A Monument to Blackness:
Murals and the Black Freedom Struggle

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For Grandad Jack,

Who taught me that America was a land of great history, great music, and great comedy. I hope you're sitting around a table with Groucho Marx, W.C. Fields, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, laughing over how many hard-boiled eggs you actually ordered.

Contents

Abstract

This thesis offers the first in-depth analysis of black muralism across the US, from interior murals in the South, to street murals in the North and West. It argues that murals played a significant role in black communities at heightened moments of racial protest in the black freedom struggle because of their relationship with space. Focusing on 1930 to present day, I interrogate the currently missing connection between black politics, art, memory and space in studies of black muralism to uncover how murals created spaces of interaction within black communities. Recuperating black history and radical memory, and painting it onto building façades, muralists transformed walls of *de facto* segregated black communities into sites of education, ritual, performance and commemoration. This thesis traces the genealogy of black muralism throughout the black freedom struggle by uncovering how, why and when murals became interactive sites of black empowerment and imagination across the country at various moments of racial protest in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

In crossing the boundaries of street, high, guerrilla, contemporary, galleried and ephemeral art, murals defy easy categorisation, resulting in their oversight in current scholarship. However, this thesis draws upon material from multiple fields to create an interdisciplinary framework to better understand the significance of black muralism throughout the black freedom struggle. I engage with extensive archival research, original artist testimony, and the fields of memory, urban and Black Studies to demonstrate how walls in isolated black communities were used by communities to empower black residents, protest against social, racial and political contexts, contest geographical confinement, and commemorate black heroes. Split into two parts, the first half of the thesis tracks the evolution of muralism from an interior mode of artmaking in the 1930s to a radical form of public street art in the 1960s. It introduces both the early protest purposes of interior black muralism and street murals' position as a tangible manifestation of black consciousness. Building upon these two chapters, the second half of the thesis spans the Black Power and Black Lives Matter movements, offering three original case studies that explore in greater depth the ways in which murals transform walls of black communities into spaces of interaction. For example, in grassroots communities across the nation, murals became interactive textbooks, newspapers and museums, they healed the physical and emotional landscapes in the aftermath of racial rebellion, they provided spaces of communal ritual performance, and they fostered spaces of commemoration by becoming visual mausoleums marking the physical sites of death.

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgments

even though they were not given
commissions to paint black heroes.
In the past buildings in the ghettos
have only been marked with names like
   Nigger Baby/Blue Daddy/
   Shinola/and the Hadean
decadence of slum landlords
According to white sociologists
black communities are void of culture.
They wanted black people to forget
about the August kingdoms of Ancient
Africa which made European cultures
look like primate archipelagoes.
But the WALL is for black people.
It is too black to decorate the
   galleries of Baroque museums,
   or adorn the Victorian mansions,
   of clamorous belly aristocrats,
   who refuse to appreciate
   the sacredness of blackness.
It has too much pride to be viewed
as a freak attraction for white tourists
seeking snap shots of ghetto life, to
show their suburban friends how niggers
survive on welfare reservations.

Let Picasso's enigma of steel
fester in the backyard of the
city father's cretaceous sanctuary.
It has no meaning for black people;
only showmanism to entertain
imbecilic critics who judge all art by
   European standards
   and forget the Greeks and
   Romans were inspired by
   black cultures.
The WALL is for black people
A soulful mural of blackness
depicting black ideology and
   a third world
   that has awaken
   from enslavement.
It is a citadel of black strength
conceived by black artists to remind
black people they have black music.
   black politics/black religion/
   black literature/and black heroes/
It is a black culture commemorating
black people who have a black heritage that
is inferior not even to a lily white god.

Black Culture (For the WALL at 43rd and Langley) by Useni
Eugene Perkins, 1967.

Introduction
"A Monument to Blackness:"
Space and Black Muralism, 1930-2019

> When the media attacked Black Power, muralists took its images—the clenched fist, the faces of leaders like Stokely Carmichael, and historical figures like Nat Turner—and made them things of pride. In doing this, Black muralists were mounting a radical challenge to white control over political and cultural symbols.
>
> Ronald G. Walters, Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University.[1]

> Our murals will continue to speak of the liberation struggles of Black and Third World peoples; they will record history, speak of today, and project toward the future. They will speak of an end to war, racism, and repression; of love, of beauty, of life. We want to restore an image of full humanity to the people, to place art into its true context—into life.
>
> Bill Walker, Eugene Eda Wade, John Pitman Weber, Mark Rogovin, *The Artists' Statement*.[2]

"The *Wall of Dignity* stands as a monument to Blackness," read an article in Detroit's community newspaper, *The Ghetto Speaks,* in 1968. "It is our firm hope that it may help inspire our Black youth today to match and even excel the accomplishments of the great personages depicted there," it continued.[3] Demarcated into a thematic triptych, the 1968 mural monumentalised diasporic black history through narrative scenes of Africans in Benin and Ife, portraits of historic and contemporary leaders such as Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King Jr., and an intense, ornamenting border composed of congregating black men and women interspersed with vignettes of enslavement and self-emancipation. In 1968, when the *Wall of Dignity* was painted onto a charred street in Detroit, succeeding the rebellious racial confrontations a year earlier, it stood proudly as a marker on the city's cultural landscape, challenging distorted racist images of African Americans that persisted throughout white mainstream narratives. "To the Black ghetto school child, [the wall] confronts the 'Imagery' of 'Little Black Sambo' and projects a far different Image than that of which so many Black people today are conscious," the newspaper continued.[4] The wall recuperated the black memories and bodies erased by a pervasive white national imagination by destroying "the 'traditional' Image of the lazy head-scratching, shuffling Negro" and usurping it instead with images of black empowerment and pride from a narrative so commonly overlooked.[5]

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[1] Ronald G. Waters, "Radical Art/Radical Politics: Afro-American Community Murals," in *The People's Art: Black Murals, 1967-1976.* Exhibition catalogue. (Philadelphia: African American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1986).
[2] Eva Cockroft, John Weber and Jim Cockroft, *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement,* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc, 1977), xvi.
[3] East Side Voices of Independent Detroit, "ESVID Builds a New Wall: Detroit's Wall of Dignity," *The Ghetto Speaks,* April 22, 1968. Copy courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

But the *Wall of Dignity* was not the only mural to stand as a monument to blackness in America's cultural landscape. This thesis offers the first in-depth analysis of black muralism across the US, from interior murals in the South, to street murals in the North and West. It argues that murals played a significant role in black communities at heightened moments of racial protest in the black freedom struggle because of their relationship with space. I interrogate the connection between black politics, art, memory and space, currently missing in studies of black muralism, to uncover how murals created zones of interaction within black communities. By recuperating black history and radical memory, muralists transformed community walls into sites of black consciousness, education, alternative literacy, ritual healing, performance, and commemoration, to reclaim black space in a segregated community, empower oppressed black residents, and contest threats of urban disinvestment. Murals are an integral cultural form to analyse as they uncover a critical element of black community life. They function as tools of collective protest, and operate as barometers of the social, political and racial climate of a community and city. Altering to fit specific racial, political and social contexts, murals are a malleable protest form and this thesis underscores how murals have different interactive functions within black communities across the country at various moments of racial protest in the twentieth and twenty-first century. By overlooking the significance of black muralism in the black freedom struggle, scholars miss the crucial role that murals played in not only enhancing connections between community members, but also in strengthening the relationship between local residents and the physical neighbourhoods in which they lived.

Overview of Black Mural History

Black murals have been an enduring presence in America since 1850 when Robert Scott Duncanson painted the first mural by an African American at the home of Nicolas Longworth in Cincinnati, Ohio. Using his artistic skill to demonstrate how achievement in the fine arts was proof of black humanity at a time when chattel slavery plagued the South, he depicted beautiful landscapes that drew inspiration from the Hudson River School. From 1930, muralists began working with images of black empowerment and historical memory, thus explaining why 1930 is the starting point for this thesis. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Aaron Douglas invoked radical black memory in murals for the first time with *Harriet Tubman* (1930-31), and since then, black murals have stood as monuments to blackness on America's cultural landscape. Gaining national prominence between the 1920s and the 1940s during the Harlem Renaissance and Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the artwork of Douglas, Hale Woodruff, Charles White and Charles Alston, black murals emerged on the interior walls of

libraries, halls and student union buildings, commonly at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) in the South. These empowering works of art showcased historical memory in black muralism for the first time, but their messages of black pride were contained behind closed doors, often caught up in a web of politics and patronage that sanitised their visual content. It was not until the late 1960s, in the cradle of the Black Power Movement, that black muralism exploded into the streets of black America with the *Wall of Respect* in 1967 becoming the first exterior black mural.

In the height of the Black Power Movement, Amiri Baraka migrated uptown to Harlem from Greenwich Village to stand shoulder to shoulder with black radicals in the quest for black liberation after Malcolm X was shot down in Harlem's Audubon Ballroom in 1965. Setting up the Black Arts Repertory Theater (BARTS) and Black Arts Movement (BAM) with fellow intellectuals such as Larry Neal, Marvin X, Hoyt Fuller and Ron Welburn, these two entities soon became known as the cultural arm of the Black Power Movement. 1966 saw the cries for 'Black Power' for the first time when Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks shouted the slogan at a Meredith March rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. These exclamations of 'Black Power!' reverberated across the nation that same year and found traction in Oakland, California, when Merritt College students Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale used the phrase as a platform upon which to build their Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Revolution raged in the streets of black America in the summer of 1967 as flames of black discontentment filled the sky in cities across the urban North, culminating in rebellions in Newark and Detroit in what became known as 'the Long Hot Summer'. The following year on April 4, cries of sorrow rang out in Memphis as the bullets of James Earl Ray pierced the chest of Martin Luther King Jr.. Two days later, on April 6, Bobby Hutton, the first and youngest member of the Black Panther Party, was murdered in a police shootout, resulting in Black Panther Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, seeking exile in Algeria. The year 1968 also saw a continued escalation of the Vietnam War following the Tet Offensive; continued urban unrest in the US North; fists of Black Power raised at the Mexico City Olympics by John Carlos and Tommie Smith; and fierce confrontations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which led to the violent and unlawful trial of Bobby Seale, who was gagged and bound to a chair in the courtroom in order to silence his radicalism.[6]

The Black Power Movement provided fertile ground for the emergence of black street murals, and the *Wall of Dignity* was just one of many murals that stood as a monument to

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[6] 'The Chicago Seven Conspiracy Trial," *Federal Judicial Center,* accessed January 29, 2015. http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/tu_chicago7_narrative.html

blackness in predominantly Northern and West coast cities during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The *Wall of Respect,* the first black street mural in the country, was painted in 1967 in an impoverished area of Chicago's South Side and catalysed a mural movement so potent there were soon over 1,500 street murals nationwide, thereby marking this period as the most productive in black mural history.[7] Commonly free from the limits of official funding and sponsorship, murals had evolved from their earlier interior form to become a democratising guerrilla art form paid for by the muralists and created in cooperation with the community. "The outdoor murals brought into play the vernacular tradition of call-and-response because the images needed community approval to survive without being defaced," muralist Elliot Pinkney suggested.[8] The recuperated faces of radical historic and contemporary black heroes, in tandem with images of broken shackles and fiery rebellions, textured the walls of black enclaves in cities such as Chicago, Boston, Detroit, St. Louis, Baltimore, Washington D.C., New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The figures of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Nathaniel Turner became a constant visual presence of the decade, thus inscribing positive images of blackness on the streets for the first time in America's history. Artist Jeff Donaldson recalls that before 1967, "Black neighborhoods did not even have any Black faces appearing on billboards to sell liquor or cigarettes to the community."[9] Like birthmarks for the neighbourhoods, these murals appeared on the walls of buildings, signalling the presence of black life, community, and memory in run-down black enclaves.

Literature Review

From the 1930s to the present day, murals straddled the boundaries of street, guerrilla, radical, high, contemporary, galleried, commemorative and ephemeral art, and in doing so, have defied simple categorisation. As a result, they have been neglected in scholarship. Their lack of distinct categorisation and their guerrilla street presence places murals in the margins of art history scholarship, and their presence as a cultural art form leaves them overlooked by historians of the twentieth century who opt for more conventional historical narratives. Although 'black culture' features prominently in Black Studies scholarship, attention is instead overwhelmingly

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[7] Jeff Donaldson, "Upside the Wall: An Artist's Retrospective Look at the Original "Wall of Respect"", in *The People's Art: Black Murals, 1967-1976*. Exhibition catalogue. (Philadelphia: African American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1986).

[8] Michael D. Harris, "Urban Totems: The Communal Spirit of Black Murals" in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals*, ed. James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz, (San Francisco: Pomegranate Press, 2000), 26.

[9] Rebecca Zorach, *Art for People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 56.

given to music, galleried art, fiction, film and poetry, leaving murals, again, to slip through the cracks of analysis. Therefore, while murals have been a significant presence in the black freedom struggle throughout the last hundred years, the same cannot be said for their presence in scholarship, with the few books that do exist on the topic giving broad narrative accounts of the murals' creation on both the interiors and exteriors of buildings.[10]

In existing scholarship, murals of the black freedom struggle fall into two distinct groups— interior murals and street murals—and are frequently dealt with as separate moments and movements, thus producing two distinct canons. A small body of literature records the murals created by Harlem Renaissance and New Deal artists Hale Woodruff, Charles White, Charles Alston, Aaron Douglas and more latterly, John Biggers, and from them we learn the complicated impulses that drew artists to the mural as a form of expression. For example, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* by Amy Helene Kirschke (1995); *The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room* (1995) and *Charles Alston* (2007) by Alvia J. Wardlaw; *Charles White* (2002) by Andrea Barnwell Brownlee*; Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy* (2007) by Amalia Amakie and Andrea Barnwell Brownlee; *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* by Susan Earle (2007); and *Walls That Speak: The Murals of John Biggers* (2010) by Olive Jensen Theisen, all skilfully uncover the prominent murals painted between 1930 and the 1950s whilst offering important information on the period of each artist's life and their relationship with muralism. Similarly, a small number of black art survey texts group Woodruff, Alston, White, Biggers and Douglas together by era, artistic movement, and artistic style, such as Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson's *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present* (1993); Elsa Honig Fine's *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity* (1982); Sharon Patton's *African-American Art* (1998); and Samella Lewis' *African American Art and Artist* (2003). However, because muralism constitutes only one aspect of these artists' repertoire, their mural contributions to the art world are frequently obscured amongst biographical literature charting the artist's life works in all mediums. By providing an overall picture of each artist's service to black art, this literature elevates the successes and skill of individual artists, but in doing so, dilutes the scholarly focus on muralism as a significant cultural form. Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis examines institutional murals housed in historically black colleges and universities to uncover the relationship between black interior murals and the social, racial and political backdrop of the 1930s to 1950s.

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[10] This introduction gives a literature review based on various fields of scholarship this thesis intersects with as a whole, but within each chapter, there are smaller literature reviews that are more specific and focused on the interventions made by each chapter.

This thesis works closely with two special issues from the *International Review of African American Art* (IRAAA)—'Keepers of the Flame: African American Art Collections at Black Institutions' (vol. 1, no. 4, 1994) and 'Institutional Murals' (vol. 12, no. 4, 1995)—to provide an analysis of the spatial, visual, and interactive components of interior black muralism. The latter issue of the IRAAA includes articles that cover important mural case studies from prolific artists, and investigates the societal influences catalysing the creation of each mural. M. Akua McDaniel's 'Reexamining Hale Woodruff's Talladega College and Atlanta University Murals,' Amy Helene Kirschke's 'The Depression Murals of Aaron Douglas,' Michelle-Lee White's 'Common Directions, Epic Dimensions: Jacob Lawrence's Murals at Howard,' Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins' 'Contribution of the American Negro to Democracy: A History Painting by Charles White' and Brooke Anderson Linga 'As Above, So Below: John and Jim Biggers' WSSU Mural Project' all evaluate empowering and historical murals from the era following the New Deal. Whilst these individual essays are all short in length, they successfully connect interior black muralism as one cohesive artistic movement and scratch a little deeper beneath the surface to begin unveiling the entrenched influences between social and political backdrop, and the mural's content. This research directly informs my first chapter that focuses on the effects of institutional patrons, black and white interior locations, and historical memory on the visual language of black muralism in the WPA and post-New Deal eras.

