be a multi-pronged approach for engaging in social justice through reparative archival practices when dismantling homogenous or master narratives within academic repositories. The approach includes the following goals: (1) acquisitions; (2) advocacy/promotion; (3) utilization. This research maintains that how those goals are met can vary based on staff, funding, resources, and so on. Thus, the following example, which shows how Kent State University met the above goals for a reparative archive, is just one example, not the totality.

Goal # 1: Acquisition

After the official launch of the BCM Collection Development Initiative, the project acquired the Lafayette Tolliver papers. Tolliver was an African American alum who had attended Kent State University from 1967 to 1971. The flagship collection included nearly 1,000 photographic prints and negatives, primarily never before published images of black student dissent, fraternities and sororities, cultural events, and various informal gathering between black coeds—the collection is primarily a visual history of the black student experience at Kent State between 1968 and 1971.[52]

While the initial focus was the late 1960s through early 1970s, we are actively collecting records about black student life up through the present. As a result of the growing awareness of this project, we have acquired additional items that document the 1990s and 2000s. Some of the smaller collections have included correspondence and memorabilia from black fraternities and sororities. The BCM Collection Development initiative has also resulted in the recording of more than thirteen oral histories that highlight the narratives of black alums. The majority of the narratives include voices from Black United Students (BUS), as research shows that this group served as the most critical element in the evolution of cultural transformation at Kent State during the late 60s through early 70s.[53]

One of the interviews includes Dr. Larry Simpson, provost of the Berklee College of Music, and one of the first stand-alone presidents of BUS, which was established in 1968. He gives an illuminating account of being a student of color in the late 1960s on a predominately white campus with the arrival of the Oakland Police Department recruiters in the wake of the death of Black Panther Party member Bobby Hutton, and the importance of seeing "oneself reflected" in academic spaces.[54] Silas Ashley, a 1972 Kent alum, speaks of his Southern roots and his earliest memories of lynchings and participating in the Montgomery Bus Boycott as a young boy. He describes how those experiences traveled with him up north and served as a catalyst for his activism at Kent State University, including in athletics, where there were many complaints of discrimination leveled against the university's intercollegiate sports for their lack of diversity. To address this injustice, Ashley assisted in the creation of a black intramural

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Larry Simpson (provost, Berklee College of Music) in discussion with the author, June 2017.

basketball team.[55] Finally, Dr. Francis Dorsey, who was part of the early wave of black faculty hired by the university, underscores the challenges of navigating the campus with limited resources in the newly formed Department of Pan African Studies.[56]

All of these interviews and small acquisitions have begun to clarify the development of black student life and activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the acquisition of physical collections remains the most challenging element of this initiative. As was the case with the DOVE and Women of Iowa project, our research suggests that reparative archival work requires at a least one dedicated staff member to attain a reasonable level of success.

Goal # 2: Advocacy (Exhibits and Digitization)

In the fall of 2014, the university libraries, along with the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and the Department of Pan African Studies, hosted an exhibit highlighting a cross-section of the Tolliver collection; the exhibit was actually at the request of the donor. This agreement between the department allowed Special Collections and Archives to create a trust of stewardship with the donor, while at the same time the exhibit provided an opportunity for the hidden voices of black student activism to begin to reclaim their space and their history, and a forum to assist in deconstructing the master narrative at a predominately white academy.

The majority of the images from the Tolliver donation did not include descriptions, so the exhibit relied heavily on images that were easily identifiable. More than one hundred black alumni returned to Kent State for the event, many of whom had not returned since graduating more than forty years ago. Names of individuals were gathered for potential future inclusion in the Black Campus Movement project's oral histories and acquisition outreach. Marketing materials highlighting the BCM project's goals were provided during the event. This event led to many local news reports in outlets on and off campus.

When the exhibit was completed, a digitization project was initiated to make all of the Tolliver photographs digitally accessible. Normally, a collection is fully processed before digitization, but due to the publicity that the exhibit received from campus and local coverage and because of the rarity of the content, both the university archivist and the head of special collections archives at Kent State University, Cara Gilgenbach, decided to make the digitization of the Tolliver photographs a priority. The department was also transitioning to an Omeka platform and this digitization project would be one of the earliest collections to be added using Omeka. The Tolliver photographs served as the pilot collection to test the new workflow system.

Since most of the Tolliver photos did not include descriptions, the university archivist solicited a group of four reviewers from the previously interviewed black alums. Requests for participation were sent out to individuals who, based on their oral histories, were heavily involved in black student activities, including fraternities, sororities, or

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[55] Silas Ashley (Kent State alumnus) in discussion with the author 2016.
[56] Francis Dorsey (Kent State alumnus) in discussion with the author 2016.

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other culturally relevant student groups. A Dropbox account was created as the primary platform to give access to reviewers. However, one reviewer had technical difficulties accessing the account and instead requested that images be sent via email. Due to file storage limits at the time with university email, this process required a bit more labor. Nearly one hundred images were reviewed by the group of four individuals. The reviewers were asked to provide the following if known: name(s); date(s); event; location (on/off campus).

If the collaborators needed to provide any additional context outside of the areas requested, they were given space to do so. Reviewers sent information on images via email, phone calls, and through Google docs. The university archivist hoped that reviewer responses would largely coincide with one another. The digitized *Daily Kent Stater* (DKS) was used to further verify responses (specifically the timeline). Fortunately, there were only a few instances where the time frames differed, but even so, not drastically. Some events were not reported in the student newspaper, and thus there was not an immediate mechanism to verify timelines for reviewer submissions. Additionally, due to the fact that there were a number of protests between the late 1960s and early 70s, it was a challenge to differentiate which specific protests were taking place. In the first set of 112 digitized images uploaded into Omeka there were twelve images, in which neither the individuals nor the events could be identified.

Since this digitization project does not have a dedicated full-time staff member, there has been a lapse in gathering and uploading the next batch of images. However, as this article goes to press, the next set of Tolliver images is being reviewed for metadata and uploaded into Omeka. The same mechanisms have been put into place to gather metadata before their upload.

One of the more significant components of this digitization process is the participation of the reviewers in creating the metadata, which had an impact on the controlled vocabulary used for this digital project. An increasing constituency within memory institutions, specifically within the realm of human rights work in community archives, engages in a participatory archives model, and "archives consequently become a negotiated space in which these different communities share stewardship—they are created by, for and with multiple communities, according to and respectful of community values, practices, beliefs and needs."[57] This paper argues that reparative archives in academic repositories should make this approach part of the acquisition process and work collaboratively with the donor or community members where applicable. In this particular relationship, African American alums played a role in bringing forth marginalized figures and events from the shadows of the past and placing them into their proper context in digital and physical spaces. These actions, in turn, gave participants a sense of ownership and belonging.

Goal #3: Utilization

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[57] Anne Gilliand and Sue McKemmish, "The Role of Participatory Archives in Furthering Human Rights: Reconciliation and Recovery," *Review for Modern Archival Theory and Practice* 24 (2014): 78.

Building inclusive spaces: Student organizations (library instruction)

A significant portion of the literature on library instruction focuses on outreach to faculty members. As highlighted in the literature review, valiant and considerable efforts are being initiated to engage in outreach to faculty members and to connect them with primary resources that will strengthen course outcomes.

However, this paper has focused on an interaction between library instruction personnel and the student organization, prompted by BUS, which was a significant development because of the organization's long-established history of disrupting white homogeneous culture at the university. Student organizations are not attached to specific outcomes and they therefore may provide more opportunities for organic interaction with records than structured classrooms can afford.

After attending the Tolliver exhibit in the fall of 2014, members of BUS approached the university archivist about holding one of their 2015 spring leadership meetings in the archives with the goal of learning about the BCM project. The university archivist agreed to hold a session for twenty students. Students were given packets outlining the aims of the project and given a presentation on current holdings. Students were granted access to newly created oral history recordings of black alumni and engaged in a hands-on workshop with primary resources that focused heavily on their own organization's history. Unfortunately, much of the historical record still relies on the administrative perspective. But copies of the *Blackwatch* (the organization's newspaper) in addition to other ephemera related to activities of BUS from the late 1960s and early 70s provided some counterbalance. The students were given an overall introduction to Special Collections and Archives and then received a review of the BCM Collection Development Initiative, outlining efforts to collect historical documentation of black student life (including photographs, video, correspondence, newsletters, oral histories, and organizational information). The university archivist then discussed the importance of archiving their stories to assist in repairing the void in the historical record in the institution's archives moving into the future.

Anecdotally, the university archivist has since witnessed an increase in reference requests by members of BUS, has been contacted by various members from BUS about visits to Special Collections and Archives, and has received invitations to engage in future meetings for the fall of 2017.

This engagement with BUS is a clear example of an outcome from reparative work within Kent State's Department of Special Collections and Archives that has led to a feeling of inclusivity. The 2015 workshop is the first time BUS specifically requested library instruction for their student group, which is due to the awareness of the department's efforts through advocacy. Today's BUS group are the descendants of the Black Campus Movement of the late 1960s and this relationship is not tokenistic. The organization reaching out to the department is evidence of a building of bridges with this community and the repairing of a broken relationship.

Conclusion

Zinn, Jimmerson, Poole, Sutherland, and other scholars critical of mainstream repositories have called into question the repeated refusal of mainstream archives to include records of historically subjugated and marginalized communities. Due to institutional practices that have permitted sexism, racism, classism, discriminatory application against the differently abled, religious minorities, LGBTQIA persons, and others, community archives have shouldered the brunt of charting a course that bears the truth of America's "bloody catalogue of oppression."[58] Mainstream archives, including academic repositories, cannot see the community archive as a type of absolution or emancipation from their debt to society. Mainstream archives are not free to continue to preserve a privileged history that is riddled with half-truths and tainted narratives that dismiss lynching crusades, genocides, state violence on university campuses, and black students and their charge to create an academy more respectful of the black diaspora and instead champion the "virtuous" histories of slave owners.

It is the conclusion of this paper that engaging in social justice through reparative archival work in the form of the diversification of archives, advocacy/promotion, and then utilization within an academic archive has set a process in motion that has shown early signs of creating feelings of inclusivity within the archival space, a feeling of "believing and belonging."[59] This process has challenged and disrupted the institutional history that has promoted a white homogenous depiction of Kent State's activism in late 1960s through the early 1970s and has shifted us slowly toward a new trajectory, one closer to how we should "truly see ourselves."
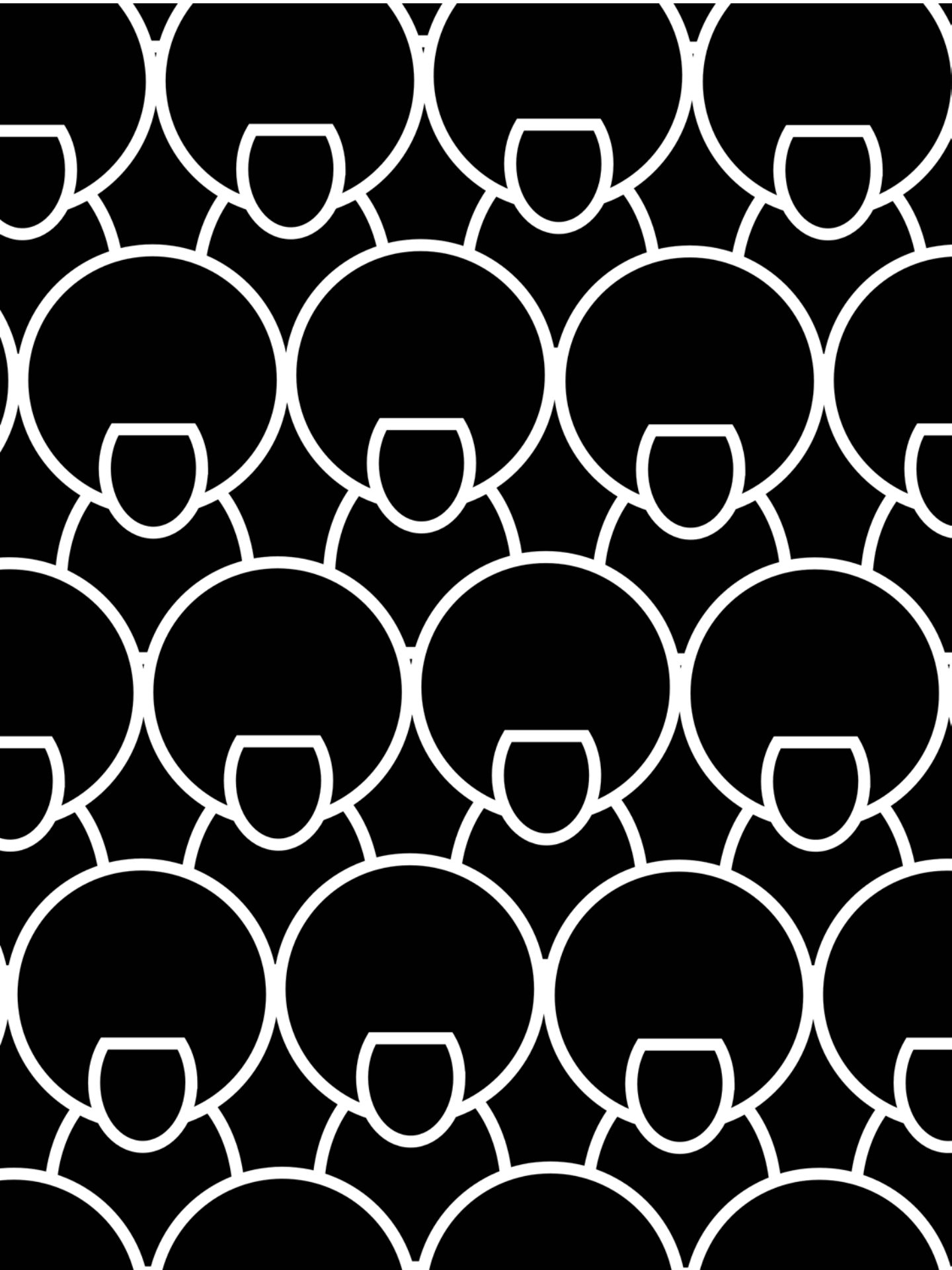
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[58] James Baldwin, "American Dream and the American Negro," Speech, March 7, 1965, *New York Times*, Archived Web Page, accessed February 10, 2018.