Considering murals defy categorisation, they are rarely mentioned in fields of academic scholarship. Whilst interior black muralism receives acknowledgement within the field of black art—perhaps more easily categorised because of its interior position—scholarship on exterior black muralism is even more sparse, cited infrequently under the broader umbrella of 'black art' and, more often, 'community murals'. When I interviewed muralist Dewey Crumpler in 2018, he echoed my concerns for the precarity and under-acknowledgment of black muralism in scholarship and everyday life, by stating: "I share your concerns for the position of muralism in the larger context of art."[11] By referring to this 'larger context of art', Crumpler acknowledges how muralism is pushed to the sidelines of study, whilst galleried—commonly white—art takes centre stage. Even when black artwork of the 1960s and 1970s finds its way into acknowledgement, murals still fall by the wayside. Patton's *African-American Art* and Samella Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy's *Black Artists on Art* (1971) both include an acknowledgement of street murals, yet this is a small, passing reference. Patton's study briefly alludes to the *Wall of Respect,* designating a paragraph to the project that "covered the exterior wall of a building on

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[11] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

the Southside of Chicago."[12] Yet Lewis and Waddy venture a little further into the case studies of black mural art. With their book structured in an almost encyclopaedic fashion—each artist receives a page of acknowledgement—the authors supplement images of artwork with testimony from each individual artist. Eugene Eda Wade, Bill Walker and Mitchell Caton all receive a double-page spread showcasing their murals surrounded by conceptualising statements such as, "The missing pages in history are seen on the outdoor murals painted by Black artists."[13]

Whilst Patton, Lewis and Waddy, give a small but promising nod to the presence of black street muralism in the United States, this thesis plugs the gaps they leave in black art scholarship by discussing black muralism's malleability, and its ability to create interactive spaces of protest and empowerment at heightened moments of racial tension—especially Black Power. The existing scholarship's fleeting references to the historic imagery of black muralism receives full acknowledgment in this thesis as I unpack how murals become alternate forms of education, black consciousness and commemoration in the streets of black America. I build upon the insertion of black muralism into the field of 'black art' by positioning murals as an underappreciated radical art form present throughout the last hundred years which, much like galleried art, has a symbiotic relationship to the social, racial and political climate in the United States. Patton, Lewis and Waddy contribute to the disaggregation of black muralism by separating *interior* and *exterior* muralism, thus dissolving the lineage of artistic, protest, spatial and community interaction connecting the two currently isolated movements. But when murals became exteriorised, they did not "break from the past" as Ronald G. Waters suggests.[14] Instead they evolved and grew from their earlier interior predecessors. This thesis adds breadth and depth to our understanding of black muralism as a longer artistic movement by treating interior and exterior black muralism, not as isolated historical moments of public art, but instead as a cohesive artistic arc undulating and evolving throughout the black freedom struggle in tandem with moments of radical black protest.

In terms of the scholarship on community murals, 1977 and 1984 saw the publication of two seminal books. Eva Cockroft, John Pitman Weber and Jim Cockroft's *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* and Alan Barnett's *Community Murals: The People's Art,* were published shortly after the decline of 'radical' community murals during the Black Power Movement. They are the first two books to document the fervour of such a movement,

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[12] Sharon F. Patton, *African American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 215.
[13] Samella Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy, *Black Artists on Art: Volume 2* (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts, Inc., 1971), 122.
[14] Waters, "Radical Art/Radical Politics: Afro-American Community Murals".

capturing a moment so recent and palpable at the time that it was described by Jean Charlot as "not yet history."[15] As muralists of the movement working predominantly in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, Cockroft, Weber and Cockroft wrote *Towards a People's Art* out of a lived experience, providing the first analysis of production methods, artistic technique, and design composition, of street murals. The authors used their book as a way to "break through the near blackout of critical attention" and shine an—albeit relatively small—light on murals as an artistic protest tool for the liberation of races, laying the first steps to better understanding the purpose and practical creation process of street murals in the US.[16] Alan Barnett's *Community Murals*, published seven years later, built upon this introduction to street murals by giving us the most extensive documentation of US street muralism from 1967 to 1980. Opening with a 'prehistory' of muralism, Barnett uses the remainder of his book to chart the genealogy of activist mural art across the country. His work is an invaluable source for enhancing our understanding, not only of how many murals existed in the streets of African American, Chicana/os, Latina/os, Jewish, Asian Americans and white communities, but also the symbiosis between public consciousness and street murals, due to the artwork's physical location in local communities.

Our knowledge of community murals would not be what it is today without the contributions of *Towards a People's Art* and *Community Murals*. Cockroft, Weber, Cockroft and Barnett give an expansive overview of muralism, not necessarily for scholars and academics, but for those invested in the fight for social and racial liberation through artistic means. But given the geographical and racial breadth of their study, more work needs to be done that focuses specifically on geographical region and racial background, and the complexities that emerge within these two distinct variations. Journalist and mural walking-tour director, Jeff Huebner, and muralists Tim Drescher, Jane Weissman and Janet Braun-Reinitz begin to plug the gaps on geographical region. In *San Francisco Murals: Community Creates Its Muse, 1914-1990* (1991), Drescher—whilst maintaining a racial breadth—adds geographical specificity to his study by surveying San Francisco's murals throughout the twentieth century. Writing because "community murals and muralists deserve an accurate documentation" in literature, Drescher focuses his study on public art painted in the Mission District, the Haight-Ashbury, the Western Addition, Fillmore and Hunter's Point-Bayview before entering into a discussion on the practicalities of muralism such as funding, legalities and censorship.[17] Adopting a similar

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[15] Jean Charlot, "Foreword" in Eva Cockroft, John Weber and Jim Cockroft, *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc, 1977), xx.
[16] Cockroft, Weber and Cockroft in ibid.
[17] Tim Drescher, *San Francisco Murals: Community Creates Its Muse, 1914-1990* (Apple Valley: Pogo Press, 1991), 3.

template, Jane Weissman and Janet Braun-Reinitz in *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* (2009) focus on muralism in New York from 1968-2007, spanning across multiple boroughs. Much like Drescher, Barnett, Weber and the Cockroft's broad racial focus, Weissman and Braun-Reinitz cast their research net far and wide to encompass murals from all ethnicities within the remit of the New York metropolitan area. Documenting murals concerned with racism, the gay liberation movement, the Vietnam War, gang warfare, gentrification and drug abuse, the authors offer up detailed narratives regarding the creation of each mural, alongside its reception in the community.

Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals (2000) by Prigoff and Dunitz is the first book to deepen our understanding of black muralism in the twentieth and twenty-first century, visually charting the spatial shift from interior to exterior street murals through photographs. Prigoff and Dunitz acknowledge the paucity of scholarship on African American murals when they compare it to the more extensive literature on the Chicano mural movement. Spanning the last fifty years, Chicano muralism has been "reasonably well documented in books such as *Signs From the Heart* from SPARC…which archived twelve hundred slides from California Chicano Art," Prigoff writes.[18] In a coffee table-style book replete with a litany of large-scale, high quality, colour photographs, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride* offers an African American counterpart to the Chicano study by creating the first text to cohesively and visually chart the lineage of black muralism from the late nineteenth century through to the late 1990s. They begin their excavation in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride* "one hundred fifty years ago, cover[ing] the great artists from the '30s through to the '50s, and then add[ing] what I think is the missing piece of the tapestry: the wonderful African American public art of the last thirty years."[19] Venturing into unchartered territory for the first time in order to visually document the lineage of black muralism in the twentieth century, the authors acknowledge the potential limitations of their study. "This book is a work in progress," they write in the introduction, and "the authors hope that this investigation will stimulate sufficient interest to ensure that the documentation becomes even more complete."[20]

Joining me on the search for a deeper understanding into black muralism is *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (2017). This book refines our understanding of black muralism in Chicago and offers the most in-depth analysis of the city's role as the heartbeat of black street art in the nation. Taking until the 50th anniversary of the *Wall of Respect* for there to be an in depth excavation into the role of black street muralism,

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[18] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride*, 7.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 8.

Abdul Alkalimat, Romi Crawford and Rebecca Zorach commemorated the milestone by creating an exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center, titled 'The Wall of Respect: Vestiges, Shards and the Legacy of Black Power', and publishing its written counterpart.[21] As laid out in their introduction, the *Wall of Respect* offers "a crucial case study in how public art can be a staging ground for debates about community and identity," and throughout their book, Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach "hope to shed light on the important role the arts played in defining the Black Liberation Movement in Chicago."[22] Replete with republished documents from the Jeff Donaldson Archive, photographs from the Robert Sengstacke and Bob Crawford collection, and essays from Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, the 2017 book presents a comprehensive account of the wall's creation and the community responses to it.[23] Seeking to "complicate art history's understanding of the visual arts in the late 1960s," the authors recalibrate public perceptions of sixties black art by shifting geographical focus away from the long studied metropolis of New York City instead to its mid-western counterpart. I work most closely with this ground-breaking scholarship in Chapter 2 in order to reconceptualise the *Wall of Respect* as a physical manifestation of the decade's new black consciousness. More broadly, I also expand upon Alkalimat, Zorach and Crawford's localised examination of Chicago black muralism to offer additional case studies about how "public art can be a staging ground for debates and community identity" in black enclaves like San Francisco, New York and Detroit. I work closely with *The Wall of Respect* to write black muralism more prominently into scholarship, and to also highlight the spatial significance black mural art had in communities during the Black Power Movement.

This thesis walks down many byroads in order to enhance our understanding of the spatial interactions generated by black muralism, and in doing so it deepens our knowledge of the Black Power Movement. The central three chapters of this thesis are set against the backdrop of the movement. Murals are almost silent from the canon of literature documenting Black Power's political, ideological, intellectual and cultural footprint, but this thesis inserts the murals finally into the narrative. With its own scholarly hurdles to overcome, Black Power

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[21] Asides from this exhibition, there have only been two other large-scale exhibitions on black muralism: *The People's Art: Black Murals, 1967-1976,* at the African American Historical and Cultural Museum, and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,* at the Tate Modern, Brooklyn Museum and currently on display at the Broad. This latter exhibition was ground-breaking for its inclusion of muralism, yet the section of muralism was small due to the scale and scope of the exhibition as a whole.

[22] Abdul Alkalimat, Romi Crawford and Rebecca Zorach, *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 3.

[23] Abdul Alkalimat, formerly known as Gerald McWorter, was one of the founders of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) in Chicago. Jeff Donaldson was also a member of OBAC. OBAC, along with Bill Walker, are known for creating the *Wall of Respect*. Romi Crawford is the daughter of famous photographer Bob Crawford, who took hundreds of photos documenting the creation of the *Wall of Respect*.

literature has only recently gained traction amongst academics, growing as a field over the last two decades. Commonly vilified as the Civil Rights Movement's 'evil twin' and stereotyped "as a politics of rage practiced by gun-toting Black Panthers," the Black Power Movement remains, as Peniel E. Joseph argues, "the most misunderstood social movement of the post-war era."[24] The primary motivation behind this thesis is not to correct warped distortions of Black Power. Instead, this thesis expands our understanding of the era—not from a broad, narrative perspective that focuses on key players of the movement, like the important literature, *Waiting 'Till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (2006), *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (2006), and *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (2010) by Joseph; *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (1999) by Komozi Woodard; *A New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-75* (1993) by William L. Van Deburg; and *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (2016) by Joshua Bloom—but instead from both an artistic and grassroots perspective. By showing *why* black muralism emerged in the streets during the Black Power Movement; *what role* these murals played in black communities during this period; and *how* local residents interacted with these black murals, the central three chapters of this thesis offer a new outlook of grassroots community relationships in black enclaves around the North and West coast. These chapters bring to the fore an unacknowledged artistic mode of black communication and interaction and unveil a new form of protest that articulated black empowerment and liberation at a time of radical ideological thought.

In 2016, Susan E. Cahan published her ground-breaking book *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power*. The book offered an unprecedented insight into "the moment where museums were forced to face [African American] artists' demands for justice and equality."[25] Operating within the remit of "museums, auction houses, private collections, schools, government funding agencies, art books, and magazines that together form the conduit through which art, and ideas about art" circulate throughout society, Cahan's study gives unwavering focus to 'official' modes of displaying art.[26] Yet speaking of his 1968 murals in Roxbury, Boston, Dana Chandler argued how "[t]here is no Black art in the [Boston] Museum of Fine Arts…so we are going to utilize the facades of buildings in our community for our

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[24] Peniel E. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barak Obama* (New York: Civitas, 2010), 4.

[25] Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

[26] Ibid., 2.

museum."[27] Muralists painting during the Black Power Movement saw the lack of black representation in galleries and reconfigured such physical constraints by bringing the art museum into the streets through murals. This thesis therefore stands in direct conversation with Cahan. Whilst she focuses on the internal battles over the politics of representation and space within a white-governed art world at the height of Black Power, I evaluate the other side of the coin by showing what happens when artists reclaim the spatial politics of the art world in the streets during this era and beyond, in the age of Black Lives Matter.

In arguing for the significance and originality of black murals throughout the last near hundred years, this thesis not only highlights the interactive roles played by black murals, as well as the way murals recalibrate our understanding of grassroots Black Power activism. It also sheds light on the recuperation and enactment of radical black memory in an artistic tradition that spans the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Murals and radical black historical memory are intrinsically bound together and have been since Aaron Douglas created the first historically based mural in 1930 with *Harriet Tubman.* Guided by Celeste-Marie Bernier's *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination* (2012) and *Pictures and Power: Imaging and Imagining Frederick Douglass (1818-2018)* (2017), I investigate the resurrection of radical antislavery memory throughout the twentieth century to help "complicate monolithic reductive definitions of black heroism" in the black freedom struggle, and to assess why the memories of Frederick Douglass, Nathaniel Turner, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth are commonly represented in a guerrilla art form during the fight for black liberation.[28] Bernier's source base in *Characters of Blood* spans across "daguerreotypes, etchings, sculpture, fine art, portraiture, poetry, novels, plays, essays, tracts, speeches, murals, graffiti, mixed-media installations and performance art."[29] By drawing on specific murals, I expand on how black historical figures "were and are reimagined across diverse social and political contexts as well as a gamut of aesthetic forms," by engaging in the visual afterlives of antislavery heroes in interior and exterior murals at the height of twentieth century protest movements.[30]

Throughout this thesis, I build upon the work of the aforementioned scholars to offer an in-depth interrogation into the complex interactive and spatial dynamics of black muralism in twentieth and twenty-first century. To do so, I take forward Jeff Huebner's lamentation that:

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[27] Barnett, *Community Murals,* 36.

[28] Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2012), 6.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 5.

> Critics and scholars have tended to downplay the contributions of the mural movement to contemporary art in a broader sense, missing the chance to demonstrate its relevance and current concerns with performance and community cooperation.[31]

Huebner acknowledges the current disregard for the interactive and community unifying components of black muralism in scholarship, and as two of the most pivotal elements comprising the spatial significance of black muralism, this thesis works closely with Rebecca Zorach's *Art for the People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975* (2019) to ensure black muralism's spatial dynamic is fully excavated. The mural as a cultural form was conceived as "an adoption and an aesthetic extension of the turf-identifying graffiti scrawled on the neighborhood buildings," Michael D. Harris argues in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* briefly alluding to the emergence of subversive artistic spatial reclamation, and Zorach analyses the gravitas of such graffiti in *Art of the People's Sake.*[32] "Throughout the sixties graffiti was becoming both more prominent and more politicized," with "[t]he words 'Black Power'…appearing on Chicago walls. This was more than just an expression of group identity; it was also about shaping space," she argued.[33] In cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland and New York space was being shaped into pockets of revolutionary ideals where declarative statements such as "WE The BLACKS must RISE", "THE MOON BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE", and "PANTHER POWER" joined the graphical declarations of "Black Power" in impoverished, *de facto* segregated enclaves of major cities.[34] Emerging to contest racial, spatial and political oppression across America, the written statements of black authority gave black Americans a voice, and the walls upon which they were scrawled became the megaphone, amplifying their statements.

"Cities and space are the unfinished products of historical debates and conflicts involving meaning, function, and form," Manuel Castells writes in *The City and the Grassroots,* and the eruption of subversive statements from black America on the walls of cities became living proof of this.[35] African Americans engaged in these debates and conflicts by "taking over urban space."[36] They made themselves visible to the city, not through official channels which frequently denied and excluded them, but through their visual markings upon the physical urban environment. "The street itself found ways to speak" Zorach writes, and one of the ways it

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[31] Zorach, *Art for People's Sake,* 31.

[32] Michael Harris, "Urban Totems: The Communal Spirit of Black Murals," *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 25.

[33] Zorach, *Art for People's Sake*, 27.

[34] These photographs can be found in Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (New York: Abrams Press, 2016).

[35] Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 318.

[36] Zorach, *Art for a People's Sake,* 25.

learned to speak was through murals.[37] Whilst the concept of spatial reclamation runs under the surface of *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride* and *Art for People's Sake,* I bring it to the forefront in this thesis by arguing how murals transformed walls into sites of interaction in isolated black enclaves to highlight the presence of proud black communities. I use Zorach's book to assist my framing of space, and to show how murals were "more than just an efficient way of conveying a message; they established black presence and shaped black space."[38]

To understand murals as sites of interaction, I supplement the ideas gleaned from *Art for People's Sake* with concepts from *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (2015) by Rashad Shabazz. This enhances my understanding of the closely entwined relationship between murals and racialised community spaces. Shabazz uses the phrase 'spatialising blackness' in a carceral sense to underscore how "mechanisms of constraint built into architecture, urban planning, and systems of control…literally and figuratively created a prison-like environment," giving rise to new forms of black masculinity.[39] Yet spatialising blackness as a term helps to frame how muralists painted black memory and culture onto walls to create spaces of black empowerment, protest and commemoration. When Shabazz begs the question "what happens when people are raised in environments built to contain them?" (discussing the *de facto* segregation of Chicago), the answer is partly found in this thesis.[40] Whilst Shabazz finds his answer in the production of new gender identities, his methodological framework applies beyond the realm of gender dynamics and is especially useful for discussing the arena of public art. As such, I borrow from Shabazz's framework to understand how environments of *de facto* segregation gave rise to interactive black murals that transformed building façades into sites of black consciousness, education, performance, ritual healing, and commemoration in the streets.

Framework

The malleable and multivalent nature of murals makes it a near impossible task to firmly categorise them. At the same time, murals can be a subversive protest tool, an interactive form of communication for black communities, a touchstone of education and learning, a form of commemoration, a marker of spatial reclamation of physical sites of contested memory, democratising guerrilla artwork, a barometer of black consciousness, a tangible manifestation

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[37] Ibid., 26.
[38] Ibid., 83.
[39] Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago,* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.
[40] Ibid.

of blackness, and a site of performance, all whilst being an ephemeral, unfixed marker on a black landscape. The indefinability of black muralism is one of its most intriguing characteristics, and this thesis does not seek to categorise muralism in a way that confines its artistic, social, racial and political meaning. Instead, it draws upon material from multiple fields and disciplines to create an interdisciplinary framework to better understand the significance of black muralism throughout the black freedom struggle. Although several frameworks fit the analysis of black muralism—such as art, memory or protest theory—I prioritise space because it not only underscores the tangibility and physicality of murals, but it also answers the question: 'why are murals so significant?' Other cultural forms of the twentieth and twenty-first century use historical memory and operate as forms of protest much like murals do, but very few—if any at all—create physical spaces within a black community and are malleable enough to constantly adapt and transform these spaces to suit the evolving protest movements, thus creating *different* sites of interaction within black communities. Specifically, this thesis uncovers new functions of black muralism not yet acknowledged in scholarship—partly due to the under-examination of muralism in the existing literature. It shows how street murals in the age of Black Power became physical manifestations of the decade's new black consciousness. It unpacks how murals functioned as alternate forms of literacy in the streets, circumventing the politics of white institutional spaces that denied access to black communities and overlooked the presence of black history. It uncovers the ritualistic element of black muralism by showing, firstly, how they were painted to heal the physical and racial landscape of a wounded city in the aftermath of violent rebellions, and secondly, how murals encouraged repeated community performances at their physical site as forms of black celebration. And it introduces, for the first time in black mural scholarship, how murals are used today as gravestones marking sites and cities where actions of fatal police brutality occur.

Murals have the unique ability to construct interactive spaces of black empowerment and imagination in the streets of black America, but we cannot comprehend their role and significance without first understanding the construction of *de facto* segregation in black communities in the urban North, and the battles over contested space. In the field of black urban studies, several scholars have used Chicago's South Side as a case study for their excavation of black life and space in the post-World War II era. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton's *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945); Arnold R. Hirsh's, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (1983); Mary Pattillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* (1999), and *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (2007); and Shabazz's *Spatializing Blackness* all analyse Chicago's

black neighbourhoods to understand how racial and spatial lines were drawn in a city that experienced one of the greatest increases in black population during the Great Migration. By 1966, nearly ten times as many African Americans lived in Chicago than in 1920, skyrocketing the black population from 4 per cent to 30 per cent of the city's total population.[41] But although the city saw a rapid influx of black residents in the post-war period, it maintained the residential boundaries demarcated across racial lines because "in Northern and Western cities…de facto…segregation was largely the norm."[42] Those who moved from the South to Chicago joined the incumbent black residents on a small seven by half a mile strip of land on Chicago's South Side known as the Black Belt.[43] But from the 1940s to the 1960s, as overcrowded areas became further saturated, the sheer volume of people forced black residents into previously all-white areas. This did not mean that segregation was ending, however, it just meant it was time for the city to work out a new geographical accommodation between the races.[44]

In the years following the Second World War, the federal government made promises to black residents in cities like Chicago for better housing. This promise was met in the form of large-scale public housing, which, whilst 'roomier' and perhaps cleaner than the kitchenettes they usurped, stacked black residents on top of each other in high-rise buildings, further isolating them from the rest of the city.[45] In public housing like the Robert Taylor Housing projects, for example, twenty-eight identical units of sixteen floors were grouped in a U-shape and encircled by cages of mesh wire, with the Dan Ryan Expressway to the west.[46] These public housing projects became contested spaces of black containment designed by white architects of the city. As Hirsh laments in his study of the Black Belt, "primary attention is devoted to whites" because "that is where the power was…what we are looking at here is the construction of the ball park within which the urban game is played. And there is no question that the architects, in this instance, were white."[47] Given the overcrowdedness of Chicago's South Side, in tandem with its immovable boundaries of confinement, it comes as no surprise that America's first black street mural emerged at 43rd and Langley in the city's Black Belt. It is also unsurprising, given the federal government's attempts to maintain and control the black population of Chicago, that a mural depicting black nationalist pride and revolutionary historical

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[41] Arnold Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

[42] James A. Tyner, "Urban Revolutions and the Spaces of Black Radicalism" *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place,* ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Boston: South End Press, 2007), 223.

[43] Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness,* 2.

[44] Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto,* 5.

[45] Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness,* 56.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto,* xi.

memory made white America uncomfortable. In 1967 when the *Wall of Respect* was created, the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) workshop members and artists were under constant surveillance by the FBI. "Members of both Workshop factions began receiving anonymous phone calls," artist Jeff Donaldson admitted. They received "unsigned letters accusing them of being spies and traitors to the group and of accepting secret payoffs to exploit the Wall and the…community."[48] "We could have been shot," Eugene Eda Wade remembers, "anything could have happened but it was a type of fear we had to overcome."[49] By understanding the racialised politics of community space in cities like Chicago, I use the spatial discussions by Hirsh, Shabazz, George Lipsitz and Raúl Homero Villa, as well as the work of Zorach and Robin D. G. Kelley, to inform my own conceptualisations of black artistic, imaginative and interactive spaces created by black muralists in black communities across the US.

Describing Chicago's Black Belt as a "quarantine[d] black neighborhood," Hirsh's words create a visual image of black containment and disease, but the works of George Lipsitz and Raúl Homero Villa show the step beyond Hirsh's case studies by unpacking the community and cultural responses to such confinement and oppression.[50] Writing about the racial containment of *barrios* across the US, Villa argues how "[b]arrio residents have consciously and unconsciously enacted resistive tactics or defensive mechanisms to secure and preserve the integrity of their cultural place-identity within and against the often hostile space regulation of dominant urbanism."[51] Villa's acknowledgement of the ideological reclamation and control over contained racial spaces speaks directly to Lipsitz's symbiotic framework of racialised space and spatialised race, where he argues: "People who do not control physical places often construct discursive spaces as sites of agency, affiliation and imagination."[52] Lipsitz and Villa both point to the reactionary dynamics of oppressed, contained and segregated racial communities and the ways in which they create "distinct spatial imaginar[ies] in a broad range of cultural expressions" to contest their racialised confinement.[53] The cultural and ideological reclamations of space discussed in Lipsitz and Villas' work both inspire a main artery running throughout this thesis: that black murals are a product of their spatial and racialised confinement. Murals reclaim space in oppressed black communities by creating sites of black empowerment and interaction.

In 2002, Robin D. G. Kelley wrote in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*:

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[48] Donaldson, "Upside the Wall."
[49] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[50] Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto,* 2.
[51] Raúl Homero Villa, *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), 5.
[52] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 60.
[53] Ibid.

> For obvious reasons, what we are against tends to take precedence over what we are
> for, which is always a more complicated and ambiguous matter. It is a testament to the
> legacies of oppression that opposition is so frequently contained, or that efforts to find
> "free spaces" for articulating or even realizing our dreams are so rare and marginalized.[54]

This thesis argues that murals became 'free spaces' for envisioning black freedom in the face of racial oppression and segregation. If "[t]he dark ghetto's invisible walls have been erected by the white society, by those who had power, both to confine those who have *no* power and to perpetuate powerlessness," Kenneth Clark wrote of the contested space in black communities across the country in the 1960s, then this thesis shows what happens in black communities when muralists make their communities seen.[55] Muralists transformed the invisible walls built by white America into free spaces of imagination. When historical memory and images of black power wallpapered these spaces of black containment, no longer did the invisible walls convey confinement. Instead, murals reclaimed these spatial limitations by spatialising blackness and thus transforming their negative physical presence into spaces of imagination, expansion, community interaction, and pedagogy. By functioning as forms of alternate literacy, ritual healing and commemoration, murals served to empower black residents, contest geographical confinement and commemorate black heroes. Their interactive and didactic functions speak directly to Kelley's argument that the most radical art "is not protest art, but works that take us to another place, that envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling."[56] Murals of the black freedom struggle were and are transformative. They not only creatively expand the boundaries of containment, but they also transport the viewer into an imaginative space of empowerment by spatialising black history, memory and consciousness. The black freedom struggle in the 1960s was "more than sit-ins at lunch counters, voter registration campaigns, and freedom rides; it was about self-transformation, changing the way we think, live, love, and handle pain," Kelley continued, and murals facilitated this process at a grassroots level.[57] By recuperating black memories, resurrecting black bodies, and recalibrating black narratives, this thesis shows how murals, like the *Wall of Respect,* created spaces of self- and collective transformation and empowerment.

As the title of this thesis suggests, murals stand in the community as "monuments to blackness." The word 'monument' was carefully selected by members of the East Side Voices of Detroit (ESVID) in *Ghetto Speaks* when conceptualising the *Wall of Dignity,* and I follow their

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[54] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 10.
[55] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1965), 11.
[56] Kelley, *Freedom Dreams,* 11.
[57] Ibid.

lead by using the word throughout this thesis. Whilst 'monument' may seem a counterintuitive word for a cultural form constantly described as 'guerrilla' and 'ephemeral', this thesis stretches the boundaries of what we understand by 'monuments' by removing them from the confines of their official, static form and showing how murals expand the parameters of commemorative sites. "Public monuments are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever," Kirk Savage claims in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (1997). He adds: "while other things come and go, are lost and forgotten, the monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and cognitive landscape."[58] Given Savage's description here, it seems almost antithetical to conceptualise ephemeral, evolving murals as 'monuments' fixed to a point. Yet by introducing the word 'supposed' into his statement, Savage leaves room for an unwritten caveat that welcomes alternate theorisations of monuments.

Through the lens of black muralism, we can expand our understanding of 'monuments'—as seen in greater detail in Chapters 2, 4 and 5. Monuments "emerged within a public sphere," Savage argues, yet so do murals. Monuments are also "one space in which local communities based on geography or interest could define themselves," and again, so are murals. And just like murals, public monuments are "not just a rhetorical space where people debated image and symbol, but…also a real physical space where publics could gather and define themselves at ceremonies and rallies," as shown in Chapters 4 and 5.[59] In a variety of ways, murals and monuments are siblings, and this thesis brings them closer together by extending the boundaries of 'monument' and moving the parameters of the term. From fixed, unchanging, and enshrined in stone, metal or marble, monuments in this thesis incorporate works of public art specific to a location or group of people; a street art that commemorates or honours something or someone (although this becomes ironically subverted by murals that enshrine those people who 'conservative monuments' so conveniently forget); and an art that creates a space charged with purpose. Murals are not, and never will be, what Savage defines as a 'monument'. They are not permanent and unwavering, they are not conservative or created from top-down decisions, and they are not made of hard metal. Instead, they fade, have a shorter life span, involve community members in the creation process, and are made of ephemeral paint.[60] Yet as ESVID suggests, they stand in black communities as undeniable

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[58] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 5.

[59] Ibid., 7.

[60] I am not the only mural scholar to recalibrate our understanding of monuments. In *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California,* Guisela Latorre writes "Chicana/o artists employed the monumentality of the public mural to disseminate an iconography radicalized in large part through its indigenizing qualities." Here,

'monuments to blackness.' Perhaps the reason why ESVID's statement seems so clear and pertinent is because, just like the supposed unshakable fixity of traditional monuments in the US public landscape, the 'blackness' of a mural is equally unshakeable—black content in a black space, created by and for a black community, by black artists, at the height of racial protest. Murals were commemorations of blackness because "commemoration was essential. IS essential," Dewey Crumpler told me in a telephone interview:

> When I was making those murals, there was a need for commemoration because, you know, the heroics of those individuals should never be forgotten by the people whom those heroics were essential as aims for their life, so in that way, the commemorative aspect was essential.[61]

When Crumpler suggests that "the heroics of those individuals should never be forgotten", he hints at an element of permanence to black muralism that adds ballast to their presence as monuments. Murals weren't meant to last forever, Crumpler added, and artists knew that from the start. They existed as ephemeral monuments serving "a point and…a community at a given moment," yet whilst the physical painting fades, the memories of black heroes depicted—as well as the mural's presence—remained fixed in the minds of those who saw it.[62]

The similarities between monuments and murals do not end here. As Celeste-Marie Bernier acknowledges, the fixity of official monuments is not as permanent and infallible as we may assume. In the same way that murals are vulnerable and open to the elements—both natural and manmade—monuments are as well. On November 14, 2007, the statement "N.T. 11 11 31" was spraypainted onto the base of a Confederate memorial close to Montgomery, Alabama. The monument that was supposed to stand as a fixed, untouched preservation of "the knightliest of the knightly race/who since the days of old/have kept the lamp of chivalry/alight in hearts of gold," stood on November 14, 2007 as an unofficial, unauthorised acknowledgement of the martyred Nathaniel Turner, who died on 11 11 31. As Bernier suggests, "the incendiary overtones of this unequivocal message written by an unknown hand demands recognition."[63] Challenging the conservative notion that monuments should last "unchanged, forever," the subversive symbols from an unknown hand sprayed onto official white stone enter the monument into a public discussion about the invisibility of black history, and draw it closer to its mural counterpart, which frequently gets re-worked and occasionally

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in a seminal text on Chicana/o muralism, Latorre acknowledges the monumental characteristics of muralism, using the term as a way to add ballast to the scale, potency and position of murals in her argument. Guisela Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 1.

[61] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 89.

defaced in the streets, complicating and enhancing its narrative. "'N.T. 11 11 31' documents Turner's presence through absence by telling yet refusing to tell," Bernier writes, and in doing so destabilises the original function of monuments. Although supposedly fixed to a specific site, enshrining a memory forever, monuments are just as vulnerable to defacement as murals are. By redefining the boundaries of 'monuments' therefore, this thesis not only recalibrates our understanding of monuments in the commemorative public landscape; it also highlights the malleability of 'monuments' as they create various spaces of interaction within black communities at heightened moments of racial protest.

Methodology

In 2006, Manning Marable set a challenge to scholars and researchers to create a 'living black history,' in his book of the same name. "Precious documents, transcripts of important speeches, and crucial manifestos written by African Americans, produced by generation after generation, have been largely scattered, destroyed, and lost," he laments.[64] Discussing the precarity of archival materials like Malcolm X's writings, letters and speeches, and the physical sites of history under threat of gentrification, like the Audubon Ballroom where X was assassinated, Marable demands for the reconstruction of these lost voices, narratives and histories. Scholars can recreate the hidden, fragmented past of African Americans through a multidisciplinary methodology, he argues, one that employs "oral history, photography, film, ethnography, and multimedia digital technology."[65] The collection of these preservation techniques is labelled by Marable as 'living black history', and this thesis is an example of Marable's theory in action.

Adhering to Marable's declaration that African Americans are the principal actors who must tell the story "largely from their own vantage point," this thesis draws on an extensive and original body of artist testimony and mural excavation personally gathered during a series of oral history interviews with muralists from the Black Power Movement.[66] It must be stated upfront that this thesis would not work without the input from these generous artists who graciously gave up their time to discuss their murals with me for hours. I am fully aware that I am a white academic operating in, and writing about a black world, and as such, that comes with its own issues that are constantly at the forefront of my mind. Artists are the best theorists of their own work, and during each interview with black muralists Eugene Eda Wade, Dewey Crumpler, Dindga McCannon and Dana Chandler, I asked for their input on how to ensure

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[64] Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future,* (New York: Civitas Books, 2006), 22.
[65] Ibid., 21.
[66] Ibid.

their voices remained front and centre throughout the thesis as I wanted to ensure I was not co-opting, over analysing, or underselling their work, stories and voices. Chandler offered impactful advice that has shaped this thesis and its arguments. He firstly suggested that I should not categorise when categories are not there, and not force a framework when the artists never intended there to be a framework. Therefore, throughout this thesis I ensure that muralist's voices are given primacy. I layer the contextual and analytical elements onto their testimony to build a broader picture of the mural's purpose and position in the lineage of the black freedom struggle. Secondly, Chandler advised me to put photographs of the artists throughout this thesis. Usually when muralists' work is included in scholarship their faces do not receive the same recognition. As such, interspersed throughout this thesis are images (where possible) of each artist and muralist accompanying their work to ensure their presence is as full as possible.

In addition to original artist testimony, this thesis is guided by extensive archival research on the black muralists who left interviews, statements, and artist testimony before they passed on. The words of Aaron Douglas, Charles White, Hale Woodruff, Jacob Lawrence, Bill Walker, C. Siddha Sila Webber and Mitchell Caton, along with my interviews with Dana Chandler, Susan Kiok, Tomie Arai, Eugene Eda Wade, Dindga McCannon and Dewey Crumpler are the most important sources in this thesis, in addition to the murals themselves. In *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz provide a comprehensive printed archive of black murals from 1934 to 2000. However, they acknowledge—given the informality and flexibility of street muralism—that many murals are missing from their study. Only two books have since expanded the extant archive: mural documentarian, Tim Drescher's *San Francisco Murals* and *Urban Art Chicago* by Jeff Huebner and Olivia Gude (2000). This thesis carries on their excavation work. To ensure this is the most comprehensive examination of black muralism from the 1930s to present day, I have uncovered all known African American murals of this time period depicting themes of race, liberation, black empowerment, and figures from history, yielding a new archive of 205 murals (included in the appendix). These murals have been found, not only through the amalgamated archives from books such as *Wall of Heritage, Walls of Pride; Urban Art Chicago* and *Community Murals* by Alan Barnett (1984) (in which many of the murals are the same), but also from oral history interviews, research trips, and walking the streets of Google Maps.