[59] Drake, "Liberatory Archives."

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Implications of Archival Labor

If we want respect for our labor, we need to value it more

S. Williams · Follow

Published in On Archivy · 7 min read · Apr 11, 2016

The following is a more complete set of notes from a panel discussion I participated in at the Organization of American Historians annual conference, Friday, April 8, 2016, in Providence, R.I. Participants in "Leading Together: Archivists and Historians Shaping the Digital Archive" included: Emily Drabinski, Long Island University; Cathy Moran Hojo, New York University; Juliette Levy, University of California at Riverside; Michelle Moravec, Rosemont College; and Bergis Jules, University of California at Riverside.

I want to share an anecdotal story about labor and archives. Last fall, I had an engaging lunch discussion with a visiting historian about her research, during which she revealed that she had not previously paid much attention to who (or what) was doing actual work in the archives until she found her book at a standstill because much of the material she needed was in archives that were severely underfunded and understaffed. She said at times, she was given boxes that had not even been surveyed, let alone arranged or described, and with no finding aids available in analog or digital format. Almost none of the collections she needed had been made available via digital means (including metadata). That was the first time, she said, that she had ever even considered that there are people who do this work daily so that she could conduct her research in an orderly, efficient manner. As we were eating at the faculty dining club, I compared her revelation to eating at a restaurant. "You could be at a really reputable place," I said, "Where the head chef or owner has been profiled in all the best magazines and that name might be the only one you know, but there is a huge team of people in that kitchen who are helping get this plate out to you. You receive a perfect plate with the right balance of textures and flavors, but what do you think that plate looks like without the sous chef, the busboy, the line cook or the dishwasher?" This, unfortunately, is how many of our users tend to think (or not think) of archival labor. They are hungry for research or information in our collections, but very little thought goes into the team of people who make it possible: the collections management archivist, the manuscript

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archivist, the technical services cataloger, the digital archivist, the reference archivist, and most importantly, the people who actually process the collections. They go by many titles, but we'll return to that momentarily. As a researcher, it's easy to take all of those things for granted — that you would visit a research room, tell someone behind a desk what you want, and be given a sweet little acid-free gray box with all of the information you are looking for, perfectly organized by date, format, or subject. But how would we expect people to know? Archivists do a terrible job of advocating and informing people about our labor and the overall contributions of our labor to society. We seldom speak in terms of concrete concepts like time or money and speak instead of abstract notions like love and passion. And when it comes to asking for money, we tend to have a hand out as if we were Oliver Twist begging for the tiniest extra bit of gruel. "Please, we're so unworthy, we just need this little bit to do our jobs."

As a highly gendered profession — more than 65 percent women, according to the Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States taken in 2004 — there is a cultural expectation that archivists will work without complaint, for very little and if we are lacking resources, we will hire volunteers or unpaid interns to do the work. This renders the labor truly invisible, because people without job protections or benefits are unlikely to discuss anything about the work that is problematic, such as the transient nature of grant-funded archives projects or the fact that even within some of those grants, there are PIs who ask for money that doesn't include relocation expenses or even a living wage.

When we talk about digitizing, well, anything, we *have* to be willing to talk in terms of time and money. Who are we asking to conduct this labor? Why? What are they getting out of it? And what is the end game? Are we digitizing something that is going to be extremely useful to a wide variety of researchers or users? Are we asking people to contribute to projects that might help their communities or even help them personally? Or are we just asking people to pad a university or repository's bottom line and annual feel-good reports?

At my university, we employ graduate students to process collections. They are paid only around the national average minimum wage in a city that lacks affordable housing and is relatively expensive. The people with the archivist

or staff titles, including myself, largely supervise that work and create scholarly work based on it that lends personal or institutional prestige. Our digital collections are created by people given titles as "technicians." They have a highly skilled understanding of digital project workflow, technology and metadata standards, but may not have the MLIS. Or maybe they do, yet their value — as assigned by title designation — is classified as less important than staff or managers. Or they may be grant-funded employees with temporary positions who, because of the specifications of the grant, are not allowed to participate in any other department functions, such as professional development or scholarly projects unrelated to the grant. Which means they don't necessarily have input or engagement in a department or system that is run on the backs of their labor.

We ask people, paid or unpaid, to use culturally biased metadata that benefits our colonialist and Anglo-based organizing systems and paradigms, as Jarrett Drake pointed out in his piece on the limitations of archival description and provenance. We ask them to work within our very limited hours — as most archives are open fewer hours than regular libraries, in spaces that may lack parking or reasonable accommodations for the disabled. Indeed, most of our job descriptions mandate that applicants be able to lift at least 40 lbs or stand for long periods of time. We ask them to work in spaces that have historically been cruel or closed off to them — especially if we are talking about city-based universities, many of which have contentious relationships and histories with their surrounding communities. And then we ask these students, interns, and volunteers to be grateful for the privilege. We tell them to apply for this privilege and we will bestow on them the honor of accepting it only if they "fit in," as Angela Galvan concludes in her article "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship." If they make our gatekeepers comfortable. If they know the right jokes or listen to the right music or watch the right kinds of shows or perform gender identity in a subjectively acceptable way. And we expect little to no criticism for it.

I want to challenge everyone to question *why*? Why is this an acceptable way to express the value of our labor? And maybe this goes back to my original statement about the importance and value of our labor as archivists in

society. Perhaps we are so terrible at advocating for the importance of what we do because to be good at that advocacy means acknowledging that the manner in which we conduct this labor is often times unequal, rooted historically in sexism, racism, ableism, and classism, and that will always present a challenge to the access we hope to provide.

What can we do to disrupt this system-based inequality? How best can we challenge our repositories to change this? It's not all hopeless. We can build more equitable salaries into our grant proposals that bridge gender, racial and living wage gaps. We can accept that true archival practice means paying professionals for their time and quality, and that may mean we can't clear as many backlogs, even using an MPLP standard. We can allow the people creating the research content access to our closed-off spaces and procedures and ask for their input into our processes and workflows. And we can and should engage those who seek to use our materials. Bring them into our processes in a real and tangible way. Lift up and make visible the employees who do the digital or processing work, allow them to benefit professionally from their labor in the same way that their managers do. This is a field that takes a lot of people to produce the highest level work. And to be clear, this does not mean that you get rid of MPLP, but it does mean hiring and paying well employees who know how to think critically and creatively. Those who are interested in doing more than reproducing the same exploitative systems and models. We cannot continue to conduct that work at the expense of those very same people, not if we want others to truly value what we contribute to the larger society. And that contribution should reflect our highest standards of fairness, transparency, and accessibility.

ⓕ ⓢ

Call to Action: Archiving State-Sanctioned Violence Against Black People

Zakiya Collier · Follow

Published in Sustainable Futures · 5 min read · Jun 6, 2020

Tony McDade should still be alive
Breonna Taylor should still be alive
George Floyd should still be alive
*Ahmaud Arbery should still be alive*
Nina Pop should still be alive
Jamel Floyd should still be alive
All the Black people who have died from Covid-19 should still be alive

They were all killed by state-sanctioned violence carried out by racist police and the racist systems that prop up our healthcare, education, economic, social, and cultural infrastructure.

We Love Black People. We affirm the value of ALL Black people's lives and we commit to doing memory work both in our personal and professional lives that will lead to dismantling systems that continue to harm Black people. Our work must support efforts to defund the police, abolish prisons, and redirect resources to the communities that have suffered the most under these racist structures that exist and thrive solely because Black people's lives are consistently devalued around the world.

We are Black memory workers committed to documenting the Black experience during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the current uprisings brought about by racist police violence against Black people. Our work is imperative, especially as we witness this dual assault white supremacy has unleashed on Black people. We offer this call to action to ethically and comprehensively archive during this moment, to ensure that we shine light onto the oppressive systems that disproportionately subject Black people to generational pain and suffering.
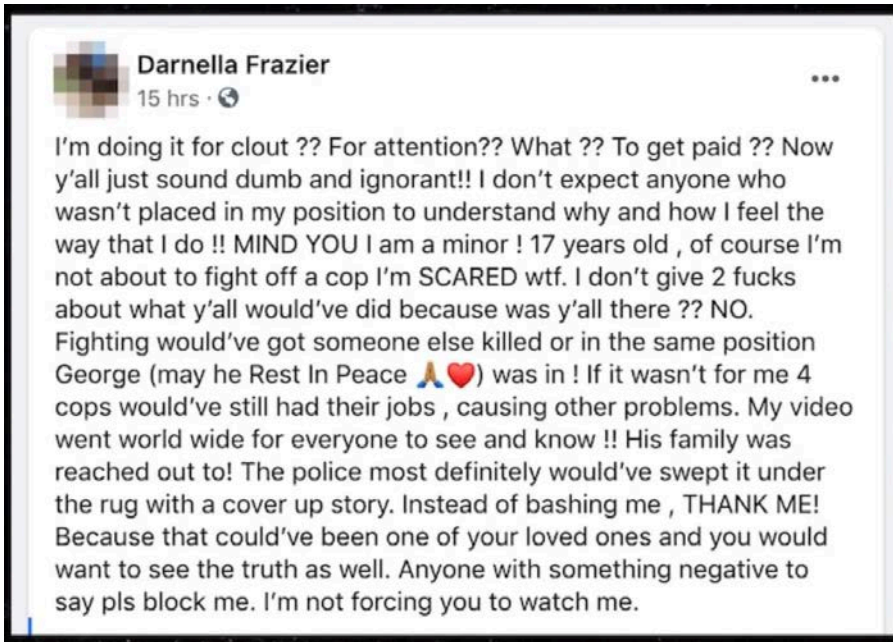
Facebook post by Darnella Frazier, the 17-year-old African American girl who filmed George Floyd's murder while on her way to run an errand. Retrieved from TMZ on 6/6/2020.

We offer this call to action because we know moments of crisis and Black suffering are also opportunities ripe for institutional exploitation and professional opportunism in the cultural memory sector, where harmful activities involved with building collections for institutions that don't care about Black people, become more important than documenting the root causes of why Black people are suffering in the first place. We do not offer this call to action on behalf of our affiliated cultural memory institutions. Instead, we offer this call in solidarity with our Black communities all over the world.

We reject attempts to document this moment that fails to center the Black experience or that fails to document the facts about the State's role in inflicting Black pain. We commit to modeling care in our memory work because Black people deserve care. We commit to doing ethical memory work that protects Black people because racist state-sanction violence also resists documentation. We commit to archival practices that support accountability and historical accuracy because when the dust settles attempts will be made to rewrite the history. We commit to an intersectional archival practice that also presents a global perspective of Black suffering and the response to it because we acknowledge that Black people with disabilities, and from working-class, queer and immigrant communities have suffered negative and disproportionate harm due to white supremacy

and capitalism. We believe that Black memory workers should lead the documentation response when Black people are suffering. And we believe Black memory workers should be supported and given the space and resources to do this work.

We invite anyone to complete this form to sign onto this call to action in solidarity with Black memory workers. We are also organizing efforts based on this call to action. If you are a Black memory worker interested in joining our efforts, please identify yourself as such in the form.

Join Us!

Stacie Williams
Jarrett Drake
Trevor Watkins
Lae'l Hughes Watkins
Skyla S. Hearn
Petrina Jackson
Barrye Brown
Derek Mosely
Jessica C. Neal
Micha Broadnax
Cheryl Beredo
Rachel Winston
Holly Smith
Jina DuVernay
Steven Fullwood
Zakiya Collier
Bergis Jules
Kimberly Springer
Makiba Foster
Steven Booth
Tonia Sutherland
Erin Glasco
Raquel Flores-Clemons
Tracy Drake
Miranda Mims
Harvey Long
Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski
Tianni Graham

Kayla Henry-Griffin
Claire Fox
Gina Murrell
Ana Roeschley
Eli Boyne
Rhoda Boateng
Ben Blake
Anya Dani
Nylah Byrd
Heather Hart
lauren craig
Tyree Boyd Pates
Kelly Wooten
eliza myrie
Rehana Zaman
Taylor Le Melle
Fia Friskie
CJ Pentland
maya tomkiewicz
Gwynneth Malin
Sydney Augustine
Lydia
Monet Timmons
Jessica Bitely
Andrea Spencer
Darby Witek
Melissa Benbow
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MoMA

No New Thing

Black Archives founder Renata Cherlise presents a selection of photographs from MoMA's collection that highlight everyday moments of Black life.

Renata Cherlise
Feb 14, 2022

I was born under the Florida sun. And ain't nothing new about me. I've been here before and some version of myself shall return here again and again.

The written part of my story begins with Theresa "Ressie" Candy (b. 1891), my third great-grandmother and the first name documented in our family Bible, a keepsake that's been in my family for generations. For my family, and many others, the Bible is a primary source for record-keeping—and one that I first encountered as a child while poking around my grandmother's dresser. Further down the list of relatives, written in my grandmother's handwriting, my name appeared along with the place of my birth and birth date. It's a moment that I'll always recognize as being attached to intense feelings of knowing and not knowing. A type of response that I would later come to identify as a call for me to remember.

I consider my entry into archival work as one that was retrieved through a patchwork of ancestral dreams. It is not one that derives from a particular institution or leans solely on academic coursework. Rather, it comes from an urgent compulsion within my matrilineage to be remembered.

There aren't many photographs of my family prior to the 1960s. This can be attributed to a number of reasons. But despite such visual gaps in our family's archive, the commitment to recording our names and birth dates is a testament to surviving a system that wanted us erased. Stories are carried by the women in my family. Ressie thought of and remembered me. And so I remember her and the others who wrote their names not in Bibles, but in the dreams of their descendants. And I will go on to remember the many versions of ourselves and their-selves, and the selves of us and them that do not yet exist.