In the foreword to *On the Wall,* Drescher underscores the importance of documenting murals in scholarship. "This book arrives not a moment too soon," he begins, "not only are many of the murals it discusses disappearing (through age, weather, and 'urban renewal'), but the artists who painted the early works are also beginning to pass on. Now is the time to have

gathered the full range of materials pertinent to New York's community mural history."[67] In his foreword, Drescher acknowledges two major research hurdles for mural documentarians, writers, activists, academics and researchers of history—the ephemerality of the cultural form; and the rapidity of which time can pass on, taking the makers of history with it. These hurdles perhaps explain why such a small body of literature exists on such a vast cultural form. Following Marable's instruction for a 'living black history' that calls for a multidisciplinary methodology to preserve lost voices and narratives, I have created an online digital archive that plots many of these black murals, both interior and exterior, onto a map of the United States. This map is available at antislavery.ac.uk/murals and houses information about each mural: its location, process of creation, and figures.[68]

Chapter Overview

This thesis demonstrates the role that black muralism has played at heightened moments of intense racial protest throughout the black freedom struggle. Demonstrating that murals have an intrinsic and dynamic relationship with space, the following five chapters unpack how murals turn walls into sites of interaction in black communities to empower black residents, commemorate black heroes, protest the social, racial and political contexts, and contest geographical confinement. The five chapters are organised chronologically, moving through time and protest movements, from 1930 to 2019, through the Harlem Renaissance and New Deal era, to the Black Power Movement, and on to Black Lives Matter. The chapters underscore how the mural form was malleable and lent itself to meeting different needs at different moments throughout the black freedom struggle. Showing how, when and why muralists visually reclaimed physical walls in black communities, this thesis underscores the significance and genealogy of black muralism at heightened moments of protest in the black freedom struggle.

This is a thesis of multiple parts. Chapters 1 and 2 trace the shift from interior to exterior murals and serve as contextualising, pre-history chapters that exist together in their own narrative arc. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are all set against the backdrop of the Black Power Movement and highlight the malleable and empowering nature of early black street murals. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present three in-depth case studies that underscore the multivalent nature of black

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[67] Janet Braun-Reinitz and Jane Weissman, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), 3.
[68] To fit with the theme of 'Antislavery' given that the archive is housed on an Antislavery website, 112 of these murals relate to the theme of slavery. The remaining murals do not have overt slavery imagery and can be found in the appendix.

muralism by highlighting their different interactive functions within black communities across the country at different moments of racial protest.

Chapter 1, titled "I had to fight with my brushes: Languages of Resistance in Interior Black Muralism of the New Deal Era," discusses the history of interior black mural art from 1930 to 1943. Laying the contextual groundwork for the preceding four chapters, this chapter uncovers the early relationship between black artists and murals by showing how artists used interior murals as a tool of racial protest for the first time. Set against the backdrop of the post-Depression era, it argues how muralists navigated the interior constraints of patronage, location and audience to create protest murals with either encoded or overt languages of resistance. Using *Into Bondage* (1936) by Aaron Douglas, and *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943) by Charles White, displayed in Dallas, Texas and Hampton, Virginia respectively, this chapter highlights how interior muralists were drawn to the mural form—because of its size and public-facing position—to protest Jim Crow, economic bondage, unbridled capitalism, and European fascism of the era. As a preface to the history of exterior murals, this chapter introduces the early symbiotic relationship between politics and black muralism, as well as the mural's ability to operate as a tool of subversive racial protest—both of which live on in later periods discussed in the remaining four chapters.

While interior black murals emerged in 1930 and endured until the late 1940s, black muralism experienced a fallow period during the era of the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Black muralism troughed in the 1950s and lay almost dormant during the desegregation era, with only a handful of murals by artists John Biggers and John Wilson appearing during these years. There has been no explanation in scholarship for this stagnation. My theory is that interior black murals of the Harlem Renaissance and New Deal era drew upon communist aesthetics to display radical languages of black resistance. Influenced by the backdrop of economic unemployment and growing European fascism, black muralists laced their work with radical and emancipatory content to inspire black viewers to resist their social circumstances. However, as the Cold War haunted America in the post-World War II period, radical iconography, especially imagery linked to communism, faded into the past. Abstract expressionism flourished in the work of artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, heralding a period of sublime, large-scale paintings of abstracted colour. Therefore, during a time when the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) loomed throughout the country looking to quash communist, or inflammatory anti-American sentiment, black muralism disappeared, albeit briefly, and therefore this thesis does not examine the 1950s.

Radical black murals emerged again in 1967, this time in the streets, and persisted through the late 1970s. Connected to Chapter 1 by pinpointing the moment when murals became exteriorised, Chapter 2, titled "'They call it 'The Wall' but it's more than that": Muralism and Black Consciousness in the Age of Black Power,' discusses the intricate relationship between street murals, space, politics and community, and in doing so, it lays contextual ground-work for the three case-study chapters of the thesis. In 1967, the *Wall of Respect* emerged on Chicago's South Side, becoming an exterior phenomenon that catalysed a mural movement across the nation. No longer confined to the borders of a frame hanging upon a wall inside a building, or bound by the constraints of patronage, murals evolved from their interior predecessors into a radical, guerrilla art form on the streets of black communities, depicting radical black history and the contemporaneous racial present to reclaim neighbourhoods and empower black residents. Muralists recuperated antislavery heroes such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Nathaniel Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Ida B. Wells alongside their contemporaneous activist counterparts, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis, and Stokely Carmichael. Although the *Wall of Respect,* created by Bill Walker and OBAC, is frequently documented in scholarship for its role as the first black street mural, its relationship to the mood and consciousness of black communities during the radical sixties is not. Set against the backdrop of the radical search for black liberation, this chapter uses the *Wall of Respect* to conceptualise murals of the 1960s as a physical embodiment of the decade's new black consciousness. It shows how murals spatialised blackness by operating as talisman of consciousness. By using the example of the *Wall of Respect,* this chapter shows how murals became both a tangible manifestation of black consciousness, and how murals elevated the consciousness of the black community in which it was housed.

Closely tied to Chapter 2 and continuing to explore the Black Power Movement, Chapter 3, titled "'Africa had no history and neither did I": Communication, Education and Alternate Literacy in Murals of the Black Power Movement,' offers an in-depth case study of how muralists used these talismans of black consciousness to transform the walls of black communities into sites of alternate literacy. Murals became unofficial museums, newspapers and history textbooks in the streets of black America, working to counter the erasure of black history and culture from the public mainstream. When school curriculums and mainstream presses failed to incorporate black history, culture and news into their remit, black murals lined the walls of black enclaves to circumvent the politics of institutional white spaces, becoming powerful modes of communication and education for black communities. Reframing the *Wall of Truth* (1969) in Chicago by Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade as a communal street

newspaper, and *Education is Truth* (1971) and *The Fire Next Time I* and *II* (1977) in San Francisco by Dewey Crumpler as black history textbooks, this chapter shows how murals were at the helm of teaching black history, culture and news in black communities throughout the era of Black Power.

Chapter 4, titled "'All Worship the Wall": Performance, Healing and Rituals in Murals of the Black Power Movement,' offers another case study into how muralists transformed community walls into sites of interaction. It unpacks a neglected dynamic of mural art by examining the relationship between muralism and rituals. Broken down into two distinct sections, this chapter firstly assesses how murals became sites of ritual healing, and secondly how murals inspired performative rituals at their physical site. Using Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade's murals in Detroit from 1968, *Wall of Dignity, Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go),* and *Wall of Pride,* the first section evaluates how these three murals were painted in the aftermath of the city's racial rebellion to heal the physical, social and emotional wounds of a fractured Detroit, thus turning spaces of dereliction into sites of healing. The second section of the chapter uses the *Wall of Respect* and *Universal Alley/Rip-Off* (1968-75) by C. Siddha Sila Weber and Mitchell Caton to unpack how murals created spaces of community interaction by inspiring performative acts of ritual at physical mural sites. Daily, weekly and monthly, street parties, spoken word poetry, dance, jazz festivals and music battles would commence at the sites of murals, transforming these acts, and the people performing them, into an extension of the mural itself.

But as the flames of Black Power subsided, so too did the radical content and creative, collaborative process of black muralism. "Moods are less radical now, and the energies of the wall movement diminished," Brian O'Doherty, director of the Visual Arts Program, admitted in 1973.[69] By the mid-1970s government agencies and businesses usurped community sponsorship by providing funds that placed limits "implicitly or explicitly, on the content of artistic expression."[70] The 1980s and 1990s—described by Manning Marable as the "'post-segregation' / 'post-reform'" period—saw the decline of radical murals and the emergence of murals as "beautification projects" that were less "*of* the community than *for* the community," shifting in content from fiery proclamations of Black Power to colourful, peaceful exaltations of black history.[71] These two decades became a period of racial incongruity.[72] On the one hand this period saw the emergence of a new black middle class, increasing African American

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[69] Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art,* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 423.
[70] Zorach, *Art for People's Sake*, 216. For more information on the change in funding in the 1970s, see Alan Barnett's *Community Murals,* 422-431.
[71] Zorach, *Art for People's Sake*, 216.
[72] Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1991.

representation in politics, and the mayoral victories of Harold Washington in Chicago, and David Dinkins in New York City, the gubernatorial victory of Doug Wilder in Virginia, and the campaign of Jesse Jackson for the presidency of the United States in 1984 and 1988. Yet at the same time, the 1980s ushered in a period of neo-conservatism under the Reagan administration, the deterioration of the black working class, and an influx of cocaine into black communities producing "a social devastation and violence between black Americans that had never before been witnessed."[73] By the 1980s, segregation was mandated as illegal, leading to the damaging illusion that "discrimination and conflict no longer existed."[74] During these two decades, the nature of black muralism changed dramatically, but unlike the fallow period of the 1950s, murals did not disappear completely. Instead, the radical content of Black Power era murals gave way to sanitised depictions of black history and family unity as government funding looked to sponsor public art that was both "decorative and amusing."[75]

Given the decline of radical black memory in mural art during the 1980s and 1990s, I refrain from examining these decades. Instead, I conclude this thesis by focusing on mural art from the late 2000s until present. It was not until the murder of Oscar Grant in 2009 that black muralism evolved once more. Black Lives Matter murals are the latest iteration of black muralism in the genealogy of black muralism outlined in this thesis. Although continuing the mural tradition of creating sites of interaction for the black community, murals of the Black Lives Matter movement diverge from their Black Power predecessors due to the demand for immediacy and site-specificity. I conclude the thesis with a case study of how muralists today use walls of black communities as sites of commemoration to honour the lives of those being killed at disproportionate rates in the streets of black America. Titled "'These voices continue to speak to us": Muralism in the Era of Black Lives Matter,' this chapter shows how contemporary murals transform walls into visual gravestones to commemorate the lives of police brutality victims. It conceptualises visual gravestones in two ways. Firstly, this chapter shows how murals are painted in the victims' hometown and at physical sites of death. This creates sites of mourning, and, much like murals of Chapter 4, sites of community healing. By engaging with Alan Rice's theory of 'guerrilla memorialisation' this chapter also demonstrates how Black Lives Matter murals counter mainstream amnesia and subvert media bias, stereotypes and negative portrayals of police brutality's victims, by depicting the positive,

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[73] Ibid., ix.
[74] Ibid., 187.
[75] Barnett, *Community Murals,* 424.

empowering nature of each victim's life and memory, immortalising them in the streets of their hometown.[76]

      This thesis tells the story of black muralism from the days of racial segregation and the laws of Jim Crow during the 1930s, to the present when those hired to lawfully protect American citizens perpetuate new forms of fatal racial violence in the streets. As African Americans moved through the last hundred years in the search for black liberation, murals have lined their path along the way. From southern lynchings at the beginning of the twentieth century, to a moment of contemporary lynchings in the streets of black America today, murals have stood as monuments to blackness, reminding the nation of the indelible and irreplaceable presence of black history, culture and memory across the United States of America.

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[76] Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

Chapter One
"I had to fight with my brushes":
Languages of Resistance in Interior Black Muralism
of the New Deal Era

Art has been for the few, but it should be for the many.

Hale Woodruff, *artist.*[1]

Paint is the only weapon (that) [sic] I have with which to fight what I resent. If I could write, I would write about it. If I could talk, I would talk about it. Since I paint, I must paint about it.

Charles White, *artist.*[2]

Harriet Tubman stands powerfully atop the barrel of a smoking cannon, throwing off the manacles shackling her freedom in *Harriet Tubman* (1930) by Aaron Douglas. Traditional and modern healing practices are interwoven to depict the history of medicine from Africa to America in *Harlem Hospital Murals* (1936) by Charles Alston. Luminous brown skin glistens on the muscular bodies of ten enslaved men led by Cinque, as they brandish machetes and pin down their white enslavers in an act of radical self-liberation aboard a slave vessel called 'the Amistad', in *Mutiny Aboard the Amistad 1839* (1939) by Hale Woodruff. A lynched figure hangs from a tree surrounded by several interlocking narratives that depict the subversive plotting of a protest inspired by the acts of John Brown, in *Technique to Serve the Struggle* (1940-41) by Charles White. And a soldier, falling to his knees, is enmeshed in a fence of barbed wire whilst his clothes are torn from his lacerated body during the conflict of war, in *Dying Soldier* (1942) by John Biggers. From the 1930s to the mid-1940s, during the Harlem Renaissance and New Deal, interior black muralism grew in importance, receiving sponsorship from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Harmon Foundation, the Barnes Foundation, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and individual patronage. Painting acts of black self-determination and liberation, interior black muralists of the early twentieth century established their autonomy in public artwork by placing black history, culture and memory at the forefront of murals.

This contextualising chapter introduces the ways in which artists first used interior mural art as a form of protest. In the 1930s and 1940s, artists such as Douglas, Alston, Woodruff, White and Biggers were drawn to the mural because of its large-scale and public-facing nature. Aaron Douglas's reach as an artist and communicator for example "was inextricably tied to the public nature of the arenas he chose for his work," and by creating

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[1] Stacy Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1930-1953* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 43.
[2] Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, "Contribution of the American Negro to Democracy: A History Painting by Charles White," *International Review of African American Art,* vol. 12, 4 (1995): 39.

artwork for journals, books, and public walls, Douglas could "speak and teach about the struggles that he and fellow black Americans faced."[3] With the same goal of reaching a mass audience of 'fellow black Americans,' Charles White also turned to black muralism "to get [his] work before common ordinary people." To White, "a work of art was meant to belong to people…Art should take its place as one of the necessities of life, like food, clothing and shelter."[4] Art is not "for artists and connoisseurs alone," he explained during a 1943 interview with the Communist Party's (CP) *Daily Worker* magazine. "It should be for the people. A mural on the wall of a commonly-used building is there for everyone to see and read its message," he continued.[5] Whilst White's artistic interests were piqued by the grassroots reach of muralism, he was also enamoured by the large-scale impact of the mural form:

> The most important thing…for me has always been to say something that is meaningful, and much more important than the media I use. And whatever media that I could do it strongest, that's the media I've always used. That's why murals are extremely important to me, even though it's hard to get mural commissions these days, but murals I've always felt very strong to because it's allowed me the room to say the kinds of things…[and] try to deal with truth.[6]

Having 'the room' to say everything the artist wanted to during the 1920s to 1950s was imperative, and the mural offered both space and a public arena to do so.[7]

The decades stretching from the Wall Street Crash in 1929, to the rising tide of the Cold War shook the lives of African Americans from both domestic and international fronts. The deeply entrenched laws of Jim Crow and proliferation of lynching in the South, the status of economic bondage as a form of neo-slavery, the slowly enveloping cloak of fascism, threats—and later reality—of another world war, and the rising tide of communism and Marxism across the US, left much for black artists to paint, protest and support.[8] As an art form that could "capture the attention of a mass audience much more readily than could easel painting," artists were drawn to the protest potential of interior mural art.[9] As a result, black murals sprung up in hospitals, state fairs and historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) to protest the

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[3] Susan Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond: Aaron Douglas and His Role in Art/History," in *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist,* ed. Susan Earle (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 5.

[4] LeFalle-Collins, "Contribution of the American Negro to Democracy," 40.

[5] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 43.

[6] Oral history interview with Charles W. White, 1965 March 9. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[7] Although the New Deal ended in 1939, murals—which gained traction during the New Deal—still continued to be produced in abundance until the mid-1940s. As there are a wealth of definitions applicable to this period of time—post-Depression, pre- and during World War II, the New Deal, pre-Cold War—this chapter will use 'the New Deal era' for ease when discussing black muralism from 1930 to mid-1940s.

[8] The bondage over the economic mobility of African Americans in the 1930s is described by Paul Gardullo as 'neo-slavery.' Paul Gardullo, "'Just keeps rollin' along': rebellions, revolts and radical black memories of slavery in the 1930s," *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 3-4 (June 2007): 272-5.