Unknown photographer. Untitled. c. 1960

And then I will imagine, in a direct refusal to forget.

Alongside those who came before me, I imagined Black Archives in an effort to immerse myself within the vastness of Blackness. To reconcile the images of Black folks that I saw depicted in the media and that conflicted with our very existence. The very thing about us that I knew to be true was falsely presented.

My archival work is an ushering of the faces left behind. A space to reemerge fully and joyously outside of bare bones and frameworks. A passageway to reconnect with kin. An affirmation that there shall be no surprises when we witness the sayings of our elders, when our ancestors pierce through our lips and ascend. We see them as they see us. Their facial features as ours—their poses are now our poses, and we are reminded through these photographs that we are not the first, and there's nothing new about us that is born under the sun.

It is imperative that we collectively (re)imagine the archive as more than just a register holding the accounts of dead things. We must make space for the multidimensional lives of Black folks—beyond just the metadata. We must view the archive as a living extension of ourselves and listen for the breaths while counting the heartbeats beyond the unknown, the unnamed, and the unspecified.

In this selection of photographs from MoMA's collection, I chose to highlight the everyday moments of Black life. Not as a way to correct the narrative or "enable some kind of redress," but rather as an exercise in love and narrative reflection.

Unknown photographer. Untitled. c. 1923

And I will go on to remember the many versions of ourselves and their-selves, and the selves of us and them that do not yet exist.

Unknown photographer. Untitled. c. 1965

This photograph brings me back to my childhood. The poses are part of the inherent language of Black girlhood. It's one of the ways we converse with ourselves and with one another through time.

Unknown photographer. Untitled. 1968

One can only imagine what transpired just moments before this photograph was taken. Even though we're missing the contextual clues embedded in digital "live" photography, what we do have is stillness and the beauty of wonder.

I've always felt a strong gravitational pull towards the 1970s. A familiar place I've only visited in the imagination through portals of cigarette smoke and soulful music. This way of being is a timely reminder that Black folks have been birthing cool since the very beginning.

Aside from cooking, the kitchen served as a gathering place for many things, but especially for hair clippers and hot combs. This photograph is alive with memory and sustenance, nourished by Easter Sunday mornings and the feeling of cutting my grandfather's hair for the first time.

This joyful moment reminds me of the times I shared with my grandmother. She was a serious woman for the most part, but every now and again we'd share in the opportunity of witnessing one of her many selves.

I've always been fascinated by interiors and the placement of items on bedroom dressers. This is Black curation at its finest. And exactly the type of thing that pulled me toward the family Bible on my grandmother's dresser. This curation is the thing that keeps me here.

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Unknown photographer. Untitled. c. 1960–70

A visual representation of finding oneself propelled into the center of a Black embrace, this photograph reveals a whirlwind of emotions. The figures situate themselves between singing and dancing, between love and time.

Renata Cherlise is a research-based visual artist and memory worker who uses various mediums to explore themes of identity and familial interiors within the Black community. Her work reimagines themes in literature, history, and photography to render different perspectives of the Black experience. These ideas became the foundation for Black Archives, a multimedia platform that provides dynamic accessibility to a Black past, present, and future.

Explore additional vernacular photographs in _Gallery 214: Critical Fabulations_, which includes artworks related to artifacts, archives, and testimonies.

Renata Cherlise
Artist and founder of _Black Archives_

PERSPECTIVE

Black Families Have Inherited Trauma, but We Can Change That

Medically reviewed by Timothy J. Legg, PhD, PsyD — Written by Jacquelyn Clemmons on August 26, 2020

When I look at my life, family, and community, I wonder: which patterns are authentically ours, and which are a result of cultural PTSD?

In recent years, talk about cultural trauma and its impact on Black families has made its way to mainstream media. There's been a desire to understand how we're affected today by what our ancestors experienced.

Over the years I've been curious about the patterns and practices I've observed in my own family. Sitting under my grandmother's feet asking questions about her life was the start of a journey for me. To better understand myself, I needed to understand who and what I come from.

ADVERTISEMENT

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Our ancestors' trauma lives on

During my exploration, I came across the work of Dr. Joy DeGruy. She's a clinical psychologist with a doctorate in social work research and author of the book"Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury & Healing."

After attending one of Dr. DeGruy's lectures, I began to contemplate the depth of the impact American chattel slavery had on my family and community at large. The concept that something experienced centuries ago could impact habits, practices, behaviors, perspectives, and fears beyond a person's lived experience was fascinating.

Epigenetics is the study of how certain genes are turned on or off. It is not an actual change in the sequence of your DNA, but rather changes in the structure of your DNA.

Specifically, scientists who study epigenetics ⊘ have found that trauma experienced by parents can impact the DNA and behavior of their offspring for generations to come. One study ⊘ conducted on worms found the residual effects of trauma lasted for 14 generations.

For the Black community, the impact of centuries of unaddressed trauma still manifests today. And while part of that is certainly due to ongoing social injustice, some of the impact might very well be inherited.

Basically, being Black in America means living with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused not only by one's lived experiences, but the experiences of our ancestors. Dr. DeGruy asks, "How does... being Black in America impact your stress level, therefore your body's ability to operate its own immune system? Once you understand it then you can deal with it."

A culture shaped by trauma

Symptoms of PTSD include a feeling of a foreshortened future, exaggerated startle responses, difficulty falling or staying asleep, outbursts of anger, and hypervigilance.

Some of these behaviors can be found in the African American community today, not just on an individual level, but overall on a cultural level.

When the question comes up whether these behaviors are inherent or account that all habits, practices, and beliefs are created first before they are reinforced.

A common teaching in the Black community is regarding work ethic: We must work twice as hard to be just as good as the next person. This philosophy is based on cultural conditioning, anthropological assertion, and lived experiences of our ancestors.

On any given day, an enslaved person would have to work from sunup to sundown. If they appeared fatigued or unproductive, they would be called lazy and would be beaten.

Many parents today may not fear that their children will receive actual lashes, but the trauma from those experiences is embedded in our DNA. On a cellular level we still recall the negative outcomes. The stress on work ethic is a hypervigilant response to a centuries-old trauma, and is reinforced by a desire to disprove stereotypes that are still circulating today.

Similarly, during slavery a parent would downplay their child's intelligence or strength to protect them from being seen as valuable and sold on the auction block. This practice can be seen today in families where Black

parents may be proud of their child's achievements and celebrate them at home, but in the presence of mixed company, downplay their children's talents so they aren't seen as a threat.

Connections like these can be made in many different areas of our everyday existence. J. Marion Sims is considered the father of modern gynecology, and most of his test subjects were Black enslaved women. Because it was believed that Black people do not feel pain, they were experimented on without any anesthesia.

Fast-forward to the early 20th century Tuskegee experiments and current high infant and maternal death rates in the Black population, and the Black community's general distrust in the medical system makes sense. These responses are not only a survival response, but one generated from DNA-encoded information. The impact of these traumas are lodged in our DNA.

The feelings of fear and mistrust so many Black people feel can be attributed to the experiences both lived and inherited. When we consider that we are not only walking around with our own lived experiences and traumas but also those of our ancestors, we must slow down and take a hard, honest look at our past. To truly heal, we must address the cultural trauma that has always been there, shaping our perspective from birth.

The path to healing

For healing and repair to begin, we need honest acknowledgment, investigation, patience, and safe spaces. The truth of the matter is that the effects of trauma are not one-sided. As much as the Black community has been affected by the experience of chattel slavery, so has the white community. To get to the root of the systems, beliefs, practices, and ideals, we *all* have to do the work.

Dr. DeGruy explains, "The root of denial for the dominant culture is fear, and fear mutates into all kinds of things: psychological projection, distorted and sensationalized representations in the media, and the manipulation of science to justify the legal rights and treatment of people. That's why it's so hard to unravel."

Without a doubt we have our work cut out for us. As science discovers more and more about how trauma negatively impacts our DNA, it is also discovering how intentionally healing the trauma through methods such as cognitive behavioral therapy can help reverse the negative impact.

As the story unfolds about how our past affects our future, we can do the work in the present to be mindful of what we are currently creating. Starting with our own families, we can begin to address what has been handed down to us. We can then decide what is worth keeping and what is worth letting go. Choose well.

Jacquelyn Clemmons is an experienced birth doula, traditional postpartum doula, writer, artist, and podcast host. She is passionate about holistically supporting families through her Maryland-based company De La Luz Wellness.
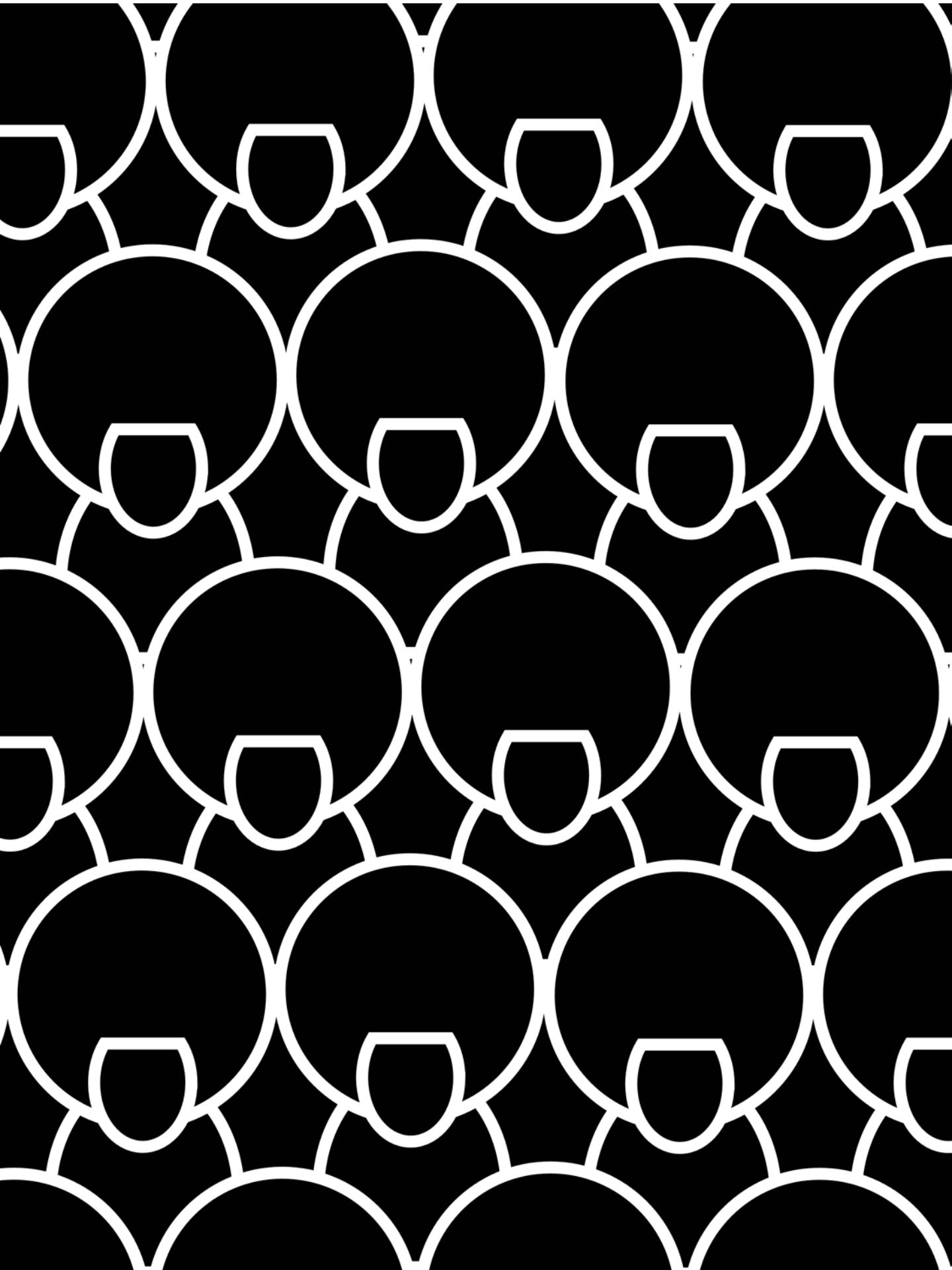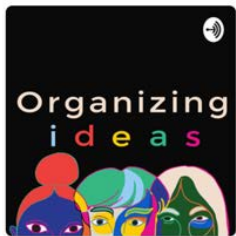
Organizing Ideas

By Organizing Ideas Podcast

Because libraries and archives are never neutral.

Taking a closer look at the relationships between organizing information and community organizing. We talk to information professionals, activists, and other insightful folks who have thoughts about what we mean when we say, "knowledge is power". Hosted by two new librarians figuring things out as we go. We are based on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

See less

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Ep 19 - (Web) Archives and Black Culture with Zakiya Collier - Transcript

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AJ: Allison Jones

KN: Karen Ng

ZC: Zakiya Collier

AJ: Welcome to the Organizing Ideas Podcast. I'm Allison.

KN: And I'm Karen and we are two new librarians/archivists and your hosts for this podcast.

AJ: Together, we're taking a closer look at the relationships between organizing information and community organizing, how libraries and archives are never neutral, and what we mean when we say that knowledge is power. We are recording today on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

KN: Today our guest is Zakiya Collier. Zakiya is the Digital Archivist for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. In spring of 2019 she received her Master of Science in Library and Information Science from Long Island University and a Master of Arts in Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. Zakiya's work is driven by a passion to understand how cultural identity influences our experiences and perceptions of the world around us, as well as affirming the humanity of populations that have been repeatedly dehumanized throughout history.

[Intro jingle]

[1:13]

AJ: Is there anything else you want to add in introduction or you want listeners to know about you?

ZC: First I want to say thank you both for having me here on the podcast today and I just want to say thank you for that introduction as well. I think in addition to being interested in cultural identity, I'm also interested in understanding how cultural identity shapes the work that we do and how we encounter, experience, and practice archives and archiving, and that's something that I also explore in my work, in my research and as well in workshops that I do that mostly center around queer and Black and Indigenous people of colour.

KN: So congratulations on finishing both of those Master's programs. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into librarianship and this field of interest, like how did you decide to pursue archival studies?

ZC: Yeah so I think the reason that I got into the field sort of perfectly explains the work that I do right now and that I'm committed to doing today. So really I came to archival studies through Black studies and through Black feminist literature. So I started in the Media,

Culture, Communication program in fall of 2016 and really I got into that program after successfully combining Black studies, specifically Black history, media studies, and oral history in my undergraduate thesis at the University of South Carolina so I decided to pursue the Media, Culture, and Communication degree. And after a semester in the program I became interested in the dual opportunity with Library Science at Long Island University. And in that same semester, well for one I sort of became interested in that program because I always had interest in libraries. So I worked in the media center in elementary school and I have a cute little picture of me as a media center volunteer, and in undergrad I had applied to a few public library jobs so I just always had this like interest that lived with me my entire life and so I was like hmm maybe this is a thing I should do. And I'm also a bit of an overachiever, so I was like ooh I can get two Master's degrees, also for the price of one so

[laughter]

ZC: But I decided to hold off on it for a little bit but in that same semester, so spring 2017, I took a Black feminist theory class in my department and it was in that class that I encountered the literature of Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Tina Campt, Jennifer Nash, Hortense Spillers. And through reading their literature and their work with the archive, I really just fell in love with the way that they sort of really brought their whole selves to the work in order to sort of investigate and describe as fully as they could the lives of people who had been overlooked and who people had said weren't there or sort of to really find and describe people who were living in the documents of someone else so living in documents of slavery that actually documents their oppression and their ownership in slavery, but really just working tirelessly to bring them to the forefront and describe them. And I just really fell in love with that and wanted to sort of work on the other side of that and find a way to bring these people more fully to the surface from the other side of the reference desk. And so after encountering this literature I really just decided like alright I'm gonna go ahead and do this overachiever thing and get this other degree and so I applied in that second semester

[transition music]

[5:30]

AJ: Cool. So you're finished now and you're working for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Can you tell us a bit about what you do there? How long have you been working there and yeah, what's that look like?

ZC: Yeah so the Schomburg Center is a research institute that focuses exclusively on documenting African Americans, African diaspora, and African culture. And it began in 1926 with the sale of the Arturo Alfonso Schomburg collection to the New York Public Library, which at that time it became known as the Negro Division of I believe manuscripts and prints. That could be wrong but something like that, the Negro Division, at the 135th Street library in New York. And so sort of since then the Schomburg has been slowly dedicated to just solely documenting the African diaspora in all the ways, through artifacts, manuscripts, art, artifacts, photographs. Anything you can think of, the Schomburg is focusing on acquiring in order to document Black lives more fully. And so the work that I do there as of August 2019, I'm a digital archivist and my work focuses on web archives so to add to the art and artifacts and manuscripts, the Schomburg now also collects web archives.

KN: Can you, like what are web archives?

AJ: Yeah, I think that there's often a misunderstanding about archiving on the internet. I click archive in my Gmail which is probably not the same thing that you do for work. [laughter] So can you tell us what web archiving is for people who might not be familiar with it?

[laughter]

ZC: Yeah so you know, shout out to Gmail and all the other services that have an archive button for putting archives at least on the radar of many people who may not have ever thought about the term before. But you're absolutely right, it is a bit different. And so really web archiving is like an intentional act of preserving web published materials in the way that they look on the day that you decide to preserve them. So for example, I don't know like my blog site, if I decided to web archive it today, I really just want to preserve sort of everything that is there and what it looks like on, what is today, February 9th, 2020. But if I web archive it let's say fifty days from now maybe I've added a post and so it will look different if I do it then. But it's an intentional act to capture what it looked like in that moment so that we have that for posterity. So in the same way that we have physical materials that we may take in today, so just understand what that sort of tells us about the current moment. It's the same principle with web archives.

AJ: Thanks

KN: So you're archiving materials related to the Hashtag Syllabus Movement, so what is the Hashtag Syllabus Movement, how did it start, how did it spread, like what is it?

ZC: Yeah so the Hashtag Syllabus Movement really got started in the wake of the murder of Michael Brown in August of 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri when he was murdered by former police officer Darren Wilson. Later that month a history professor at Georgia University, Dr. Marcia Chatelain, tweeted #Fergusonsyllabus in order to get people to co-create and co-curate a list of resources that help to contextualize what this moment was, like this moment of civil unrest, this moment of pain, trauma, people responding to what was going on. So she really wanted to gather with the help of other scholars and other people invested in finding resources for educators to use in the classroom to talk about what was happening. And I sort of read in some articles that she thought about movements in her childhood where she really wished that she had resources that helped to make that make sense and was able to talk about that in a classroom or in other safe spaces, and to really just understand what's going on. And since her initiating this movement in 2014, we've seen a number of other syllabi show up to contextualize other social movements. So we have the Trump syllabus unfortunately, so we have the #Charlestonsyllabus, we have syllabi on prison abolition, the Central Park Five, sort of anything and I think over time they've expanded from just the Hashtag Syllabi Movement into people just sort of creating syllabi on their websites and blogs to give people resources on the things that they care about and that other people may also care about. And I think it just really documents this moment in Black studies specifically but also more broadly just in online spaces where people are wanting to self-educate and take educational resources outside of the university and open it up to people who may not

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have access in the same way that people who are attached to an institution of higher learning.

AJ: I have a question relating back to what is web archiving because in that you were talking about trying to show these records in the context that they're created. And when a lot of this stuff is coming out on Twitter, that must be very hard to do because the context changes so I'm curious when you archive these materials, is it in the context of that hashtag's feed, a person's individual feed? How do you show the relationships like in Ferguson to other conversations happening about that that might not have that hashtag? Can you talk a bit about that, how you think through all that?

ZC: Yeah that's actually a really great question. So in a lot of these, like I said there's sort of like this distinct thing happening where we have these hashtag syllabi that is still very much an active movement, sometimes in response to something that's happening in the world, whether it's an album comes out so there's like a Beyonce syllabus, there's a Lemonade syllabus for when her album dropped. So there's things that respond to culture and to social movements but there's also these syllabi that people who are just like this is my project and so I'm going to create a syllabus of things related to things that I'm interested in. So like there's a Black disability syllabus, there's a, hmm I'm trying to think of some other ones that are out there. But there's just sort of like these syllabi that people have just noticed that that's a thing that's going on and so with any project, people are just like yeah we should include a syllabus or bibliography that we're not necessarily citing anything but it's just like these people are saying things that we support and these people over here are saying things that we find important and contextualize whatever statement that we're trying to make on this particular website. And so at the Schomburg Center, we've decided for the moment to not focus on archiving social media just because there is so much that comes with that. There's a lot of additional labour and resources involved. Social media is ever-changing, Twitter populates endlessly. So for the time being we're focusing on the more permanent structures, still ephemeral but more permanent syllabi, many of which were started on Twitter but someone had the foresight to create a Google Doc or maybe it started as a Google Doc on Twitter so someone's like here's this Google Doc, everybody add to it and many of those Google Docs are still live so I focus on web archiving those or the ones that people have posted on their blogs and websites rather than on social media.

[14:32]

AJ: Cool thank you.

KN: Yeah, do you have a favourite syllabus?

ZC: My favourite syllabus, wow what a question. Hm I don't think I can say that I do but I think I have maybe a favourite type of syllabus or like a favourite setting in which I've found syllabi is like on the sort of increasingly professors are creating websites that go alongside their class, especially if they have multiple iterations of this class. And many of these are classes that are sort of revolutionary in the context of typical classes that you find in a university. So it may be a class on like Black death or it may be a class on Black Lives Matter and really talking about the movement or showing the legacy between the civil rights movement or maybe slavery to Black Lives Matter. So they create these websites where not

only is the syllabus and the class itself being offered in an institution that likely has racist roots because many of them do, especially if they're PWIs (predominantly white institutions). So the class itself is sort of standing out amongst other classes at the university and the syllabus obviously as a part of this class does the same thing. But then you're able to see students responding online, where they are you know making blog posts or responses every week or they create these projects, like these digital projects. And so you're able to see the entire trajectory of the class from the syllabus and the readings that are there and like you can imagine like what the students were experiencing reading these things that are so different from what they probably normally would read and what they're able to create. And many of these syllabi, you're able to just see this flexibility in what type of projects they can pursue and like students write songs and they make these montage video compilations and they write about them and they're collaborative. And so it's just really beautiful to see that entire thing and recognize the syllabus and what the syllabus tells us about this moment in time and what is important to read to contextualize today and then how students are responding to that and just imagining what they're going to do on the other side of this class and like taking this into the future so those are my favourite types of syllabi.

AJ: Yeah that's really cool to see the whole arc of it.

KN: I feel like that relates to the next question because you were talking a lot about contextualization and how it relates to other material so can you talk a little bit more about how the syllabi relate to other things at the Schomburg. And maybe as a follow-up, I'm curious how all of the materials at the Schomburg is kind of presented or organized, like how do people, what does it look like when people access it? When you do web archiving, like can I find that online or do I have to go there?

ZC: So in terms of how the syllabi relate to the rest of the Schomburg's collections, I think that our web archiving in general is a bit different from the rest of the collection just because it is very much 21st century. So the Hashtag Syllabus Project which I mentioned started in 2014 so that was you know just six years ago, so it really documents and extends the Schomburg's collections, which go back to I believe it's as early as the fifteenth or sixteenth century into the 21st century. And so we do have some physical collections from the 21st century but this is sort of a more presentist approach of like this is happening right now. And so the most recent syllabus that I identified was from early January so it's like real time archiving to ensure that the moment that I'm living in, that we're all living in, will have a future and that someone you know 25 years from now can be like what was happening at this time and we have it there. You asked another question, I don't remember what it was. Oh how can people access it and access other materials at the Schomburg. So the Schomburg Center is organized by format. So we have the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division which is the division that I work in. We have Art and Artifacts Division, Photographs and Prints, and the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division. So web archiving, it actually intersects with all of those, so I have photographs, not so much artifacts but there's definitely art on the internet so it sort of intersects with all of the divisions of the Schomburg Center but I am personally a part of the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division. But the general approach of web archiving is to mirror the collecting practices of the divisions. So there is an art and artist organization's collection that sort of mirrors what is collected in the Art and Artifacts Division. Oh I missed a division, we also our Research and Reference

Division which is where we have our books and serials. And so there is like the collection of directories, which is something that people do access the Reference and Research Division for in order to just learn more about the Harlem community and for reference materials so like trying to collect the things on line that are like reference materials. And in terms of accessing the web archive, we use the Internet Archive's tool, Archive-It. And so if you go to Archive-It and search Schomburg Center, you'll find all of our collections there so it's always available online, you don't have to contact me or anyone else at the Schomburg. It's widely available which is also a bit different from the rest of our collections which are for in-use of the library only, aside from the things that are digitized. And so that is another way of thinking about expanding the way that archives look in the 21st century and embracing this post-custodial and making the archives be for the community's access wherever they are. And thinking about the Schomburg's immediate community being everywhere because it documents the Black diaspora so online and across the entire world is our community and so the internet is particularly useful in making sure that all of our communities are able to access our materials.

[21:53]

KN: That's a huge job. Are you the only digital archivist or do you have a team?

ZC: It's me.

KN: It's you?

[laughter]

ZC: There's a team of one. [laughter] But I am a part of, because the Schomburg Center is a part of NYPL, there is a broader digital team. I am not a part of it but I do a bit of work alongside them from afar and do sort of at least have conversations and I'm a part of a working group to think about the digital approaches for the Schomburg, I mean NYPL more broadly. But in terms of like web archiving for the Schomburg, it's me.

[laughter]

KN: Wow, that's impressive.

AJ: Yeah. I think that actually leads itself well into our last question for this section which is why is it so important for Black and people of colour-centered libraries and cultural institutions to do web archiving. Why is it so essential you exist, your position exists and maybe is there a need for more of that?

ZC: Yeah I definitely think there's a need for more of me just because you know it's a lot for just one person to do it. But speaking in terms of Black and POC libraries in general and cultural institutions, I think it's particularly important because our communities are everywhere and many times we can't access these spaces. Like the Schomburg Center is in New York City but like I said we document people from across the world. And so not all of those people can come to the Schomburg Center and not everyone knows about it. But they are maybe creating things online and I think what we know about Black people and people of colour is that increasingly we are, our things that we're doing are happening in online spaces

for a number of reasons like the limited physical spaces that we have and the ones that we have had historically are increasingly being taken away or are under-resourced. And so a lot of the content that we're creating and the ways that we are living our lives and communicating with other people is happening online. And so it's very important to document that and preserve this moment where we're living our lives online and we're doing this podcast online like this thing is happening, everything is happening online and we have our phones and our devices in our hands all the time. And I think in addition to that, people of colour are also driving culture online so the ways that we see technology changing is often as a result of some way that a person of colour has already started saying like Twitter needs to do this thing or people started doing threads and then Twitter added the thread option. And so I think it's also important to document our inventions online and the ways that we are shaping culture and like creating these fads and making some of these platforms more popular than they are meant to be just by our use and driving people to them.

[transition music]

[26:25]

KN: So summer 2019 was incredibly busy for you. I know you presented some of your work multiple times, also at AERI, the Archival Education and Research Initiative. Your presentation was titled, *"This History has Engendered Me": Centering Embodied Black Knowledges in Archival Practice*. And that quote is from Saidiya Hartman's piece, *Venus in Two Acts*. Can you, maybe let's start with talking about how Hartman and others you've mentioned earlier as well, what has that meant to you and your work?