[9] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 43.

national and international threats to black lives in America from an empowered black perspective. Artists wanted to use murals to create protest artwork that challenged the oppressive political, social and racial backdrop of the era. To do so, they filled their artwork with visual languages of resistance: imagery that conveyed overthrowing white oppression through rebellion and self-emancipation. The artworld of the 1930s and 1940s, however, was not free from constraint. When creating interior black murals to protest racial and social equality in America, black artists had to navigate issues of patronage, location and audience, asking themselves: where would the mural be located? Who would sponsor the artwork? And who would the audience be—black, white, or both? The answers to these three questions, along with the artistic style in which artists worked, would alter the protest language of interior black murals.

This chapter shows the early iterations of radical black protest murals and unpacks the intrinsic relationship between politics and public art. It argues that interior muralists created large-scale, public-facing protest art to contest the oppressive racial climate and shows how they adapted their languages of resistance in accordance with artistic style, patronage, location and audience. It analyses Aaron Douglas's *Into Bondage* (1936), which was painted in a modernist style, sponsored by white patronage, and displayed in a southern, predominantly white location at the Texas Centennial. It also analyses Charles White's *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943), which was painted in the style of social realism, sponsored by the Julius Rosenwald Foundation which funded black artwork specifically, was housed at the HBCU Hampton Institute in Virginia, and viewed by an all-black audience. Oftentimes languages of resistance were overt and displayed explicitly radical imagery of black revolution, as was the case with *Contribution*. Yet given the dictates of white patronage and the politics of the mural's location, some artists used the experimental terrain of modernism to encode their messages of revolution within historical allegory, coded symbolism, and imprints of socialist imagery, as will be analysed in *Into Bondage*. By unpacking the complex relationship between the early twentieth-century artworld and protest language, this chapter illuminates the malleable nature of early black muralism. It argues that in creating protest murals, muralists adapted their artwork in order to successfully navigate the politics of interiority. It highlights an undiscovered encoded visual language within interior black muralism of the period, which was used subversively to fight "against forms of neo-slavery and for social, economic and racial justice."[10] When artist Michael D. Harris suggested black muralism in the streets made "direct challenges to the oppressive American political system," he overlooked the empowering, and often subversive,

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[10] Gardullo, "'Just keeps rollin' along': 275; Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism*, 5.

existence of interior black muralism.[11] By uncovering the malleable nature of early black mural art, as well as its languages of resistance, this chapter shows how muralism of the New Deal era was a radical, empowering and politicised art form, much like street murals of the later Black Power Movement.

Fighting on Many Fronts: Racism, War, Unemployment, and the Growth of Communism in the Era of the New Deal

In the 1930s and 1940s, radical black muralism was new. Although black murals began in the nineteenth century with the work of house paintings by Robert Scott Duncanson, this artwork was not radical in content. It was not until the 1930s that black public art finally showed the "image of a black man *winning*."[12] During this period, black interior muralism developed under both the Harlem Renaissance and New Deal. The Harlem Renaissance ran from roughly 1920 until the late 1930s and is synonymous with the term 'The New Negro'—a term popularised by philosopher, writer and educator, Alain Locke, who published a book under the same name in 1925. To Locke, New Negro artists had an important responsibility. Creating an aesthetic that reclaimed the warped, subservient depictions of 'Sambos' and 'pickaninnies'—and that challenged the widespread myth that "Africans couldn't paint"—New Negro artists had the duty to develop "the Negro subject as an artistic theme," both "interpreting the Negro in the American scene to America at large" and more importantly, reflecting black culture, black life and black identity to black viewers.[13] Paralleling the artistic footprint of black muralists during rise of the New Negro Movement was artwork of the New Deal era. In 1934, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was established under the premise that artists "should be held to the same standards of production and public value as workers wielding shovels in the national parks."[14] By May of 1935, the PWAP evolved into a more structured format under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), employing millions of job-seekers to carry out public works projects in the field of construction. Run as a subdivision of the WPA was the Federal Arts Project (FAP) that remedied the unemployment levels of artists, who F. V. O'Connor argues were "more hurt than any other group of workers in the country."[15] As such, the FAP sponsored

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[11] Harris, "Urban Totems", 25.

[12] Floyd Coleman quotation discussing Hale Woodruff's *Mutiny Aboard the Amistad 1839* (1939) in Michael D. Harris, "Urban Totems: The Communal Spirit of Black Murals," in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* ed. James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 24.

[13] Alan Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1925), 11.

[14] Jerry Adler, "1934: The Art of the New Deal," Smithsonian, June, 2009, accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/1934-the-art-of-the-new-deal-132242698/.

[15] Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

artwork and public murals that projected narratives of patriotism and nationalism in representational imagery, because "the Roosevelt state exhibited an administrative bias against 'abstractionist practices.'"[16] In July 1939, four years before the Works Progress Administration was formally ended, it was renamed the Works <u>Projects</u> Administration, changing 'progress' to 'projects' in response to the pressures on the Roosevelt administration to "renounce its 'radical' ambitions and values."[17] The active choice to refrain from words, activities and imagery with even the slightest connotation of radicalism was a recurrent theme throughout the New Deal, and one which many artists attempted to overcome, as will be discussed in this chapter.

As the artwork of Duncanson tapered to a natural end in the early twentieth century, artists such as Douglas, Alston, Woodruff, White, Biggers and William Edouard Scott evolved interior black muralism into a space of black ownership and protest. It offered black artists a chance to reclaim black history, memory and culture from the racist artistic stereotypes of the nineteenth century which depicted "the Negro as happy, content and 'naturally in place' in such a romanticised presentment of the patriarchal regime of the Southern plantation."[18] Paternalistic images of subservient, enslaved African Americans sat alongside stereotypical depictions of them as jesters, fools, and 'Sambos', reaffirming their inferior racial and social status in nineteenth-century society.[19] Confined to depictions as servants and laborers, the African American subject became a mere foil that highlighted the philosophy of Nordic superiority.[20] Therefore, when interior black muralism crested in the mid-twentieth century, black artists claimed an agency they had been denied in mainstream artistic works of the previous century.

Black muralism emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression and persisted until the early advancements of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This oppressive climate fuelled black muralists to turn their artwork into sites of protest. Jim Crow laws plagued the South, entrenching racial segregation and increasing the prominence of lynching. The spread of European fascism hinted at the emergence of another world war. And economic bondage and vast unemployment, although widespread across the country following

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16 Ibid., 14.
17 Ibid., 129.
18 Floyd Coleman, 'Keeping Hope Alive: The Story of African American Murals," in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals,* ed. James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 10. During the nineteenth century there was a swell of empowered self-representation in artwork and photographs by artists such as Augustus Washington, James Ball, Robert Scott Duncanson, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Edmonia Lewis and Patrick Reason.
19 W.E.B. Du Bois Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University Press, "The Image of the Black in Western Art," YouTube Video 06:04, December 13, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QIAbKa4USs; Harvard University Press, "About the Series" The Image of the Black in Western Art*, accessed March 27, 2016, http://www.imageoftheblack.com/about.html.
20 Alain Locke, *The American Negro: His History and Literature* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969)*, 43.

the Wall Street Crash, was felt most intensely in black communities in the North which were overcrowded due to the first wave of the Great Migration. Not only were black employees typically the last hired and first fired from industrial jobs, but also "downwardly mobile whites displaced many black workers from even those menial service-sector jobs that African Americans previously had monopolized," resulting in African American unemployment rates that were three times that for white men.[21]

To many Americans, communism offered an antidote to these oppressions. At the height of the Depression, "the CPUSA boasted sixty-five thousand members who fought militantly to establish such familiar and illustrious institutions as rent stabilization, public housing, Social Security…, and even small-farm subsidies," and by the early-1930s "the party emerged from obscurity" in black enclaves like Harlem.[22] Playing a decisive role in the black freedom struggle in the US, the Party galvanised black support in urban centres once it began showing concern for fighting discrimination on a racial as well as economic front—with Harlem serving as the centre point for the organisation. With membership dwindling in the late 1920s, black Party members Cyril Briggs and Richard B. Moore "concentrated their energies on transforming the American Communist Party—an organization composed almost exclusively of white immigrants—into a phalanx capable of smashing through the barriers that subordinated blacks." [23] Yet it was not until 1932-33 that the CPUSA became truly recognised as a Party allied to the rights of black Americans. In 1931, nine black teenagers were falsely accused and sentenced to death for raping two white women on a train between Chattanooga and Memphis, Tennessee. With the case first being heard in Scottsboro, Alabama, the young teenagers became known as the Scottsboro Boys. From the moment of indictment, the CPUSA mobilised to fight the case, dispatching attorneys from their political arm—the International Labor Defense (ILD)—to make contact with the defendants. The Scottsboro case was the focus of the CPUSA's new antilynching crusade, and as a result, protests, mass demonstrations and meetings mounted in Harlem. "From soapboxes, pulpits and podiums," black and white Communists made the details of the Scottsboro case a part of the daily consciousness of the community "until 'Scottsboro became synonymous with southern racism, repression and injustice.'"[24]

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[21] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 5.
[22] Gregory Sholette, "Review: Where Have All the Leftists Gone?" *Art Journal,* vol. 64, no. 4 (2005): 128; Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), xvii.
[23] Naison, *Communists in Harlem,* 11.
[24] Ibid*.,* 57.

"Yet as popularity for the Communist Party grew amongst African Americans in the early 1930s, the bleak reality that "the New Deal was doing nothing to relieve the misery of blacks" slowly set in.[25] When Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed the Oval Office in 1933, he promised "A New Deal for the American People," seeking to ameliorate suffering and promote economic recovery through a host of programs and projects such as the WPA, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), National Recovery Administration (NRA), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Federal Reserve System (FRS), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). These programs— each with their own individual sub-projects—sought to deliver a much-needed injection into the nation's economy by providing temporary employment, short-term aid, construction and agricultural production projects, and protection of the nation's debts. Despite the range of initiatives pioneered by Roosevelt, the New Deal became unpopular in the eyes of the CPUSA. This was due in part to its failure to address the "particularly detrimental impact on the already bleak prospects of most African Americans for socioeconomic advancement." [26] Whilst the NRA aimed to eliminate cut-throat competition by bringing industry, government and labor together to create 'codes of fair practice,' the codes themselves victimised African Americans. Throughout the South, the Urban League estimated that nearly three million black workers were excluded from the codes through the manipulation of "loosely drawn codes and…the establishment of formal wage disparities in the South."[27] With the New Deal failing to address issues of racial inequality, more and more African Americans were drawn to the CPUSA.

As the decade wore on and James Ford headed up the Harlem Communist Party from 1933, transforming the party from "a freewheeling agitational center into a model of political orthodoxy," the CPUSA expanded towards a Popular and Cultural Front in 1935.[28] Shifting away from the Party's early 1930s isolationist stance—which supported the 'Black Belt Thesis' and viewed a world revolution as imminent—the Party adopted a more broadly inclusive, coalition-based strategy that focused on the importance of culture "as one arm, or front, of a widening campaign for social, political and racial equality."[29] With growing support from

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[25] Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Mississippi: University Press Mississippi, 1998), 234.

[26] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 5.

[27] Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity,* 235.

[28] Naison, *Communists in Harlem,* 95.

[29] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 10; Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 3. According to Paul Gardullo, the Black Belt Thesis "stated that Blacks in the South comprised a separate nation over which they deserved total economic and legal control, whereas Blacks in the North had lost their southern folkways and required total assimilation into the working class. It appealed to many Blacks and attracted many of them into the orbit of the Communist Party." Gardullo, "'Just keeps rollin' along', 277, n.12. For a more in-depth analysis of the Black Belt Thesis, see William J. Maxwell, *Old*

cultural workers—even if not direct Party members—the mid-1930s saw black aesthetics become aligned with the aims and aspirations of the Popular Front.[30] Although visual artists such as Charles White are mentioned in the literature documenting this period, scholarship frequently gives greater consideration to prolific writers and actors of the era, such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Paul Robeson and Claude McKay. All these figures had a complex and important relationship with the CPUSA and produced empowering works of art, literature and music that inspired many African Americans, and therefore warrant in-depth study. Yet the role and cultural outputs of visual artists was equally significant during this period and should not be overlooked.

In February 1936, the first American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism was held in New York City. Over 400 leading artists, academics, modernists, purists and social realists were in attendance—including Mexican muralists José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, and African American artist, Aaron Douglas. Douglas and his wife Alma were interested in communism in the 1930s although there is no evidence of them joining the CPUSA—they were not one of the 75 percent of black cultural figures with Communist Party membership. It was during the mid-1930s, during his creation of murals like *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) and *Into Bondage* (1936), that Douglas's Marxist convictions were in the sharpest focus, yet he seldom discussed the influence of Marxism in his life or on his work during interviews. By the late 1930s, however, upon accepting his position as chairman of the Fisk Art Department, Douglas remained sympathetic to the Left, but his Marxist expressions lessened.[31] In 1936, Douglas impressed the important role artists and artwork played during the period, to an audience at the American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism:

> In America, race discrimination is one of the chief props on which Fascism can be built. One of the most vital blows the artists of this congress can deliver to the threat of Fascism is to refuse to discriminate against any man because of nationality, race, or creed.[32]

In February 1936, in front of 400 delegates, Douglas stressed the responsibility of the artist in America: "I should like to close this paper with a sincere appeal to every artist of this congress and to every lover of liberty and justice everywhere, to fight against the rising tide of Fascism,"

Negro, New Left: African American Writing and Communism Between the Wars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[30] Mullen, *Popular Fronts,* 9.

[31] Susan Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond," 35.

[32] Aaron Douglas, 'The Negro in American Culture,' in *Artists Against War and Fascism: Papers of the First American Artists' Congress,* ed. Matthew Baigell and Julia Williams (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 83.

he began.[33] "If there is anyone here who does not understand Fascism let him ask the first Negro he sees in the street. The lash and iron hoof of Fascism have been a constant menace and threat to the Negro ever since his so-called emancipation," he continued.[34] Underscoring the specific work to be undertaken by the artist, Douglas proclaimed to his audience: "What the Negro artist should paint and how he should paint it can't be accurately determined without reference to specific social conditions."[35] As artists took heed of the call to create works that depicted the plight of oppression throughout black America, some, including Douglas himself, turned to the mural to do so.

Throughout his murals Douglas created "a new and significant portrayal of [African American] lives, labor, dreams, and realities" in a modernist style.[36] Dubbed as the creator of "an original modern black art," the work of Douglas during the 1920s and 1930s became synonymous with modernism, but modernism during this period, especially amongst black artists, was not monolithic. Some artists "avoided [modernism] in favor of more artistic modes, while others embraced it quite visibly," and not all artists agreed on modernism's significance or relevance. It meant different things in literature just as it did in the visual arts.[37] But to Douglas, modernism endorsed utopianism and the potential of abstract geometries "to root out strictly narrative representation," as well as the didactic potential of public art.[38] He wrote:

> I just now opened the book [Ruskin, *Ten Lectures in Art*] at random and found this sentence which is the very antithesis of what the modernists are after. I'll quote it, "You are, in drawing, to try only to represent the appearances of things, never what you know the things to be.[39]

As Douglas acknowledges here, modernism was not about "strictly narrative representations"—something that flourished later under the remit of social realism—but it was instead a period of artistic experimentation and metaphorical representation. Modernism offered an experimental drawing board rife with possibilities that gave Douglas a way of merging "forms and ideas with a real sense of a brutal and not-so-distant past" of bondage and oppression.[40] Modernism flirted with Cubism and abstraction, and whilst flourishing in the era of 'the New Negro', Douglas and other black artists fused their understanding of modernism's

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[33] Ibid., 84.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 83.
[36] Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond," 5.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 24.
[39] Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race & The Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 10.
[40] Earle, "Harlem, Modernism, and Beyond," 41.

utopia with "motifs appropriated from African visual tradition."[41] In a 1925 letter to Langston Hughes, Douglas expressed the contours of what modernism meant, not only to himself, but to African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance. He told Hughes that they need "to conceive, develop, establish an art era…Not white art painted black" but a modernist aesthetic centred on "something transcendentally material, mystically objective. Earthy. Spiritually earthy. Dynamic."[42] Modernism offered artists the bandwidth to do so because it was about artistic experimentation. Because modernism was predicated upon the idea that artists working in the style "understood the restless world around them," Douglas used his modernist paintings to depict a black world of oppression, pain, culture and pride alongside a vision of a utopian future.[43]

As evidenced in his 1936 New York speech, Douglas was deeply influenced by the growing threat of fascism and another world war, but he was also fuelled by the deepening unemployment and lack of socioeconomic advancement for African Americans. As a result, he created artwork, not only within the context of a global fascist movement, but also under the oppressive circumstances of an extended form of slavery at home. At the vanguard of a group of artists who used murals as a subversive artform, Douglas used the canvas to protest the world around him. He had to figure out how to create protest murals in a world threatened by fascism and neo-slavery, and in an artworld constrained by the dictates of white patronage. Working under the remit of modernism gave Douglas a terrain of experimentation on which he configured new encoded languages of resistance that navigated the politics of patronage and offered black audiences a coded inspirational and resistive aesthetic. The 1930s was a period when artists began to push the conceptual boundaries of black muralism and the following analysis of *Into Bondage* brings this encoded language of resistance of modernist murals into sharp relief.

Into Bondage and Out Again: Encoded Languages of Resistance in the Murals of Aaron Douglas

Aaron Douglas (fig. 1) was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1899 to baker, Aaron senior, and homemaker, Elizabeth. Facing constant financial struggle during his childhood, Douglas's parents impressed upon him the importance of getting an education. Attending a segregated

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Richard Powell, "Paint That Thing!: Aaron Douglas's Call to Modernism," *American Studies* 49, no. 1/2, (Spring/Summer 2008): 118.