ZC: Yeah so like I mentioned before, sort of the way I even decided and walked into what I feel is my calling to be a memory worker is through the literature of scholars like Hartman. But I would say that reading *Venus in Two Acts* is probably my first time reading something where a Black woman scholar was really interrogating and being very personable about and vulnerable about her experience with reading materials about slavery where the story is sort of unrecoverable in the sense of there is no way that this person's story exists somewhere else or that maybe they had an opportunity to you know write a narrative while they're on a slave ship. And so there is like no recovery in that sense and really trying to think about other ways of recovery or rethinking the concept of recovery altogether. And so it was just a very vulnerable piece that just called me, it was just literally like a wake-up call of like, you have to do this work, you are a part of this group and you have always been a part of this group, and go forth and become an archivist. And so I think what this work means for me in the work that I do now is that I recognize that the work and my approach to the work is very personal. And I think it's really important to not pretend that my encounter with the archive as a researcher, as an archivist, and as a writer isn't, I can't pretend that it's not informed by my Blackness, my womanness, my queerness, and I know that because of course archives aren't neutral. And I think it's important to just understand that the history of being a Black woman and being a Black queer woman, my decisions in archiving are informed by that. It's informed by the history of slavery. It's informed by how slavery was documented and how we have information about slavery is through like inventory lists and we may not know the stories of so many people. And so I think it's really important to really think through that and just be very honest about the way that I understand archives and documentation is informed

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by the fact that there's so much documentation that I'll never see and so many stories that I'll never know about my ancestors.

[30:03]

KN: In your work you also talk about critical archival studies, and the three main points you bring up are erasure, inclusion, and accountability. Can you say more about this and what you were talking about with interfacing with Black Studies scholarship and archival studies?

ZC: Yeah, I think—so, my thesis, like you said, sort of looked to bring together Black Studies and critical archival studies, and I think bringing those two things together—they don't fit together perfectly necessarily. So there are places of possibility where we can think through ways that the methodology for doing archival research and creating archives through the scholarship can inform the ways that archivists critically think through and practise archives. And so what I've noticed in reading through critical archival scholarship, is that I see three main veins that critical archival scholarship takes. I think there are a lot of articulations of—that there is erasure, which I think is true, that the archive has served to erase and invisibilize and silence Black life, the lives of women, the lives of people of colour, Indigenous lives, and it has done that intentionally just through the methods that archives have physically taken. We talked a little bit about archival value, we value documents and people who create documents are people who have power to do so. And so in only valuing documents we therefore erase the lives of those who are not creating those same documents. But I think in recognizing erasure we can also say that the archive has served to erase certain lives from the record or at least not represent fully. But we can say that without saying that those people are absent. And so I hear a lot of Black lives are absent from the archive, which that's not true and if we look at Black studies scholarship we can look at a document that was not meant to document Black life. It may have documented a Black person which was seen as property but it wasn't meant to document the fullness of that person's life and their experiences but that doesn't mean that the person is absent and that their life is absent, and that doesn't mean that we can't look at that document and find out more or look at different types of documents put together in order to create a more fuller picture of a Black life. And so I think it's important to stay away from the language of absent. I think it's possible to have an absent presence, which is a term from Katherine McKittrick, so the person's there and it's made to look like they're not there. And so I think that's one place where we can look to Black studies scholarship to say yes these people are in the archive. Otherwise how would someone be able to do scholarship on a person that's not there. So the archive attempts to erase and silence but it's not successful because people are still there, although they are there in different ways than other bodies might show up in the archive and other stories might show up in the archive. I think because of this articulation and of erasure as if it's been completed, like people have been completely erased and are absent, we have this approach of inclusion so let's actively get more archives of Black people and people of colour in the archive, which I think is wonderful. I think we do need more Black stories, Black documents in the archive in general but I don't think that is a full solution, especially considering that I think that we need to rethink the way that we do archiving altogether so if we bring in more documents but we don't accurately describe them. If we don't take the time to really think about how this person might've wanted to be represented and really take the time to learn about the person's life and the material

conditions of their life and how that might inform how we might describe them in the archives so that they can be discoverable by people who would look for them using certain terms that maybe the archivist wouldn't describe them as. It involves research to really think about the best way to describe these materials. So I think it's not just about including more and I can't remember right now who said it but I think we can also just think about sometimes inclusion and making people more visible, especially as Black people, can sometimes be a disservice for your stories to be more visible and then you're criminalized yet again. And so there also has to be some care taken in including more people and it's not just about representation. There just has to be a complete reimagining and thinking about what that looks like. It's more than inclusion, more than integration, more than just numbers. We just have to really take more care. And then on the concept of accountability, I think there has also been movements and discussion to think about gathering more documentation on harms that have been done by the government against Black people. And the idea has been if we gather more documentation of the harm and the violence done then there's the possibility for demanding accountability from government institutions. I think that works sometimes and I think it works very well for other groups but I think what history has shown us is that it doesn't always work for Black communities. And I think we can see that through recent examples of police murdering Black people where the entire scene is recorded. There's no more documentation that we can get than—you can see everything that happened there. You can see that this person didn't reach for anything or that this person wasn't resisting or all the things that the police may say that this person is doing, and still the person is murdered and the cop continues to live on with their life. And so I think the idea of getting more documentation and demanding accountability from the people who harmed you in the first place, it doesn't always work that way. And these systems weren't meant for us and up until a certain point in history Black people couldn't even take advantage of courts and couldn't sue people because they weren't considered people in order to even have the right to have their day in court. And so I think it can sometimes be a bit of a—I don't want to say a mistake but I think sometimes we just have to think more carefully about if it's worth pursuing accountability from systems and people that harmed us intentionally and don't have any intention of undoing that harm or making it less likely that the harm is done in the future, even though that method of accountability may work for other situations and for other communities.

[39:00]

AJ: Yeah in your work, you offer this concept of fugitive discernment.

KN: Quote "Discernment, a quality often used to describe the skill honed by professionals, is used here to both honour Black women's intimate ways of knowing and to situate Blackness and Black ways of knowing as a way to expand current understandings of archive and where Black people exist within them. I [being Zakiya] offer fugitive discernment as a form of critique that centers Black epistemologies of contending with the anti-Blackness of traditional archives where the tools and documentation of dispossession, criminalization, oppression, and negation have been appropriated, collected, disrupted, and disordered in order to discern and attend to the obscurity that is Black life existing within and without archival documents."

AJ: Do you want to unpack that a bit or unravel it for us, what that means?

ZC: Yeah, so I developed this concept just through thinking through reading some of the work that I've mentioned of some of these scholars and their discussion of fugitivity, which is like this disregard for the ways that we're told we're supposed to do things, like the way that what's normal, what the state tells us we're supposed to do and just being like whatever. And I think often that happens through a need to survive and having to be a fugitive and thinking through Blackness and its ties to fugitivity, especially through slavery like being a fugitive and running away from slavery. And many times I think Black life is lived in this state of fugitivity—I think in one way because Blackness is criminalized in so many ways. There is this line by this group, Arrested Development, that says "self-sufficiency to us is to them a crime" in the song called Trauma that discusses Black trauma. And so in many ways, Blackness and just living life as a Black person is criminalized and so to continue living, you live as a fugitive. I think in thinking through the scholarship of people like Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and Tina Campt, they talk about living Black life through fugitivity but despite saying that and how Black life sometimes evades documentation as people try to evade being seen. However their scholarship perfectly described this encounter with fugitivity and this encounter with being able to document life that often goes unnoticed, is elusive and unseen in documentation even though it's there. And so I developed the concept of fugitive discernment to talk about the methods that they use, bringing their own experiences being Black women to think through reading archives and being like yes this is an FBI file or yes this is a mugshot photo but still being able to see the humanity and resistance in the way they're looking at the camera. And seeing that Black life and this fugitivity exists even in documents that were meant to oppress or meant to invisibilize these people or objectify violence or whatever we can think of but still being able to really discern the strategies that may have been deployed to be a person and just stare back at the camera and be like yes, you're taking this photo to make this claim about what Black people are or are not but I'm going to assert my personhood in the way that I'm just slightly adjusting my face towards the camera. And just really being able to see and to hear and discern Black people and Black life in documents that weren't meant to document them as people. That's my term to really just describe that method that is really an act of discernment and I think I also came to that term, I think I read in some archival practice book of archivists have to discern what we want to collect or what's something we don't want to accession. And I really thought about discernment and as this skill that I think is often used, like you either have or you don't the skill of discernment and I think it's really special to acknowledge these intimate ways of knowing that these Black women have from their own life experiences, from the experiences of Black women, their Black ancestors, and they have this way of knowing and seeing and describing that I think comes from their embodied experiences as Black women.

KN: Yeah I remember reading a lot about, that does come up a lot like discerning archival value and then all those different types of value but hearing that makes me think wow that's so vague, like when we were talking about informational value, monetary value. When you talked about embodiment, it really emphasizes how archives are not neutral. I as a non-Black person could never do what you're doing at least to any point of justice.

AJ: The other thing you reminded me of is conversations when we were in the archival core together about people's role in creating records and who gets recognized. You're talking

about that in terms of like a mugshot, right, like as something created by the state with a certain goal. But in understanding these records in a different way, it reminded me of conversations about who gets credit for this record or who's name is attached to it, and through this fugitive discernment you're really cracking that open and ripping open a lot of that very Eurocentric archival theory. I imagine that you bring this to the way that you arrange and describe the stuff that you web archive, right? Not only the people who come and use those records as researchers, right? Maybe that's a better way of explaining what I'm trying to get at here.

[laughter]

ZC: I think it comes at all angles. The discernment comes in the interpretation of the materials or seeing fully what's there. For example if I'm looking at two inventory sheets and I see one where the age of a Black woman like myself, a 20-something year old Black woman and on one sheet maybe the age says one thing and then on the other sheet the age says something else, maybe I could think about why it might be beneficial for her to lie about her age—for a number of reasons, what type of treatment you receive in chattel slavery based on your age. And so I might be able to discern that, not from any particular experience of mine but just knowing the ways that Black people often aren't seen as children. And so maybe lying to say that you're younger will get you a little bit better treatment than if you're seen as older and more threatening as a Black person. And so I think there's a discernment in being able to discern that in looking at these two documents. Rather than seeing her as a liar, I see her as a fugitive who's trying to survive and have better treatment to avoid punishment of some sort. But then also in my description of it in a finding aid or in an article, I might describe it in a way that doesn't say that she's a liar but that says she is a brave woman who decided to do something that would make her life better despite being under the duress of slavery. So I think it comes in seeing the document and understanding it and then also in the description of it.

AJ: Yeah, thanks for the examples.

KN: Now that you're out of school for now [laughter], how is this concept of fugitive discernment that you've been working on and how is critical archival studies playing into your work as a Black archivist and at the Schomburg? You've talked about this earlier as well but also in your reflections from AERI you talked about rethinking the entire discipline of archival science and imagining better archives and being more intentional about methodologies and listening and citing to Black women. Can you say a little bit more about this?

ZC: Yeah, I think in my day-to-day in bringing in the concept of fugitive discernment, really just thinking about the concept of discernment and it coming from within and really being intentional, listening to yourself and your intuition in guiding these decisions. I think I try to always think about everyday people in my work and people who look like me, who don't look like me, who have lives like me, who don't, and think of ways that I can better represent them and have them participate in the documentation of their own life. One way I do that is through web archiving because I think when people create websites they are created to represent to the world their perspectives or what they're thinking of at that moment or what they've created. And so I think there's that way and then also communicating with people

about web archiving and saying hey we're going to preserve your website, and letting people have a say-so and if they're like no then the answer's no. Flat-out there is no argument there and we can of course advocate and say it's very important to have this preserved but if someone doesn't want to preserve then so be it. And so just really thinking about people and thinking about how I would want to be treated in the record and as a person in conversation. And I think in terms of listening to Black women, you know I'm a Black woman so I try to listen to myself, which I think can be hard when the world tells me at every turn that what I have to say is not important in a number of ways. And so I think being really intentional and listening to myself and lessons I've learned thus far and moving with intention in that way. And I think on the other side of that, every time something happens in the world it's always like Black women told y'all this was going to happen and nobody listened. And so I think about that and keep that in mind as yeah I know what I'm doing here and I can always consult someone else when I feel like I'm not but just really believing in myself and bringing my whole self to the work that I'm doing so that I know what that feels like to bring my whole self to the table and then be able to then see what it looks like when someone else is not being fully represented and giving them the opportunity and making the space so that someone can bring their whole self to the record and to the world of archiving. And when I think about reimagining what archives do feel like, smell like, I really think about what does an archive of Black life, full Black life that represents the material conditions of the way people live and what they experience each day, I try to imagine what that looks like and feels like and move towards that with intention. And I think that changes depending on the content, there is no one way that that looks or feels but I try to imagine that and go with that sense of imagination and create the conditions and do the work that feels like it's moving towards that.

[53:10]

[transition music]

AJ: Before we wrap up, is there anything that you want to leave folks with as a thought? Something you wish more folks knew about digital archiving and Black culture? Anything we haven't touched on that you really want to say?

[53:22]

ZC: I think I wish that people knew like [?] said to just do it, to know that it exists, to know that it's a thing, that it's an option that we have, and it's something that we are all capable of doing. You don't have to be an archivist to web archive or to archive in the analog sense. We all do it, we all can do it. Everybody can and is a memory worker and so I think with web archiving, digital archiving more broadly including materials that aren't created online but are created on a computer or a phone, it is a bit to learn but I think it is worth it and I think some of it we already know, just by living in this world. And like I said we're all memory workers so there's things that we know and there's things that archivists and digital archivists can guide people into doing this work themselves. But I think specifically in thinking about Black culture we know how to survive so I think [?] survive online so there's really nothing to it but do it and I wish people would just do it.

KN: Thank you so much. If folks want to reach you online, where can they find you?

ZC: Twitter and on Instagram I am @zzcollier and also to find out about things that I'm doing and also access my Twitter or Instagram on Linktree which I am newly a fan of so that's linktr.ee/zzcollier. And that's where I am.

AJ: I'll say ours too. We can be found on Twitter at OrganizingPod. Our email is organizingideaspod@gmail.com and our website is organizingideaspod.wordpress.com.

[Outro jingle]

Transcribed by Sam Fred

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" Particularly as artists, but I think *everybody* in some capacity, is an educator—'cause we all have something to teach *each other*. Everyone can learn something from everyone. "

— *Joshua Dent*

Appendix

BLT Roundtable Event Locations & Partners

Locations

Baltimore, MD
Boston, MA
Buffalo, NY
Calgary, Canada
Cape Town, South Africa
Charleston, IL
Charlotte, NC
Chattanooga, TN
Chapel Hill, NC
Chicago, IL
College Park, MD
Durham, NC
Greensboro, NC
Houston, TX
Indianapolis, IN

Johannesburg, South Africa
Lawrence, KS
Milwaukee, WI
Nashville, TN
New Orleans, LA
New Windsor, NY
New York, NY
Omaha, NE
Santa Monica, CA
Seattle, WA
Sheboygan, WI
Skowhegan, ME
Spokane, WA
Toronto, Canada

Partners

A4
Ackland Museum of Art
Art 21
Bemis Center for the Contemporary Arts
Black Artists Retreat [B.A.R.]
Boston University
BRIC:
Brooklyn Museum
Creative Time @ Boys & Girls High School
Elsewhere
FUNDA Community College
High Line
Hudson Valley Storm King
Illingworth Kerr Gallery
Indiana University
Joan Mitchell Center
Johannesburg-Market Photo Workshop
Kohler Art Center
Lawrence Art Center

McColl Center for the Arts
Mount Mary University
National Humanities Council
New School
Project Row Houses
Santa Monica College
Staten Island Museum
Station Museum
Stove Works
Tarble Arts Center
Terrain Gallery
The 8th Floor
University of Buffalo Knox Art Gallery
University of MD Baltimore County
University of Toronto Scarborough
Vanderbilt University
Wa Na Wari
Weeksville Heritage Center
WikiMania

Wikipedia:Meetup/Black Lunch Table/Lists of Articles

< Wikipedia:Meetup | Black Lunch Table

| Current | BLT Bingo Archive | Resources | Task List | Join us! | Event Archive | About |

Black Lunch Table's task list is made up of visual artists of the African Diaspora who are under-represented on Wikipedia. We welcome your additions to our list, in fact we need them. Please keep suggestions within our scope of visual artists of the African Diaspora and please refrain from adding artists who already have substansial articles. Our goal is to create new pages and build up under-represented ones. Be sure an artist qualifies according to **Wikipedia's notability guidelines.**Thanks!

Black Lunch Table Wikimedians mobilize the creation and improvement of a specific set of Wikipedia articles that pertain to the lives and works of Black artists. In the field of mainstream contemporary art, Black artists are still marginalized within our field.

Wikipedia estimates that 77% of their editors are white and 91% of their editors are men. Our work shifts this demographic and empowers people to write their own history. Our sessions and events, including BLT Photobooth and edit-a-thons, equip new editors with the skills and resources to create, update, and improve Wikipedia articles and encourages existing editors to focus on Wikipedia knowledge gaps.

Task lists

Suggest Black visual artists/curators/exhibitions/artworks and Black visual art institution pages for **revision and/or creation** in the "New task suggestions" section below! Each suggestion is then added to Wikidata and tagged with Black Lunch Table as "On Focus List," so **please do not move or remove names from this "Suggestions" section without Wikidata work first!** BLT

staff will also work on moving these articles regularly. Black Lunch Table's task list is a crowd-sourced, initiative-specific list that focuses on important **visual artists**/collectors/curators/art writers of the **African Diaspora**.

Please add new suggestions here

✓ *Please check with a WikiFacilitator before starting new pages – recommend beginners start by editing existing pages vs. starting new pages* Charles Crossley

Yinka Ilori (Please see declined Yinka Ilori draft.) He is an import figure in contemporary design. Should be represented in this encyclopaedia. Cheers, Cl3phact0 (talk) 19:52, 9 February 2023 (UTC)

PS: I've made some edits and improvements to this (draft) article in the interim.

Comment: Please note, this article has been significantly rewritten and is now resubmitted and awaiting review by a qualified editor. Cheers, Cl3phact0 (talk) 10:09, 19 February 2023 (UTC)

Comment: Article accepted today via AfC. (Please archive this thread if appropriate.) -- Cl3phact0 (talk) 15:57, 20 February 2023 (UTC)

David Adamo

Al Doggett   Phillip Lindsay Mason

Main list

(Visual artists, curators, art writers and visual art subjects of the African Diaspora)

✓ *Please check with a WikiFacilitator before starting new pages – recommend beginners start by editing existing pages vs. starting new pages*

1. Acebeat Records
2. Kwesi Abbensetts
3. Najjar Abdul-Musawwir
4. Eileen Abdul-Rashid
5. Tanatsei Gambura
6. Julian Abele
7. Nina Chanel Abney
8. Niv Acosta
9. Raul Acero
10. Manuel Acevedo (photographer)
11. Cey Adams
12. Derrick Adams
13. Patience Adamu
14. Tunde Adebimpe
15. Terry Adkins
16. Emanuel Admassu
17. Africa's Out!
18. Leonce Raphael Agbodjélou
19. Regina Agu
20. Mequitta Ahuja
21. Ta-coumba T. Aiken
22. Ajamu X

23. 2dmaxo/Olu Ajayi
24. Olaniyi R. Akindiya
25. John Akomfrah
26. Henri Akulez Kalama
27. Adebisi Akanji
28. Ola Ronke Akinmowo
29. Njideka Akunyili Crosby
30. Elia Alba
31. Melissa Alcena
32. Laylah Ali
33. Salimah Ali
34. Basil Alkazzi
35. Jules T. Allen
36. Ariana Faye Allensworth
37. Charles Alston
38. Candida Alvarez
39. Francisco Alvaroado-Juarez
40. Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze
41. Emma Amos (painter)
42. Dawolu Jabari Anderson
43. Hurvin Anderson
44. Benny Andrews
45. Joël Andrianomearisoa
46. Katrina Andry
47. B. Anele
48. Richard Antihomme
49. Montas Antoine
50. Deborah Anzinger
51. Philip Kwame Apagya
52. Tyrone Appollis
53. Edgar Arceneaux
54. Hatch Billops Archives
55. Michael Armitage(Artist)
56. Jabu Arnell
57. Red Jordan Arobateau
58. American Artist (artist)
59. Daphne Arthur
60. Liz Johnson Artur
61. Albert Artwell
62. Nettie Craig Asberry
63. Salome Asega
64. Nellie Ashford
65. James Atkins
66. Atis Rezistans

67. Alice Attie
68. Ellsworth Ausby
69. Kine Aw
70. Nicole Awai
71. Elizabeth Axtman
72. Roland Ayers
73. Belkis Ayón
74. BaadAsssss Cinema
75. Mahmoud Baba Ly
76. Ash Baccus-Clark
77. Firelei Baez
78. Radcliffe Bailey
79. Holston Bain
80. Ada Balcácer
81. James Presley Ball
82. Lavett Ballard
83. Melvonna Ballenger
84. Alvin Baltrop
85. Alisa Banks, book artist
86. Ellen Banks
87. Gabrielle Banks
88. John Bankston
89. Edward Mitchell Bannister
90. Che Baraka
91. Anthony Barboza
92. Leslie Barlow
93. Alvaro Barrington
94. Lyndon Barrois Jr.
95. Ernie Barnes
96. Germane Barnes
97. John H. Barnes
98. Michelle Barnes
99. Kumasi J. Barnett
100. Sadie Barnette
101. Delton Barrett
102. Richardo Barrett
103. Richmond Barthe
104. James Bartlett (curator)
105. Chloë Bass
106. Suhaly Bautista-Carolina
107. Ronald Bazile
108. Kimberly Beacot
109. LaShun Beal
110. Romare Bearden

111. Kevin Beasley
112. Ron Bechet
113. Aisha Tandiwe Bell
114. Floyd Bell, dollmaker
115. Cleveland Bellows
116. Mildred Beltre
117. Rigaud Benoit
118. Gus Bennett
119. Sue Bennett-Williams
120. Willie Bester
121. Chantal Bethel
122. James Bettison
123. April Bey
124. Dawoud Bey
125. Wilson Bigaud
126. James Biggers
127. John T. Biggers
128. Sanford Biggers
129. Camille Billops
130. McArthur Binion
131. Raynes Birkbeck
132. Willie Birch
133. Blackstar Film Festival
134. Black Quantum Futurism
135. Hannah Black
136. Monstah Black
137. Morris Blackburn
138. Robert Blackburn (artist)
139. Thomas Blackshear
140. Lillian Blades
141. Nayland Blake
142. Nydia Blas
143. Tia Blassingame
144. Betty Blayton Taylor
145. Blitz the Ambassador
146. Ben Blount, letterpress printer
147. Carroll Parrott Blue
148. Betty Venus Blue, textile artist
149. Terry Boddie
150. Frances Bodomo
151. Skunder Boghossian
152. Gloria Bohanon
153. Chakaia Booker
154. Edythe Boone
155. Neta Bomani
156. Dineo Seshee Bopape
157. Seymore Bottex
158. Frank Bowling
159. Sonia Boyce
160. Mark Bradford
161. Garrett Bradley (filmmaker)
162. Peter Bradley (artist)
163. Xenobia Bailey
164. Brenda Branch
165. Cynthia Brannvall
166. Vanessa Brantley-Newton, illustrator
167. Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley
168. Kwame Brathwaite
169. Marc Brandenburg (artist)
170. James Brantley
171. idris brewster
172. Bruce Brice
173. Murat Brierre
174. Question Bridge
175. Enick Brig
176. Joan Bristow
177. Michael Paul Britto
178. Moe Brooker
179. LeRonn Brooks
180. Blanche Brown
181. Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.
182. Frederick J. Brown
183. Imani Jacqueline Brown
184. Julia Brown (artist)
185. Kay Brown (artist)
186. LaKela Brown
187. Marcus E. Brown
188. Elenora "Rukiya" Brown
189. Rukiya Brown
190. Samuel Joseph Brown
191. Vivian E. Browne
192. Kesha Bruce
193. Amy Bryan
194. Linda Goode Bryant
195. Beverly Buchanan
196. Courtney "Ceaux" Buckley
197. Barbara Bullock
198. Selma Burke

199. Jackson Burnside
200. Stanley Burnside
201. Margaret Burroughs
202. Janette Burrows
203. Charles Burwell
204. Bisa Butler
205. Robert Butler (artist)
206. Weldon Butler
207. Joan Butterfield, (Canadian artist)
208. Nina Buxenbaum
209. Carole Byard
210. Joan Eda Byrd
211. Rikki Byrd
212. Robert Byrd (filmmaker)
213. Bourmond Byron
214. Widline Cadet
215. Rodeo Caldonia
216. Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick
217. Louis Cameron
218. Donald Camp
219. Kimberly Camp
220. Andrianna Campbell
221. Crystal Campbell
222. María Magdalena Campos-Pons
223. Syd Carpenter
224. Ray Carrington III
225. Kabir Carter
226. Nanette Carter
227. George Washington Carver
228. Juan Cash[1] (http://www.worldcat.org/titl e/5-5-artists-introduce-artists-an-exhibition -of-artists-in-the-arts-apprenticeship-progr am-of-the-new-york-city-department-of-cul tural-affairs-may-19-1981-june-19-1981/oc lc/43080591)
229. Jordan Casteel
230. Laurent Casimir
231. Elizabeth Catlett
232. Bruce Cayonne
233. Momadou Ceesay
234. Arlette Cepeda
235. Edson Chagas
236. Dana Chandler
237. Michelle Marie Charles
238. Roland Charles
239. Zoe Charlton
240. Colin Chase
241. Barbara Chase-Riboud
242. Ayoka Chenzira
243. Caitlin Cherry
244. Ralph Chesse
245. Sedrick Chisom
246. Kudzanai Chiurai
247. Albert Chong
248. Gabri Christa
249. Gabrielle Civil
250. Carl Clark
251. Claude Clark
252. Edward Clark (artist)
253. Henry Ray Clark
254. Sonya Clark
255. Leroy Clarke
256. Peter Clarke (artist)
257. Tamar Clarke-Brown
258. Taha Clayton
259. Louise Clement-Hoff
260. Ladybird Cleveland
261. Kinshasha Holman Conwill
262. Mike Cloud (artist)
263. Cloverleaf Art Club
264. Gregory Coates
265. Layziehound Coka
266. Gylbert Coker
267. Willie Cole
268. Robert Colescott
269. Brandon Coley Cox
270. Bethany Collins
271. June Collie
272. Elizabeth Colomba
273. Dan Concholar
274. Houston Conwill
275. Joe Conzo
276. Jeffrey Cook (artist)
277. Brett Cook Dizney
278. Sekou Cooke
279. Ryan Coogler
280. Peggy Cooper Cafritz
281. Huey Copeland
282. William Cordova