[43] Ibid., 117.

elementary school, and later a mixed high school, Douglas earned a degree in art at the University of Nebraska in 1922—the first African American to do so—before founding the art department at Lincoln High School in Kansas City. Yet in 1925, he heard the call of New York. Quitting his job and migrating east, he embraced the pulsing beat of the Harlem Renaissance. During his tenure in New York City, from 1925 to 1937, Douglas spent a year's interlude in Paris from 1931 to 1932. "After I reached New York, in spite of the urgent pleadings of my friends, my mind was set on a plan calling for at least a year of study in Paris," he admitted. "Where else but to Paris would the artist go who wished really to learn his craft and eventually succeed in the art of painting?"[44] Returning from France in 1932, Douglas spent five more years in and out of Harlem before accepting a full teaching position at Fisk University in Nashville in 1937. Whilst Douglas's career spanned many decades and geographical locations, his years spent in Harlem creating modernist murals are of most importance here.[45]

Fig. 1. Aaron Douglas, location and date unknown.

New Negro artists of the Harlem Renaissance had the empowering task of reclaiming ownership of forgotten, distorted and sanitised narratives. However, scholars of the Harlem Renaissance remain critical of its aims. "The Renaissance depended on and answered the needs of whites rather than blacks," and in a sense, "it was as much a white creation as it was black,"

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[44] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas,* 11.
[45] For overviews of Douglas's whole career see Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race & The Harlem Renaissance*, and Susan Earle, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist.*

Nathan Huggins argues.[46] Artistically constrained by the fantasies of white patrons, the Renaissance was "merely a taxi trip to the exotic for most white New Yorkers."[47] Huggins' scathing critique of the Harlem Renaissance taps into one of the most commonly documented criticisms of the cultural movement as a whole—the role of patronage. According to Daniel Levering Lewis,

> White capital and influence were crucial, and the white presence, at least in the early years, hovered over the New Negro world of art and literature like a benevolent censor, politely but pervasively setting the outer limits of its creative boundaries.[48]

One of the most well-known, and most formidable patrons of the Harlem Renaissance, was Charlotte Osgood Mason, also known as 'Godmother'. In 1924, Mason caught wind of Douglas's artistic footprint in Lincoln and asked him to join her in New York. A wealthy white woman living on Park Avenue, the Godmother subsidised Harlem Renaissance artists like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Aaron Douglas, because African Americans were, in the words of Mason, "America's greatest link with the primitive."[49] Mason's overbearing influence was a presence in many black artists' lives, one that—much to his regret—Douglas was not impervious to. In 1928, in the company of Hughes and Locke, Douglas remembers his first encounter with Mason:

> I went down this day to see her and carry this little package of things and she looked at the drawings, she liked them and she decided she would take one of these drawings. Well, she took this drawing and gave me $125 for this drawing. Oh, terrific I thought. She had me right then.[50]

Initially lured in by Mason's wealth after she purchased two of his drawings at $125 each, Douglas temporarily indulged in the Godmother's support, under her two conditions: he gave her regular reports on his work, and he was only ever to call her Godmother, but as their relationship developed, she grew increasingly controlling over Douglas's work and career developments. In 1928, after accepting a tuition-free scholarship at the Albert C. Barnes art school in Merion, Pennsylvania, Douglas was approached after class one day by Mason's chauffer. Driving from New York to Pennsylvania, Mason demanded that Douglas terminate his scholarship at the Barnes school immediately and return to New York with her, fearing his training in Merion was detrimental to his natural artistic instincts. Douglas must "be governed

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[46] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, xiv; Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85.

[47] Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance,* 85.

[48] David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 98.

[49] Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African American Artists From 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 129.

[50] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas,* 37.

only by his emotions to preserve his "primitivism,'" she believed.[51] Yet he soon began to resist her dictatorial influence, seeing out his training scholarship and returning to New York on his own timeframe. Disobeying the Godmother's orders after accepting a teaching position at Fisk, Nashville and refusing to write to her every day, Mason dropped Douglas "like a brick," much to his delight.[52]

White patronage and interior murals were symbiotic during the 1930s and 1940s, with sponsorship frequently restraining black artistic content. Whilst the patronage of wealthy individuals like the Godmother and Carl Van Vechten was commonplace during this period, so too was patronage from government sponsors like the PWAP, WPA, FAP and private foundations like the Harmon and Barnes Foundations. But these funding bodies were not without critique from artists like Douglas. In 1934, in a newspaper article titled "MURALS and MARX," published in *The New York Amsterdam News,* author T. R. Poston details the content of Aaron Douglas's *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) murals for the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library on 135th street. "A group of Negro workers are shown kneeling around a tree from which dangles the body of a lynch victim," Poston wrote as he methodically discussed the visual content in each of the four panels of the mural before entering into a discussion on patronage.[53] "The artist touches on a subject which brought instant objections from his PWA [sic] superiors," Poston continued.[54] His analysis of the murals was supplemented with a quotation from the artist himself who, when speaking of the fourth mural panel, wrote dejectedly about the constraints of the PWAP (fig. 2). In response to the growing threat of fascism in 1934, and the artist's personal relationship with communism in Harlem following the Scottsboro incident, Douglas wanted to create a fifth panel for the *Aspects* series, which depicted "the way out for the Negro—to the one way outlined by Karl Marx and his disciples—the unity of black and white workers in the class struggle." Such an image was never created. Yet if it had been, Poston argued, "the whole mural would undoubtedly have been rejected by the PWA authorities."[55] "Under our present system…the artist must paint what his employer wants," Douglas lamented. "If he is to keep his own self-respect, however, he must try to maintain a certain honesty and present the picture as he sees it."[56] Caught between wanting to own his self-respect, and painting something acceptable to his sponsor, Douglas believed he compromised

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[51] Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African American Artists*, 129-130.
[52] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas,* 38.
[53] T. R. Poston, "MURALS and MARX." *The New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938),* Nov 24, 1934.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

his honesty by leaving *Aspects* unfinished, apologising to his audience for the sanitised end to the mural series.
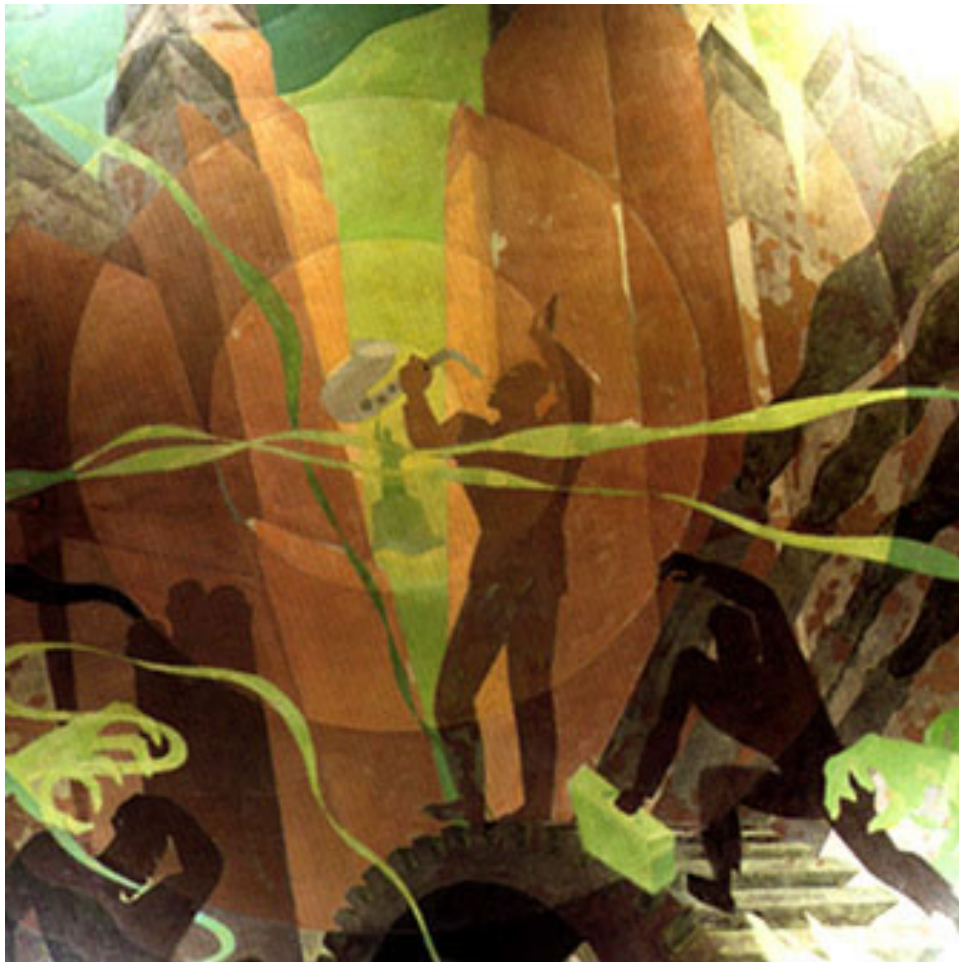
Fig. 2. Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of the Towers,* 1934. Oil on canvas, 94½x 88 in. Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

By 1936 however, Douglas discovered a way to circumvent the politics of white sponsorship of his artwork without compromising his own honesty when he created a mural for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition. As part of the "healing process of the nation" following the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved three million dollars in support of the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas.[57] Douglas would again have to navigate the constraints of white patronage—only this time his mural would not be on display at the New York Public Library in Harlem, but instead at a government-sponsored state fair in the south, a fair that sought to:

> restore popular faith in the vitality of the nation's economic and political system and, more specifically in the ability of the government, business, scientific, and intellectual

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[57] Ater, "Creating a "Usable Past," 102.

leaders to lead the country out of the depression to a new, racially exclusive, promised land of material abundance.[58]

Running from June until November of 1936, the Exposition comprised of a series of exhibitions and parades held across 50 buildings at Fair Park in Dallas, all of which celebrated the state's history, rich resources and growing social structure, whilst concurrently outlaying the promise of a bright future for the state beyond the Depression.[59] Costing around $25 million and attracting over six million attendees, including Roosevelt himself, the fair was "a tribute to the past, an exposition of the present, and a herald of tomorrow."[60]

But to make the Exposition a true "exposition of the present" that depicted a "promised land of material abundance" the fair needed to acknowledge African American history and culture—even if a majority of the fair attendees were white. The largest parade of the Exposition, Empire on Parade, supposedly included black history in their celebration: a singular float with the focus on African Americans depicting black figures picking cotton.[61] It appeared that Texas legislature failed to sponsor a black exhibit for the fair, resulting in African Americans from Dallas lobbying the federal government for funds to create a dedicated space for the celebration of black culture; a space that told of the African American contribution to the nation's identity.[62] After much lobbying, the Hall of Negro Life was built on Fair Park, marking an exhibition milestone: it was the first recognition of black culture at a world's fair.[63] The existence of the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition seemed progressive when it provided a platform at a southern state fair for African Americans to "rearticulate their racial and national identities and to reshape historical memory in the public space" during the height of Jim Crow.[64] Yet many critics of the 'racially inclusive' Exposition took issue with the physical location of the Hall of Negro Life. Paradoxical in nature, the Hall was separated and isolated from the main path of the Exposition, fenced in and somewhat obscured by a row of cedar trees and shrubs. While the existence of the Hall promoted the image of governmental interest in African American welfare, it simultaneously appeased and convinced white southerners of the government's dual commitment to upholding the Plessy vs. Ferguson

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[58] Ibid., 100.

[59] Handbook of Texas Online, "Texas Centennial," Texas State Historical Association, June 15, 2010, accessed April 1, 2016, https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/lkt01.

[60] Ater, "Creating a 'Usable Past,'" 100.

[61] Ibid., 101.

[62] Ibid., 95.

[63] Although the Texas Centennial Exposition was the first recognition of black culture at a world's fair, it was not the first fair to include African Americans. Since 1900, African Americans partook in fairs to assert their "Americanness" and display contributions to the growing development of America. Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 95.

doctrine of 'separate but equal.'[65] Yet in spite of the physical and symbolic location of the Hall on the periphery of the Centennial Exposition, it nonetheless provided a space for African Americans to "tell their complex story" to both black and white Americans—of the 400,000 people visiting the Hall of Negro Life, 275,000 were white.[66] The Hall of Negro life "position[ed] [African Americans] as citizens of the nation" at a fair where "white organizers paid scant attention to the legacy of slavery in Texas" or even black contributions to the nation as a whole.[67]

Aaron Douglas contributed to this retelling of an African American experience. Framing the entrance to the Hall of Negro Life were four empowering murals—only two of which have survived.[68] On the surface, *Into Bondage* presents a despairing, sorrowful narrative of enslavement on the untamed, tropical west African coast (fig. 3). Nine shackled individuals move from freedom in Africa to slavery in America. Seven figures walk solemnly towards two tilted ships faintly anchored on the straight horizon line of the wailing sea with their heads bowed in silence, whilst two dominant shackled figures occupy the centre and left-hand side of the panel—one standing atop a terracotta box, whilst the other raises her similarly coloured manacles towards the sky in the direction of a red star. The star cascades a deliberate beam of light into the face of the central figure. He, too, glances in its direction. The mural, ornamented on each side of the frame with wild foliage differing in tone but of the same earthy palette, places the viewer in the position of either a manacled figure waiting in a curved line of captured individuals proceeding towards the ship, or a resistant figure seeking refuge in the tropical undergrowth. As the string of shackled figures tread their final steps on the soil of freedom, the raised figure in a visually superior position holds an almost open palm to his right side. At face value, this mural tells a one-dimensional, easily accessible story: the story of the transatlantic slave trade—a story of Africans being transported, quite literally, into bondage.

But Douglas embraced communism as an answer to "the legitimate and significant problems of American society," and the encoded message in *Into Bondage* addressed the parallels

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[65] Ibid., 102.

[66] Jesse O. Thomas, *Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1938), 86.

[67] Ater, "Creating a Usable Past," 101.

[68] Collectively, the four mural cycle depicted certain stages of the development and progress of African Americans in the US. One mural depicted the African American role in the state of Texas, portraying Esta Vanico, a black explorer who explored the early lands of Texas. There are no images of this mural and the mural no longer exists. The other mural to survive, along with *Into Bondage* is *Aspiration*. Depicting exceptional black life in the US, the mural shows the contributions African Americans have made in science, literature and music. Douglas painted all four murals on site, but no information from Douglas exists on the series. Although he wrote extensively on his other mural cycles, he left no notes or descriptions on the Texas Centennial murals. Thomas, *Negro Participation,* 102; Ater, "Creating a Usable Past," 105.

between racism in America and fascism in Europe.[69] In the mid-1930s, economic depression deepened, Jim Crow violence was still on the rise, and unemployment plagued the country, disproportionately affecting African Americans. "We don't have a physical slavery, but an economic one," artist Jacob Lawrence lamented in 1936.[70] Through an in-depth reading of *Into Bondage,* we can see how Douglas navigated government sponsorship and his mural's position at a predominantly-white state fair to create an artwork that protested the intense racial climate and growing threat of fascism by creating an encoded language of resistance through three embedded references to liberation: the function of the primed central figure, the North Star, and the imprint of revolutionary figures from Douglas's earlier murals.

Douglas embedded his message of resistance and self-emancipation so deeply at the Texas Centennial Exposition that white audiences insisted the murals were not painted by an African American, leading to the following sign being erected: "These murals were painted by Aaron Douglas, a Negro artist of New York City."[71] The encoded reading of the image tells an almost opposite story to the surface-level freedom-to-slavery narrative assumed by many white viewers. As seven shackled figures march towards a faint and distant slave ship, the bordering foliage is carefully constructed to draw the viewer's focus to the manacled figures in the centre and left hand-side, leaving the shackled procession fading into the background as their shadowed bodies are enveloped by the green, unwavering sea. The procession line is not the focal point in this mural, nor are the ships that shackle freedom, waiting menacingly for their next prey. Instead, these elements of the artwork are peripheral background layers functioning to elevate the central figure that "does not look down, but rather raises his head high and pulls his chained wrists apart from his body."[72] His strong body language seems incongruous to his shackled brothers and sisters who drop their heads in despair. He raises his head; unable and unwilling to watch as their journey into bondage begins. His strong, broad stance is silhouetted against the bright sky as he begins to pull his manacles apart, hinting to the reader the early constructions of a rebellious plan. Standing illuminated against the bright green background, his outline offers a stark reminder of the racist silhouettes used to display black bodies and physiognomies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but Douglas's invocation of a shadowed outline standing primed and commanding counters such racist connotations.

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[69] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas,* 124.

[70] Gardullo, "'Just keeps rollin' along', 292.

[71] Thomas, *Negro Participation* 27.

[72] Ater, "Creating a Usable Past,", 106. Here Ater is not discussing an encoded language in her essay, but instead simply offering a reading of Douglas's central figure as she sees it.

The light obscures his physical features and instead, only the manacles binding his wrists are illuminated when he searches for meaning, hope and salvation in the dark tropical thicket. Painted with his lightened head held high, it counters the drooped, shadowed faces of the manacled parade that stomp past him in a ghostly manner as they move from defined figures into obscurity. The procession moves past the raised central body while the thud of footsteps against the thick tropical mud reverberates throughout the image in the form of pulsing off-centre concentric circles. Frequently used by Douglas to depict sound and slave song melodies—which also contained covert messages of emancipation—the circles vibrate with the weight of despair and fear as each drumming step takes the figures further from home and closer to the hell that awaits. He does not wait for the end of the line in order to move towards the ship. He refuses to take forced steps upon the thick, soft undergrowth of his homeland where each step would strip him further of his freedom, body and voice. Instead he stands primed atop a box, perhaps ready to deliver a radical oration akin to the revolutionary words from a Denmark Vesey, a Nathaniel Turner or a Gabriel Prosser.