283. Eldzier Cortor
284. Aisha Cousins
285. Linda Cousins-Newton
286. Adger Cowans
287. John Edward Cox
288. Christopher Cozier
289. Duane Cramer
290. Romi Crawford
291. Harvey Cropper
292. Lafayette Cruise
293. Iris Crump
294. Emilio Cruz
295. Lizania Cruz
296. Blondell Cummings
297. Michael Cummings
298. Jamal Cyrus
299. Leonard Daley
300. J. Yolande Daniels
301. Julie Dash
302. Bruce Davenport
303. Dana Davenport
304. Ulysses David
305. Damien Davis
306. Felecia Davis
307. Lionel Davis
308. Noah_Davis_(painter)
309. Pat Davis
310. sonia louise davis
311. Walter Davis (artist)
312. Justin Davy
313. Daniel Dawson (artist)
314. William Dawson (artist)
315. Burnis Calvin Day
316. Linda Day Clark
317. Aria Dean
318. Danielle Dean
319. Roy DeCarava
320. Erika DeFreitas
321. Avel de Knight
322. Nadine De Lawrence
323. Delio Delgado
324. Rex Deloney
325. Adama Delphine Fawundu
326. Nzuji De Magalhaes
327. Ryan Dennis (curator)
328. Paul Deo
329. Jonathas de Andrade
330. Ziomara De Oliver
331. Murray DePillars
332. Abigail DeVille
333. Dorothy Dehner
334. Cheryl Dejoie-LaCabe
335. Beauford Delaney
336. Joseph Delaney (artist)
337. Louis Delsarte
338. James Denmark
339. Ulrick Desert
340. Thornton Dial
341. Erika Diamond
342. Manthia Diawara
343. Reba Dickerson Hill
344. Modou Dieng
345. S. Vincent Dillard
346. Stephanie Dinkins
347. Marita Dingus
348. Omar Victor Diop
349. Sindika Dokolo
350. James W. Donaldson
351. Jeff Donaldson (artist)
352. Nathaniel Donnett
353. Seteria Dorsey
354. Aaron Douglas
355. Stan Douglas
356. Dyani Douze
357. John Dowell-artist
358. Kimberly Drew
359. Leonardo Drew
360. David Driskell
361. Prefete Duffaut
362. M. Asli Dukan
363. Kim Dummons
364. Keith Duncan
365. Robert S. Duncanson
366. Cheryl Dunye
367. James Dupree
368. Nekisha Durrett
369. Ava DuVernay
370. Oasa DuVerney

371. Jean-Sebastian Duvilaire
372. D. Denenge Duyst-Akpem
373. Linda Earle
374. Walter Edmonds
375. Allan Edmunds
376. Adrienne Edwards
377. Melvin Edwards
378. Michael Edwards
379. Ruth E. Edwards
380. Jeannette Ehlers
381. Alfred Eisenstadt
382. Jamica El
383. Amine el Gotaibi
384. Walter Ellison
385. Touhami Ennadre
386. Garth Erasmus
387. Awol Erizku
388. Roberto Estopinan
389. Ayana Evans
390. Kenya Evans
391. Minnie Evans
392. Fred Eversley
393. Kevin Jerome Everson
394. Ginger Ewing
395. Ritchie Eyma
396. Zachary Fabri
397. Adebisi Fabunmi
398. Lamidi Olonade Fakeye
399. Rotimi Fani-Kayode
400. Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask(film by Isaac Julien)
401. Charles Farrar
402. Nona Faustine Simmons
403. Tom Feelings
404. Dumile Feni
405. Rashida Ferdinand
406. Roy Ferdinand
407. Amos Ferguson
408. Claude Ferguson
409. James E. Ferguson, II
410. Tyrone Ferguson
411. Brendan Fernandes
412. Valeria "Mikki" Ferrill
413. Cheryl Finley
414. Keisha Finnie
415. Lola Flash
416. Sherman Fleming
417. Frederic Crum Flemister
418. Rev. L. Dianna Flournoy
419. David Fludd
420. Derrick Fludd
421. Sabaah Folayan
422. Thierry Fontaine
423. Raque Ford
424. Derek Fordjour
425. Cacy Forgenie
426. Atisha Fordyce
427. Samuel Fosso
428. Collette V. Fournier
429. Aaron Fowler
430. Florville Foy
431. Ikechukwu Francis Okoronkwo
432. Miriam Francis
433. Ricardo Francis
434. Krista Franklin
435. Chanelle Fraizer
436. LaToya Ruby Frazier
437. Russell Frederick
438. Philip Freelon
439. Roland Freeman
440. Ania Freer
441. Dania W. Frink
442. Kendra Frorup
443. Coco Fusco
444. Meschac Gaba
445. Charles Gaines (artist)
446. Nikita Gale
447. Tamika Galanis
448. Ellen Gallagher
449. Tanatsei Gambura
450. Tapiwa Gambura
451. Jerry Gant
452. Harvey Gantt
453. Domingo Garcia (artist)
454. Iliana Emilia García
455. Scherezade García
456. Paul Gardere
457. Bill Gaskins

458. Nettrice Gaskins
459. Rico Gatson
460. Cy Gavin
461. Buraimoh Gbadamosi
462. Raimi Gbadamosi
463. Erlin Geffrard
464. Herbert Gentry
465. Rennie George
466. Justine Georges
467. Vanessa German
468. Ray Gibson
469. Claudia Gibson-Hunter
470. Celeste Woss y Gil
471. Aaron Gilbert
472. Danny Giles
473. Charles Gillam (artist)
474. Sam Gilliam
475. Allison Glenn
476. GeoVanna Gonzalez
477. Brett Gordon
478. Richard Gordon (artist)
479. Rex Goreleigh
480. Mario Gooden
481. Nefertiti Goodman
482. Simon Gouverneur
483. Lungiswa Gqunta
484. Lawrence Graham-Brown
485. Cameron Granger
486. Hugh Grannum
487. Deborah Grant (artist)
488. Gladys Barker Grauer
489. Todd Gray (artist)
490. Malvin Gray Johnson
491. Leamon Green
492. Naima Green
493. Rafala Green
494. Renee Green
495. Jacci Gresham
496. Jerushia Graham, printmaker
497. Gerald Griffin (artist)
498. Kojo Griffin
499. Rashawn Griffin
500. J. Eugene Grigsby
501. Ray Grist

502. Adler Guerrier
503. Andre Guichard
504. Tapfuma Gutsa
505. Tyree Guyton
506. Anthea Hamilton
507. Gia M. Hamilton
508. Lamont Hamilton (artist)
509. Patrick Earl Hammie
510. David Hammons
511. Terence Hammonds
512. Trenton Doyle Hancock
513. Akintola Hanif
514. Kendal Hanna
515. Ruth Inge Hardison
516. Hugh Harrell
517. Fields Harrington
518. Deidre Harris
519. Kira Lynn Harris
520. L. Kasimu Harris
521. Lyle Ashton Harris
522. Thomas Allen Harris
523. Victor Harris (artist)
524. Rolfe Harris (Bahamian artist
525. Ilana Harris-Babou
526. Cherice Harrison-Nelson
527. Alex Harsley
528. Heather Hart
529. Verna Hart
530. David Hartt
531. Dr. Melanee Harvey
532. Francine Haskins
533. Reem A. Hassan
534. Maren Hassinger
535. Carrie Hawks
536. Cynthia Hawkins
537. Frank Hayden
538. Cheryl Hayes
539. Fred Hayes (artist)
540. Stephen L. Hayes Jr.
541. Ebony L. Haynes
542. Grace Lynne Haynes
543. Lauren Haynes (curator)
544. Carl E. Hazlewood
545. Romuald Hazoumè

546. Tahir Hemphill
547. Napoleon Henderson
548. Barkley Hendricks
549. Gregory Henry
550. Janet Henry
551. Randall Henry
552. Andres L. Hernandez
553. Rosalba Hernández
554. Leslie Hewitt
555. Vivian Davidson Hewitt
556. Calvin Hicks (photographer)
557. Kay Hickman
558. Chester Higgins, Jr.
559. Frida High-Wasikhongo
560. EJ Hill
561. Candace Hill-Montgomery
562. Lubaina Himid
563. Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle
564. Vandorn Hinnant
565. Linda Hiwot
566. Nicholas Hlobo
567. Rujeko Hockley
568. Wayne Hodge
569. Robert Hodge (artist)
570. Lisa Funderburke Hoffman
571. Geoffrey Holder
572. Reagan Holiday
573. Fred Holland (artist)
574. Lonnie Holley
575. Alvin Hollingsworth
576. Camara D. Holloway
577. Homie House Press
578. Walter Hood
579. Patricia Howard-artist
580. Kenkeleba House
581. Sedrick Huckaby
582. Earlie Hudnall, Jr.
583. Julien Hudson
584. Albert Huie
585. Lehna Huie
586. Daonne Huff
587. David Huffman (artist)
588. Jibade-Khalil Huffman (artist)
589. Nadia Huggins
590. Manuel Hughes
591. Horton Humble
592. Margo Humphrey
593. Amanda Hunt
594. Richard Hunt (sculptor)
595. Clementine Hunter
596. Mwangi Hutter
597. Bill Hutson
598. Juliana Huxtable
599. Hayat Hyatt
600. Hector Hyppolite
601. Jerald Ieans
602. Evan Ifekoya
603. Janelle Iglesias
604. Lisa Iglesias
605. Texas Isaiah
606. J. Renee
607. Deborah Jack
608. Ayana V. Jackson
609. Billy Morrow Jackson
610. Clifford Jackson
611. Danielle Jackson
612. Derek Jackson
613. Duron Jackson
614. Leeya Rose Jackson
615. Oliver Jackson
616. Reginald Jackson (artist)
617. Suzanne Jackson (artist)
618. Tomashi Jackson
619. Walter Jackson
620. Sandra Jackson-Dumont
621. Stefanie Jackson
622. Arthur Jafa
623. Adama Jalloh
624. Ashley James
625. Catherine "Catti" James
626. Gordon C. James (artist)
627. E. Jane
628. Hawona Sullivan Janzen
629. Virginia Jaramillo
630. Jae Jarrell
631. Wadsworth Jarrell
632. Fabiola Jean-Louis
633. Soraya Jean-Louis McElroy

634. Affrekka Jefferson
635. Robert L. Jefferson
636. Steffani Jemison
637. Genesis Jerez
638. Olalekan Jeyifous
639. Rasu Jilani
640. Barry Johnson (artist)
641. Carmen Cartiness Johnson
642. Elisheba Johnson
643. Joshua Johnson (painter)
644. Leroy Johnson (artist)
645. Sharmar Johnson
646. Scott M. Johnson
647. Sean M. Johnson
648. Oliver Johnson (artist)
649. Thelma Johnson Streat
650. Serge Jolimeau
651. Ashley Jones (artist)
652. Ben F. Jones
653. Ida Jones (artist)
654. James Edward Jones
655. Jennie C. Jones
656. Ladi'Sasha Jones
657. Kellie Jones
658. Lisa Jones
659. Lois Mailou Jones
660. Luther Jones (artist)
661. Otabenga Jones & Associates
662. Philip Mallory Jones
663. Samuel Levi Jones
664. Barbara Jones-Hogu
665. June Jordan
666. Jasmine Joseph
667. William "Woody" Joseph (artist)
668. Alexis Joyner
669. Epaul Julien
670. Isaac Julien
671. Just Above Midtown
672. André Juste
673. Cyrus Kabiru
674. Admire Kamudzengerere
675. Dozie Kanu
676. Titus Kaphar
677. Mathieu Kilapi Kasiama

678. Aubrey J. Kauffman
679. NIC Kay
680. Jayson Keeling
681. Paul F. Keene Jr.
682. Seydou Keïta (photographer)
683. Naima Keith
684. Bill Keith (artist)
685. Lauren Kelley
686. Khalif Kelly
687. Kamoinge
688. Arnold J. Kemp
689. Roshini Kempadoo
690. John Kendrick
691. Neil Kenlock
692. Devin Kenny
693. Caroline Kent
694. Themba Khumalo
695. James N. Kienitz Wilkins
696. Basil Kincaid
697. Dana King
698. Brian Kirhagis
699. Rose Kirumira
700. Rosamond S. King
701. MaPo Kinnord
702. Hasaan Kirkland
703. Marcus Kiser
704. William Kitt
705. Kapwani Kiwanga
706. Yashua Klos
707. Autumn Knight
708. Gwendolyn Knight
709. Nsenga Knight
710. Ricardo Knowles
711. Simmie Knox
712. David Koloane
713. Rosine Kouamen
714. Koyo Kouoh
715. Atta Kwami
716. Iyabo Kwayana
717. Langston Hughes Film Festival
718. Kia LaBeija
719. Sajda Musawwir Ladner
720. Helen LaFrance
721. Franchesca G. Lamarre

722. Moshekwa Langa
723. Daniel LaRue Johnson
724. Tiffany Latrice
725. Babatunde Lawal
726. Carolyn Lawrence
727. Jacob Lawrence
728. Deana Lawson
729. Carolyn Lazard
730. Thomas Lax
731. Viola Burley Leak
732. Clara Ledesma
733. Robbie Lee
734. El Franco Lee II
735. Hughie Lee-Smith
736. Simone Leigh
737. Babirye Leilah
738. Ananias Léki Dago
739. Ralph Lemon
740. Nery Gabriel Lemus
741. Alicia Le'Von Boone
742. David Levinthal
743. Builder Levy
744. Paul Lewin
745. Fatima Jamal
746. Joan Tarika Lewis
747. Joe Lewis (artist)
748. Marlene Lewis-Weinberger
749. Nate Lewis
750. Norman Lewis (artist)
751. Samella Lewis
752. Shantrelle P. Lewis
753. Georges Liautaud
754. Glenn Ligon
755. Jules Lion
756. Taja Lindley
757. Kalup Linzy
758. James Little (artist)
759. Willie Little
760. Ras Dizzy Livingston
761. Tom Lloyd-artist
762. Donald Locke
763. Hew Locke
764. Steve Locke
765. Damon Locks
766. Lionel Lofton
767. Juan Logan
768. Looking for Langston
769. Jesse Lott
770. Whitfield Lovell
771. George Leary Love
772. Natalie Lovejoy
773. Alvin D. Loving
774. Che Lovelace
775. Jamiyla Lowe
776. Rick Lowe
777. Thomas Lucas (artist)
778. Benon Lutaaya
779. Andrew Lyght
780. Jodie Lyn-Kee-Chow
781. Warren Lyons
782. Noria Mabasa
783. Dumisani Mabaso
784. David MacDonald-artist
785. Zwelethu Machepha
786. Eric N. Mack
787. Tamara Natalie Madden
788. Adam Madebe
789. Fikile Magadlela
790. Ibrahim Mahama (artist)
791. Esther Mahlengu
792. Marcelo Maia
793. Carolyn Maitland
794. Anina Major
795. William Majors
796. Katie Mallory
797. Brent Malone
798. Tierney Malone
799. Ajuan Mance
800. Billy Mandindi
801. Louis Maqhubela
802. Natasha Marin
803. Carlos Martiel
804. Courtney J. Martin
805. Shantell Martin
806. Ernel Martinez
807. Kerry James Marshall
808. Antonio Martorell
809. Kelly Sinnapah Mary