Fig. 3. Aaron Douglas, *Into Bondage,* 1936. Oil on canvas, 60 x 60½ in.
The Concoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

The use of revolutionary imagery invoking the memory of slavery intensified during the era of economic bondage and neo-slavery in the 1930s due to the centennial celebrations of Nathaniel Turner's rebellion and the development of 'Negro historical weeks' in Harlem commemorating Turner, Toussaint Louverture, and Vesey.[73] Myths of the Old South were dismantled and replaced instead by versions of slavery that foregrounded militant resistance and freedom struggles. "If these people [the enslaved], who were so much worse off than the people today, could conquer their slavery, we can certainly do the same thing," Lawrence

[73] Gardullo, "'Just keeps rollin' along', 277.

suggested.[74] Although *Into Bondage* did not overtly fall under the remit of this radical canon of work, Douglas was already cognisant of the growing trend towards radical emancipatory aesthetics when, in 1934, he created a cover illustration for *Spark* that depicted a pre-cursor to the Black Power fist breaking chains and puncturing a cubist sky.[75] Douglas's prior intervention into this body of black revolutionary artwork underscores the artist's interest in subversive, radical iconography, adding ballast to the presence for encoded references of empowerment for a black audience in his painting of slavery at a predominantly white state fair.

Whilst the central figure in *Into Bondage* stands affirmatively with tension coursing through his muscles, he stares at the brightly coloured star in the sky. This further unlocks Douglas's encoded message of resistance in the mural, especially for black viewers, who have the correct pieces of information to understand such an alternate narrative. To the 275,000 white attendees at a Hall of Negro Life—the sight of a star could be viewed as an homage to the Lone Star—a symbol of pride in the state, given its place as Texas' state moniker. Upon viewing *Into Bondage* in 1936, Alonzo J. Aden, said: "The star in the design is the "Lone Star of Texas.""[76] Yet taking into account the content and context of the mural, and Douglas's desire to evade artistic lilywhitism, the star has an alternative meaning, especially for African American audiences. Douglas describes stars in his murals as a "radiating star of Emancipation"—a not so subtle hint to their position as the North Star.[77] Used by enslaved populations, the North Star guided them to freedom on the Underground Railroad by offering directions from Mobile, Alabama, to the Ohio River and through to freedom. In covert acts of resistance, enslaved individuals sang "Follow the Drinking Gourd" as a way to disseminate instructions to find the North Star and therefore escape to freedom:

> The riva ends a-tween two hills,
> Foller the drinkin' gou'd;
> 'Nuther riva on the other side
> Follers the drinkin' gou'd.[78]

By searching for the drinking gourd in the sky, a code name for the Big Dipper constellation, individuals used it as a reference point to find the North Star. By creating a glowing star with

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[74] Jacob Lawrence quotation in ibid., 292.
[75] Gardullo, "Just keeps rollin' along," 279.
[76] Thomas, *Negro Participation,* 26.
[77] Ater, "Creating a Usable Past," 104. Whilst Ater acknowledges Douglas's discussion of the star as a radiating star of emancipation, she refrains from discussing the possible inferences and meanings this has throughout the rest of the artwork.
[78] Joel Bresler, "What the Lyrics Mean," Follow the Drinking Gourd: A Cultural History*,* accessed April 11, 2016, http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org.

an informative beam of light fixed into the mind of the primed central figure, Douglas imbues the mural with inferences of resistance and escape, yet the presence of a star not only represents the North Star. The red star, which was a common trope in Douglas's depression-era murals, such as *Idylls of the Deep South* (1934); *Creation* (1935) and *Aspirations* (1936), is imbued with communist symbolism. In the years preceding World War II, a red star was widely used by anti-fascist resistance parties, the Workers' and Peasant's Red Army in the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party on their flag above the hammer and sickle. Depicting a red star in *Into Bondage* at a moment when red stars became a symbol of anti-fascism, Douglas subtly drew upon these connotations for audience members cognisant of these implications and gestures towards communism as an alternative political ideology for the liberation of African Americans. Through the powerful figure's gaze and the depiction of the North Star—a symbol of emancipation, and more specifically communism—the audience are given the tools to piece together an alternate and encoded meaning in the image. When coupled with his elevated and primed stance, the central figure is instead read as formulating his rebellious escape by using the star as his guide; a plan the female figure to the left of the mural is also aware of. She too raises her face and manacled wrists to the sky in preparation for an emancipatory plan that will lead to the reclamation of their shackled bodies.

The final key to unlocking Douglas's encoded narrative in the mural are his allusions to figures from his previous work. The two dominant figures of the mural, both with a locked gaze on the North Star, are adapted imprints from previous works that also depict resistance, emancipation and ownership. When artist Betye Saar discussed the imprints of painful memories of enslavement through her mixed-media installation, *Diaspora* (1992), she spoke the words, "that slave ship imprint is on all of us."[79] She conceptualised and reconfigured the uses of evocative slave imagery through its ability to traverse time and space by living as an omnipresent imprint "on all of us". Although not working directly with the haunting imagery of the slave ship, which does find its way into the background of *Into Bondage*, Douglas similarly flirts with the contours and boundaries of his artistic canon by reinvigorating the memory of two emancipatory figures from *Harriet Tubman* (1930-1), and *Aspects* (1934).

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79 Celeste-Marie Bernier, "'The Slave Ship Imprint": Representing the Body, Memory, and History in Contemporary African American and Black British Painting, Photography, and Installation Art," *Callaloo* 37, no. 4 (2014): 990.
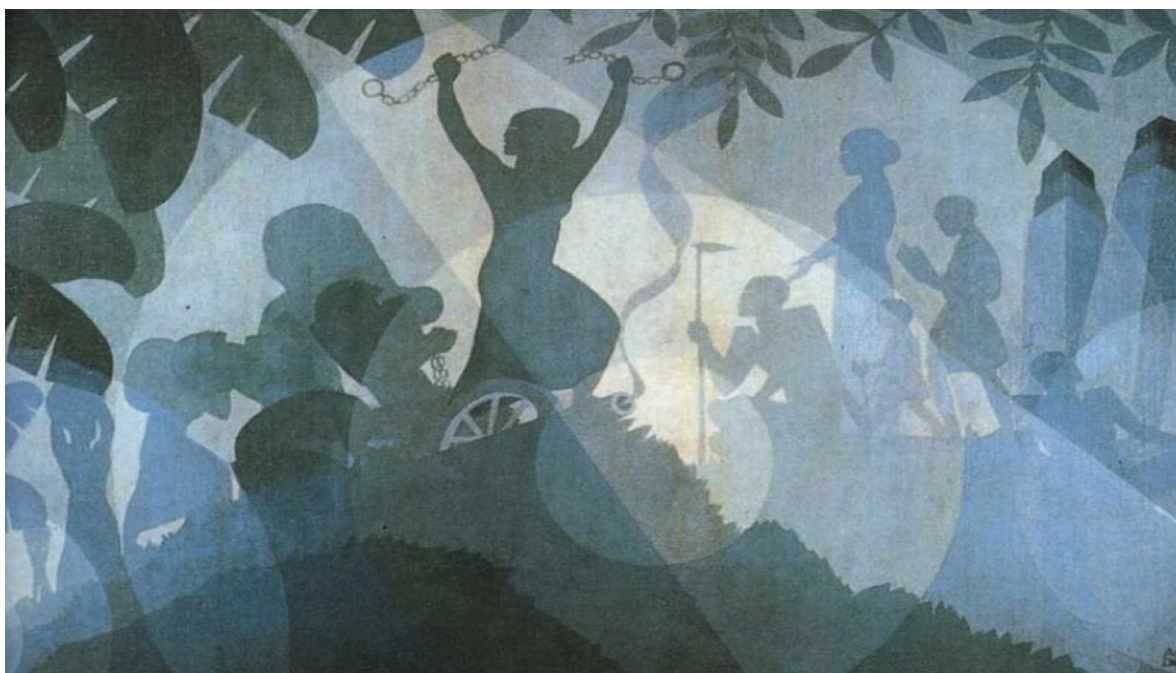
Fig. 4. Aaron Douglas, *Harriet Tubman (Spirit's Rising),* 1931. Oil on canvas, 54x 72 in. Bennett College for Women Collection, Greensboro, North Carolina.

Produced in 1930-31, *Harriet Tubman* (fig. 4) was a tribute to its namesake and depicts "a superior type of Negro womanhood."[80] Arms outstretched in an act of defiant resistance, Douglas painted the silhouetted figure of Tubman breaking the shackles that robbed her of freedom as she stands atop the barrel of a smoking cannon with a watchful audience scattered around her. This militant symbol of Tubman lives on in *Into Bondage* when Douglas imprints her revolutionary spirit onto the off-centre manacled female figure who raises her chained wrists, ready to break free and fulfil the emancipatory potential depicted by her spectral sister from *Harriet Tubman.* Similarly, an imprint from the panel, "From Slavery Through Reconstruction" (fig. 5), from Douglas's 1934 mural, *Aspects of Negro Life,* lives on in *Into Bondage* through the raised central figure. "From Slavery Through Reconstruction", the third panel of *Aspects,* depicts several groups coalescing in one mural. Hooded Klansmen, Union soldiers, musicians, and a top-hatted silhouetted figure all occupy the frame while an orator stands on a raised platform in the centre of the mural reading the Emancipation Proclamation. When reading *Into Bondage* at first glance, the box on which the central figure stands is redolent of an auction block, foreshadowing his potential life in enslavement. However, by imprinting the memory of the elevated figure from *Aspects,* who symbolises "the careers of outstanding Negro leaders during

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[80] Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 56.

this time," Douglas intensifies the subversive narrative under the surface of the mural by placing the central figure as leader of a revolution.[81] Unable to create overtly challenging iconography in 1934 in order to depict "a way out for the Negro," Douglas left *Aspects* unfinished, only to invoke the memory of the "outstanding Negro leader" reading the Emancipation Proclamation two years later in *Into Bondage*. He wanted the final panel of *Aspects* to show "the unity of black and white workers in the class struggle."[82] And by imprinting the memory of the Emancipation Proclamation, a document created by President Abraham Lincoln, onto an image laced with a narrative about black emancipation during an era of economic bondage, Douglas united the acts of emancipation in both murals to finish what he was unable to complete two years earlier.
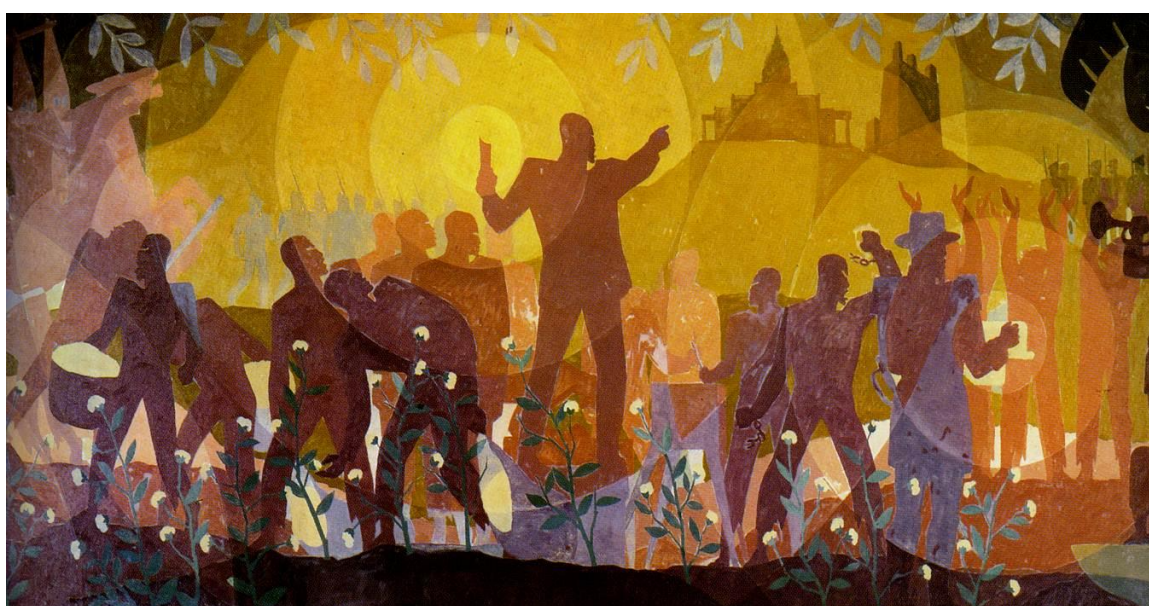
Fig. 5. Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 57¾ x 138¼ in. Art & Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

In his brave and bold modernist murals for the Texas Centennial Exposition, Douglas layered a heavily charged alternate message of revolution into his work to inspire his black audience of the 1930s. But this ingenious encoded language has been neglected by scholars who write on both New Deal art and the Harlem Renaissance. When Jonathan Harris unpacked the censorship of murals during the WPA, he offered the case study of Clifford Whyte's three-panel murals at Coit Tower in San Francisco in 1934, briefly alluding to the "censorship controversy" over Whyte's panel titled 'Communism.' Whyte painted the panel with a hammer and sickle,

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[81] Aaron Douglas, Letter, Aaron Douglas Papers, owned by Fisk University Special Collections, microfilmed by Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, reel 4520.
[82] Poston, "MURALS and MARX."

and the slogan 'workers of the world unite', to offer viewers of the artwork "another alternative which exists in the current scene" of American life—only these elements of the mural were never seen by the public.[83] Facing intense backlash, the mural made headline news of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 5, when it read "Is This Red Propaganda? Murals on Coit Shaft Hint Plot for Red Cause."[84] As a result, Whyte was forced to erase the communist iconography from his mural series before it was unveiled to the public on October 12, 1934. Although Harris acknowledges the sanitising work of the WPA, and brings attention to the "weed[ing] out of any 'Mexican partisans, abstractionists, academics and other extremists," as well as the sifting of artists into the categories of "good," "medium" and "bums", he neglects to analyse the ways in which artists navigated the dictates of New Deal patronage. This chapter, however, shows how Aaron Douglas navigated this fraught terrain by developing an encoded language of resistance in his murals, and in doing so, was able to paint a radical and empowering protest mural that did not draw the ire of his white patrons.

In Harlem Renaissance and 'New Negro' scholarship, critique focuses on the dictatorial influences and constraints of black art from white patrons during a movement concerned with empowering aesthetics. Contending that the cultural movement failed to create visually inspiring artwork about a black experience by instead pandering to white patrons, scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues:

> The New Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance sought to erase their image by conforming to the conventions of the Western tradition. By doing so, they erased or ignored much of the best of their cultural uniqueness, imitating instead literary forms and mannerisms that they often least resembled in a frustrating effort to demonstrate the full intellectual potential of the black mind… and as long as the decorative mediums of painting and sculpture remained inherently conservative in their…configurations of black identity, a career in the fine arts remained an extremely tenuous proposition for a black man or woman.[85]

Gates argues that black artists of the Harlem Renaissance conceded and conformed to the demands of white patrons in an effort to "demonstrate the full intellectual potential of the black mind."[86] However, he neglects the words of artists such as Douglas, which reveal a deeper and more complex dynamic between black artist and patron. "Douglas emphatically rejected the

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[83] Harris, *Federal Arts Project,* 14.

[84] Gary Kamiya, "How Coit Tower's murals became a target for anti-communist forces," San Francisco Chronicle, September 23, 2018, accessed July 13, 2019. https://www.sfchronicle.com/chronicle_vault/article/How-Coit-Tower-s-murals-became-a-target-for-11273933.php.

[85] Gates, "The Faces and Voices of Blackness," xlii.

[86] Ibid.

argument that the artists of the Renaissance were manipulated by their white patrons," by stating:

> There were certain white people at the time that came in contact with blacks and helped make it possible for them to reach a level from which they could create…[but] this was not something dictated to by white culture. It stemmed from Black culture. We were constantly working on this innate blackness at that time that made this whole thing important and unique.[87]

With a top down focus on white patron influences over black artwork, as opposed to assessing the bottom up dynamic of black artists creating a nuanced aesthetic within the confines of white patronage, Gates overlooks the possibility of a subversive encoded language of resistance.[88] Instead, he views these artworks through a one-dimensional lens by critiquing them as "inherently conservative in their…configurations of black identity," refraining from excavating the layers of this visual public art, and examining, not only the context of sponsorship, but the geographical location, and the artist's personal politics as well.[89] In doing so, Gates misses the possibility of covert radical languages hidden beneath the surface of modernist murals and paintings from the 1930s and 1940s. These covert languages worked to circumvent the dictates of white patronage and inspire black viewers to challenge their unequal circumstances during the era of Jim Crow, neo-slavery and economic bondage.