810. Louis Massiah
811. Paola Mateo (artist)
812. James Murelle
813. Kagiso Pat Mautloa
814. Pat Mautloa
815. Richard Mayhew
816. Valerie Maynard
817. Stephen Mayo
818. Antonio McAfee
819. Manuel Mcarrulla
820. Brianna McCarthy
821. William McBride, Jr.
822. Howard McCalebb
823. Dindga McCannon
824. Tiona Nekkia McClodden
825. Ayanna McCloud
826. Ayanna Jolivet McCloud
827. Chandra McCormick
828. Danielle McCoy
829. Kevin McCoy (visual artist)
830. Barbara McCullough
831. Fred McDarrah
832. V. Mitch McEwen
833. Allie McGhee
834. David McGee (artist)
835. Charles McGill
836. Beverly McIver
837. Tony McKay
838. David McKenzie (artist)
839. Rodney McMillian
840. Lloyd McNeill
841. Mekeva McNeil
842. Althea McNish
843. Kynaston McShine
844. Wendell McShine
845. Julie Mehretu
846. Demond Melancon
847. Ari Melenciano
848. Harold Mendez
849. Louis Mendes
850. Ana Mendieta
851. Jeffrey Meris
852. Lester Julian Merriweather
853. Angelbert Metoyer
854. Mii Ahene Mettle-Nunoo
855. Philip Kojo Metz
856. Lana Meyon
857. Yegizaw Michael
858. Troy Michie
859. Cara Michell
860. Sam Middleton
861. Wardell Milan
862. Earl Miller (artist)
863. Eva Hamlin Miller
864. Nicole Miller (artist)
865. Ruth Miller (artist)
866. Onnie Millar
867. Tom Miller (artist)
868. Adia Millett
869. Georgia Mills Jessup
870. Lev Mills
871. Lionel Milton
872. Joiri Minaya
873. George Mingo
874. Eddie Minnis
875. Jodi Minnis
876. Reginald Mitchell (artist)
877. Tyrone Mitchell (artist)
878. Solam Mkhabela
879. Nandipha Mntambo
880. Kabelo Kim Modise
881. Tracey Moffat
882. Nelson Makamo
883. Santu Mofokeng
884. Meleko Mokgosi
885. Cristina Molina
886. Kenneth Montague
887. Adriana Monsalve (artist)
888. Allison Montana
889. Daryl Montana
890. Jay Moon
891. John Moore (artist)
892. John L. Moore
893. Philip Moore (artist)
894. Francisco Mora (painter)
895. Ka Morais
896. Ivan Morazan
897. Sister Gertrude Morgan

898. Jo-Ann Morgan
899. Rafael Morla
900. Devin N. Morris
901. Keith Anthony Morrison
902. Petrona Morrison
903. Tumelo Mosaka
904. John W. Mosley
905. Alkebu Motapa
906. Archibald Motley
907. Paul Mpagi Sepuya
908. Elizabeth Mputu
909. Nandipha Mntambo
910. Zwelethu Mthethwa
911. Samson Mudzunga
912. Zanele Muholi
913. Marlon Mullen
914. Shereese Mullings
915. Kishan Munroe
916. Lavar Munroe
917. Zora J. Murff
918. Jasmine Murrell
919. J.B. Murray
920. Sana Musasama
921. Maxwell Mutanda
922. Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa
923. Nontsikelelo Mutiti
924. My Barbarian
925. Eliza Myrie
926. Sethembile Msezane
927. Adolfo Nadal Walcot
928. Trokon Nagbe
929. Gabi Ngcobo, curator and artist
930. Marilyn Nance
931. Terence Nance
932. Narcissister
933. Malik Nashad Sharpe
934. Ruben Natal-San Miguel
935. Oumy Ndour
936. Otto Neals
937. Cecil Dewey Nelson, Jr
938. Charles Huntley Nelson Jr.
939. Rudzani Nemasetoni
940. Senga Nengudi
941. Christie Neptune
942. Kori Newkirk
943. Bree Newsome
944. Rashaad Newsome
945. Floyd Newsum
946. Beauty Batimbele Ngxongo
947. Laduma Ngxokolo
948. Sam Nhlengethwa
949. Meredith Nickie
950. Serge Alain Nitegeka
951. Otobong Nkanga
952. Sokhaya Charles Nkosi
953. Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi
954. Michelle Nkoyo Lavigne
955. B.E. Noel
956. Camille Norment
957. Tameka Norris
958. Noel Norton
959. Andrew Ntshabele
960. Neo Ntsoma
961. Elsa Núñez
962. Bukhosi Nyathi
963. Mendi & Keith Obadike
964. Lorraine O'Grady
965. Antoine Obin
966. Philomé Obin
967. Sénèque Obin
968. Stephen Obisanya
969. Odathrowback
970. Puchio Odio
971. Odili Donald Odita
972. Brandan Odums
973. Toyin Ojih Odutola
974. Andrews Ofari Danso
975. Okechukwu Okegrass Ofiaeli
976. Chris Ofili
977. J.D. Okhai Ojeikere
978. Senam Okudzeto
979. Yetunde Olagbaju
980. Asiru Olatunde
981. Georg Olden (graphic designer)
982. Lovie Olivia
983. Demetrius Oliver
984. Dexter Oliver
985. Valerie Cassel Oliver

986. Karyn Olivier
987. Raymond Olivier
988. Ademola Olugebefola
989. Kambui Olujimi
990. Emmanuel Olunkwa
991. Nkiruka J. Oparah
992. Ademola Onibon-Okuta
993. Terrence Osborne
994. Solomon Omolayo Omogboye
995. Mimi Ọnụọha
996. Ngozi Onwurah
997. Henry Ossawa Tanner
998. Woody De Othello
999. Hayward Oubre
1000. John Outterbridge
1001. Joe Overstreet
1002. Clifford Owens
1003. Ida Owens
1004. Mikael Owunna
1005. Muraina Oyelami
1006. Lorenzo Pace
1007. Jennifer Packer
1008. Taisha Paggett
1009. Raquel Paiewonsky
1010. Nell Painter
1011. Nathan Parker (artist)
1012. Lee Pate
1013. Ebony Patterson
1014. Kamau Amu Patton
1015. Ada M. Patterson
1016. Jason Patterson
1017. Gerard Paul
1018. Martin Payton
1019. Malcolm Peacock
1020. Raoul Peck
1021. Fahamu Pecou
1022. Cecilia Pedescleaux
1023. George Pemba
1024. Adam Pendleton
1025. Louis Pepite
1026. Marion Perkins
1027. Regenia Perry, art historian
1028. Sondra Perry
1029. Shani Peters
1030. Elise R Peterson
1031. Lamar Peterson
1032. Dawit Petros
1033. Max Petrus
1034. Zolile Petshane
1035. Louis Lucien Pessou
1036. Madi Paul Phala
1037. Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum
1038. Salnave Philippe-Auguste
1039. Irving Henry Webster Phillips Sr.
1040. Julia Phillips (sculptor)
1041. Johannes Phokela
1042. Thabiso Phokompe
1043. Elijah Pierce
1044. Andre Pierre (artist)
1045. Naudline Pierre
1046. Howardena Pindell
1047. Jefferson Pinder
1048. Kymberly N. Pinder
1049. John Pinderhughes
1050. Adrian Piper
1051. Rose Piper
1052. Valerie Piraino
1053. Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly
1054. Stephanie Pogue
1055. Prentice H. Polk
1056. Ted Pontiflet
1057. Carl Robert Pope
1058. William Pope.L
1059. Charles Ethan Porter
1060. Nickola Pottinger
1061. Ellen Powell Tiberino
1062. Richard J. Powell
1063. Nikki Pressley
1064. Aay Preston-Myint
1065. Cody Prez
1066. Lenny Prince
1067. George Nelson Preston
1068. Thomas J. Price (artist)
1069. Lenny Prince
1070. Steve Prince
1071. Mary L. Proctor (artist)
1072. Project Row Houses
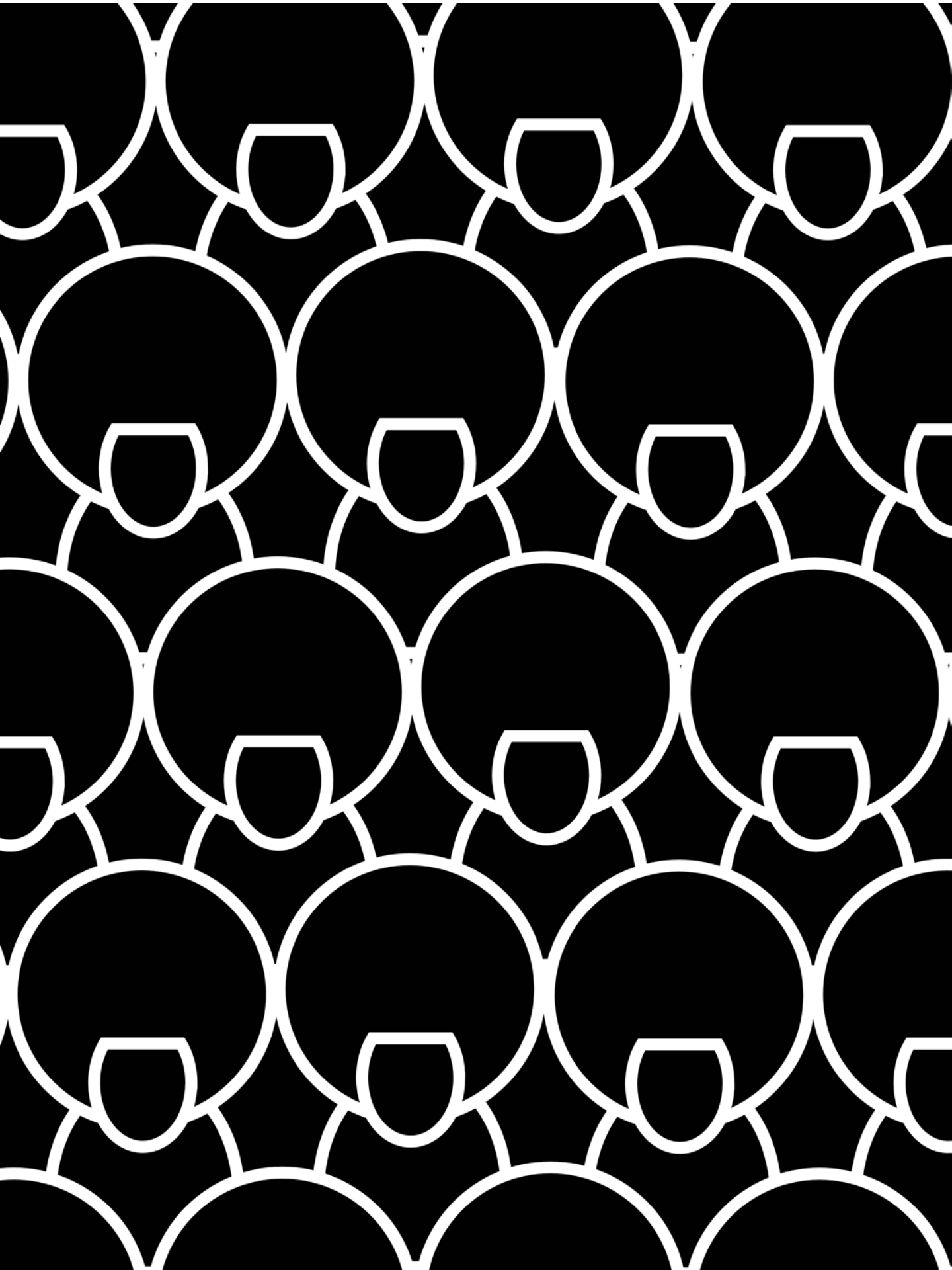1073. Nancy Elizabeth Prophet

1074. Robert Pruitt
1075. Zoë Pulley
1076. Marshall Purnell
1077. Martin Puryear
1078. Mavis Pusey
1079. Michael Queenland
1080. Malcolm Rae
1081. Bob Ragland
1082. Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz
1083. Daniel Lind Ramos
1084. Ashton Ramsey
1085. Kameelah Janan Rasheed
1086. Kamilah Rashied
1087. Rontherin Ratliff
1088. Jeanne Raynal
1089. Douglas Redd
1090. Elliot Reed
1091. Rob Redding
1092. Thomas James Reddy
1093. Rosae M. Reeder, book artist
1094. Robert Reid (artist)
1095. Vernon Reid
1096. Mallica Reynolds Kapo
1097. Tabita Rezaire
1098. Robin Rhode
1099. Michael Richards (sculptor)
1100. Carl Richardson (artist)
1101. Charlotte Richardson
1102. Tanea Richardson
1103. Zachary Richardson
1104. Gregory Ridley
1105. Marlon Riggs
1106. Faith Ringgold
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1108. Angela M. Rivers
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1110. Adee Roberson
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1118. Phillip R. Robinson
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1124. Jorge Luis Rodriguez
1125. Alva Rogers
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1127. Sherrill Roland
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1149. Issa Samb
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1154. Eve Sandler
1155. Niama Safia Sandy
1156. Tracey Sankar-charleau
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1160. Patricia Satterwhite
1161. Raymond Saunders (artist)

1162. Augusta Savage
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1166. Ayo Scott
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1168. John T. Scott
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1170. Yvonne Scott (artist)
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1172. Charles Searles
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