Douglas's murals were "part of a heroic endeavour by black historians and fair organisers to counter the effacement of a black presence from the main exposition," posits scholar Renée Ater.[90] Whilst this statement is certainly true, Douglas's murals go beyond contesting erasure at the fair. Treating *Into Bondage* as a visual palimpsest with layers of memory and information laced into the artwork enables us to see an encoded visual language in the mural which circumvented the politics of location and patronage. Douglas navigated the politics of the Texas Centennial Exposition and its predominantly-white audience to create a protest mural for black viewers by using an encoded language of resistance at a time when overt images of radical action remained unfunded—as witnessed in Douglas's sanitised 1934-WPA mural *Aspects*. Yet Douglas was not the only interior muralist to use his canvas to protest the political, racial and social contexts of the time. Following the zenith of modernism, muralists adapted the mural form to fit the needs of social realism as an artistic movement in the late 1930s and

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[87] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas,* 41.

[88] It was not uncommon for black artists to use white patronage to their advantage during the Harlem Renaissance, subverting the power-dynamic. Daniel Levering Lewis discusses this in his book *When Harlem Was in Vogue,* stating: "leaders like Charles Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, and Du Bois knew what they were doing, were cautious about it, and adroitly manipulated their white patrons and allies." Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue,* 98.

[89] Gates, "The Faces and Voices of Blackness," xlii.

[90] Ater, "Creating a Usable Past," 95.

1940s, and as a result, the mural form was embraced by artist Charles White. Unbound by white patrons, white audience members or displayed at a government-sponsored state fair in the South, White worked in a social realist style and used his canvas, not to encode resistance, but to depict overt acts and symbols of rebellion to protest the racial and political turmoil of the time. White created explicit languages of resistance by resurrecting radical black memory and allegory, and imprinting socialist imagery drawn from Mexican muralism. Showcasing messages of overt revolution in *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*, White openly challenged the threat of fascism in Europe, and the deepening condition of economic bondage for black Americans.

"The only way I had to fight was with my brushes": Explicit Languages of Resistance in Charles White's *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America* (1943)

Missing the crest of the Harlem Renaissance and coming of age as an artist in Chicago in the late 1930s, White created a body of work that extends across every artistic medium. From graphic prints to cartoons, and from watercolours to murals, White is heralded as one of the greatest African American artists in history (fig. 6). Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1918 to Mississippi-born domestic worker Ethelene Gary and railroad dining car waiter, Charly White, the young White's formative childhood years were spent discovering his artistic passions against the backdrop of the Great Depression. Before White was old enough to pursue his own employment, he was taken to work with his mother where he watched her scrub, cook, wash and sew for wealthy white families for nominal pay. This experience contributed to White's "pursuit of political radicalism via participation in Communist Party activities at an early age," and from such a young age, his strong political and social conscience found an outlet in his artwork.[91] Using black life as his muse, White created an extensive repertoire of murals and paintings that gave "dignity", "meaning" and "truth" to black subjects, whilst simultaneously imbuing such artwork—especially in his earlier works before and during World War II—with his own feelings on communism, US race relations, and the growing threat of fascism in Europe.[92]

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[91] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 49.
[92] Oral history interview with Charles W. White.

Fig. 6. Charles White painting *Chaos of the American Negro,* (1940).

In 1937, at the age of nineteen, White joined the FAP under the WPA, where he quickly became enamoured with mural painting and transferred from the Easel to Mural division, becoming one of the first African Americans in the unit. During his time at the WPA, White spent more time actually fighting discrimination than he did painting, commenting: "My first lesson on the [Illinois Arts Project]…dealt not so much with the paint as with the role of unions in fighting for the rights of working people."[93] When a significant number of black artists faced discrimination—Harlem Renaissance artist Archibald Motley being one of them—a union was formed that picketed the project for unfair racial practices. During his time at the mural unit, he also worked with prominent leftist muralists Edward Millman, Edgar Britton, and Mitchell Siporin—all of whom travelled to Mexico in 1938 to work with Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. These WPA muralists, along with Morris Topchevsky and

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[93] Erik S. Gellman, "Chicago's Native Son: Charles White and the Laboring of the Black Renaissance," in *Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and John McCluskey Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012): 152.

Si Gordon later introduced White to the readings of Engels, Lenin and Marx. During his years with the WPA, White's political conscience flourished.[94] Although he never joined the CPUSA, White felt impassioned to become politically active. "It was the most natural thing in the world," he told Peter Clothier in a 1979 interview, "or should I put it the other way, it was most unnatural not to be involved politically."[95] In 1938, he took part in an exhibition titled, *An Exhibition in Defense of Peace and Democracy,* which was held in Chicago to generate funds for victims of Fascism in Spain and China. Between June and December of 1940, WPA funds helped establish the South Side Community Art Center—a space that was incepted and developed by White, Margaret Burroughs and Bernard Goss.[96] White was also involved in the local chapter of the League against War and Fascism, as well as producing illustrations for leftist publications before serving as a contributing editor for *The New Masses* from 1946.[97] "I am interested in the social, even propaganda angle in painting," White told Willard Motley in a 1940 interview. "I do know that I want to paint murals of Negro history," he continued.[98] "I had no other tools to fight with…so the only way I had to fight was with my brushes," he told Betty Hoag in a later interview with the Smithsonian.[99] White was a political artist, creating art with a social commentary to elevate the masses, and between the 1930s and 1950s, he fought with his brushes by working within the style of social realism.

Social realism emerged in the 1930s almost as a counter to the "modernist 'decadence'" of the Harlem Renaissance.[100] It gave White the freedom to create explicit, radical artworks as opposed to modernism, which flirted with the boundaries of abstraction and Cubism. Social realism focused on the harsh realities of working-class life in the US—the laborers, the impoverished workers, and those toiling in the fields everyday invoking the memory of a slavery supposedly abolished. It was about social issues depicted in a real way and was a movement facilitated by the growth of the American Communist Party in the 1930s amidst the enthusiasm for leftist politics; but it also found a stronghold in Mexico and Russia.[101] Less concerned with experimentation and metaphorical representation, it gravitated towards proletarian and "underclass themes." Social realists of the 1930s and 1940s deemed the artist "an agent of

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[94] Andrea D. Barnwell, *Charles White* (Pomegranate Press: San Francisco, 2002)*,* 22.

[95] Charles White, interview with Peter Clothier, September 1979, Altadena, California quoted in Melanie Anne Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 27.

[96] Mullen, *Popular Fronts,* 11.

[97] Breanne Robertson, "Pan-Americanism, Patriotism, and Race Pride in Charles White's Hampton Mural," *American Art* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 56.

[98] LeFalle-Collins, *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America,* 39.

[99] Oral history interview with Charles W. White.

[100] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 3.

[101] Ibid., 2.

democratic consciousness raising and social change."[102] Adherents of the movement therefore shared a profound faith that cultural work would "leverage transformations in the social and political sphere on behalf of America's poor and working class."[103] Social realism was both a product of and response to the entrenchment of European fascism and growth of leftist, communist ideologies amongst both black and white Americans—and to artists like Charles White, it provided a perfect visual form through which to overtly protest the racial conditions of the US.

As the 1930s drew to a close, the CPUSA was shaken to the core. The year 1939 saw the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, described by Wilson Record, Harold Cruse, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser as a terminal moment for the black-Left alliance that resulted in the slow disintegration of the Harlem CP.[104] Yet regardless of European deals, African Americans—whether ideologically attuned to communism or not—maintained their political presence in the country when they rallied behind A. Philip Randolph to March on Washington in 1941 in order to pressure the U.S government into desegregating the armed forces and providing fair work opportunities for African Americans.[105] The growing economy, stimulated by federal defence contracts, was "soaking up the pool of white unemployed," leaving African Americans "excluded from all the well-paid 'skilled' jobs in the defense industries."[106] Randolph summoned 100,000 liberals, radicals and trade unionists to join him on the march—which would have been the first major national black political strike of the war—but later the same year, President Roosevelt ceded to Randolph's demands, issuing Executive Order 8802, which stated: "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries and in Government because of race, creed, color, or national origin."[107] The Executive Order also created the Fair Employment Practice Committee that, although not a law, supposedly promoted equal opportunity amongst the races. After Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, Randolph called off the march.[108]

In 1943, a politicised Charles White used his interior canvas to create a protest mural far removed from the buried alternate narratives displayed in *Into Bondage* just seven years earlier. Drawn to the impactful size of the mural as it allowed him to "try and deal with truth," White

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Mullen, *Popular Fronts,* 18; Naison, *Communists in Harlem,* xix.

[105] Randolph wanted the march to be an all-black strike. One of his motives for excluding white Americans was because he wanted to minimise CPUSA influence. Black communists could participate in the march as individuals. Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 156.

[106] Ibid., 155.

[107] Ibid., 157.

[108] Ibid.

used a 12 x 17 foot wall at Hampton Institute to create a protest artwork to explicitly contest World War II, black unemployment, capitalism, and Jim Crow. Unlike Douglas, White had the freedom to articulate explicit historic and contemporaneous rebellion not only through the style of social realism which granted him more freedom, but also from the mural's location and sponsorship. In 1942, White was awarded $2000 for the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship—a private grant program that supported black artists and writers between 1928 and 1948. Although this funding body was established by white philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, the nature of this patronage was significantly more formal—yielding a greater distance between benefactor and artist—than the relationship between Douglas and the Godmother whereby she exercised direct oversight.[109] In White's proposal to the foundation, White outlined his project in three parts. He would firstly tour the US South, sketching the lives of black farmers and workers; he would secondly travel to Mexico to refine the mural skills gained during his tenure at the WPA, undergoing formal instruction at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura y Escultura in Mexico City; and he would thirdly culminate the project by creating a large fresco mural depicting the contribution of African Americans in the US, to be painted at Hampton University in Virginia.[110] Whilst Douglas was confined by the constraints of government sponsorship for a mural at a state fair, White received funding from a more formal benefactor to create a mural for an all-black audience. Although the proposal was accepted, White's plans to study in Mexico were thwarted the night before his intended departure when his local draft board refused to allow him an exit permit, and instead, White was relocated to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. The board's refusal is believed to be related to White's alleged authorship of a 1936 pamphlet dealing with racial oppression: the pamphlet was used by the CPUSA to recruit young people to the Party.[111]

HBCUs were common sites for murals as they granted artists like White "relatively autonomous institutional support for the continued exploration of politically engaged themes and aesthetics in the mural medium."[112] Attuned to the empowering space of the Hampton Institute, White created his mural for both radical protest and the empowerment of black viewers. Like Douglas, he used socialist imprints and black memory to challenge racism and fascism, but unlike Douglas, he also used revolutionary historical allegory to recuperate marginalised heroes of black history obscured from his view by the distortions of a 'white' school curriculum. At the age of fourteen, African American history, literature and culture

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[109] Robertson, "Pan-Americanism", 57.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Le-Falle Collins, *Contribution,* 39.
[112] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 66.

unfolded before White's eyes when he read Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925). At that moment, the weight of an obfuscated black history enveloped White's mind, causing him to recalibrate his position in the world as a young black teenager. "The point of my awareness of blackness," he explained, "was the discovery of black history."[113] He found books that unveiled a host of hidden names like Nathaniel Turner, Crispus Attucks, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Demark Vesey and Sojourner Truth. For the first time, White "became aware that Negroes had a history in America."[114] His new-found knowledge clashed with the high school history curriculum when the assigned textbook, *Beard's History*, designated only one line to African American history—that Crispus Attucks was the first man to die in the American Revolutionary war.[115] White questioned his teachers why the names of Douglass, Turner, Tubman and Truth were omitted from the pages of his textbook, only to be told: "the histories from which we were taught…were written by competent people, and whatever [was] not mentioned, was simply not important enough to mention."[116] When White created *Contribution* in 1943, he used historical black memory to deal with "the theme I had long before tried to argue about in High School, the contribution of the Negro people to the development of democracy in the United States."[117]

Contribution (fig. 7) fills the 12 x 17-foot wall with multiple overlooked radical narratives. Displaying "the untold contributions of shackled slaves, exploited workers and anonymous soldiers alongside the lives of heroic freedom-fighters," White's mural reads as a history book replete with the memories of anti-slavery advocates Douglass, Turner, Tubman, Denmark Vesey, Peter Still, and Peter Salem, and contemporaneous heroes such as Leadbelly, Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson.[118] A piece of industrial machinery is anchored to the central position in the mural whilst twenty-eight African American figures are organised around the cold steely machine, their figures entwining and spilling into each other. Transcending chronological boundaries, White's mural brings multiple historical narratives from the 1830s to 1943 into view within a framework of unity to underscore the "definite tie-up between all that has happened to the Negro in the past and the whole thinking and acting of the Negro now."[119] In doing so, White debunks the misconceptions of isolated historical events, and instead situates black history and memory in a continuum whereby every underrepresented narrative feeds into

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[113] Celeste-Marie Bernier, *African American Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd, 2008), 130.
[114] Oral history interview with Charles W. White.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Bernier, *African American Visual Arts,* 131.
[117] Ibid., 131; Charles White microfilmed materials, roll #3189, unpaginated, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[118] Bernier, *African American Visual Arts,* 131.
[119] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 56.

and enhances the next—the story of Crispus Attucks informs the narrative of Nathaniel Turner, which gives weight to the life of George Washington Carver, and so forth.

These recuperated memories from black history are predominantly memories of rebellion and revolution. Unlike Douglas, White was able to use his canvas to amass a radical black army that ideologically and visually fought against the suffocating choke of fascism, Jim Crow and economic bondage in 1943. The first figure used to invoke a visual language of resistance in *Contribution* is Nathaniel Turner, situated in the top left-hand side of the mural. A radical figure of black history seldom covered in history lessons, Turner was enslaved on a Southampton County plantation in Virginia, where he became a preacher after feeling the word of God. A charismatic, brave and powerful man, he was "inspired by a series of heavenly visions to lead his people in a great battle to destroy slavery," and on August 21, 1831, he put his visions into action.[120] He led a rebellion in Southampton County that left around 80 individuals killed— three quarters of whom were white Southerners. Hundreds of black people were killed in reprisal and Turner was eventually hanged, an act that transformed him from a revolutionary leader into a heroic martyr of black history.[121] Throughout history, the memory of Turner has been frequently (re)negotiated. His identity as both a slave, and a man who threatened the core values and institutional structures of the antebellum South means he remains a complex figure for historians to reconstruct, and the lack of archival materials surrounding Turner means scholars have yet to do justice to his complex life.[122] Granting Turner a prime position on the mural, White not only immortalises him in the annals of black history; he also uses his likeness as a symbolic touchstone of resistance to imbue *Contribution* with overt memories of self-emancipation and liberation. Whilst Douglas coded his invocations of resistance through the North star and visual imprints from previous works to adhere to patronage requirements, White boldly used the memory of a revolutionary martyr to push the boundaries of interior muralism and empower black audience members living under the weight of Jim Crow.

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[120] Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.), xi.
[121] Ibid., 3.
[122] Ibid.

Fig. 7. Charles White, *Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America,* 1943. Egg tempura (fresco secco), 11 ft 9 in. x 17 ft 3 in. Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia.

Dressed in clean white and cream attire, the strong, physically imposing body of Turner wields his broad arms aloft to brandish a fiery torch. The billowing smoke from the glowing, golden flames curls above his head and envelops the wings of an armed guardian angel prepared to take up battle alongside Turner. The large blade of her downward facing sword is ready to sweep below and slash the chains looped around the necks of the three unknown figures, but she waits patiently for Turner's signal to undergo this act of resistance. As he looks down upon the three manacled bodies of the unknown individuals indirectly attached to the central piece of industrial machinery, the revolutionary martyr points to the guardian angel to release the shackles restricting the bodies of both the enslaved figures. Before she performs such an act however, she warns Turner of the impending danger about to befall him by pointing towards four bayonets angled directly at him. Invoking the memory of Turner being hunted during his rebellion, the bayonets unsurprisingly extend from one of the few white figures in the artwork; a colonial Tory occupying the bottom left-hand corner of the mural. Representing the paradoxes of American freedom expressed in the Declaration of Independence, he attempts to destroy a bill of the 1775 Provincial Congress that reads: "PROVINCIAL CONGRESS. IV. Resolved, THAT THIS CONGRESS … WILL NEITHER IMPORT FOR … OR

PURCHASE ANY SLAVE … ED FROM AFRICA OR ELSEWHERE … SIGN 1775."[123] The inclusion of this inscription is cleverly used to highlight how European American legislation attempting to ban the international slave trade not only "succeeded in intensifying the horrors of the internal trade, but also gave birth to its undoing by inspiring radical protestors," like Nathaniel Turner.[124]

Glowing a golden yellow colour, the parchment stands upright as if creating a wall between white and black figures, and damaged legislation and radical protest, and just beyond the parchment, the history lesson continues. The figure of Crispus Attucks—the first man to die in the Revolutionary War—falls in front of Peter Salem, a soldier in the Continental Army, as well as enslaved revolutionary, Denmark Vesey, who sits astride a horse. The image of Vesey in a powerful stance and gripping a gun appears beneath the steely, determined likeness of Frederick Douglass, who bisects the mural through a decisive point across the image and towards George Washington Carver—with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment neatly nestled under his arm. A litany of African American heroes surrounds Carver. Harriet Tubman stands behind him, guiding figures in the distance towards the Underground Railroad, whilst Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute, singer Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson and Leadbelly, all frame the renowned scientist and inventor.

Working in the style of social realism, White used muted colours to facilitate his message of protest—one that could be achieved through communism. Dark browns, blacks, blues and greys occupy the majority of the frame, with White cleverly abstaining from using red—a colour commonly associated with communism—until he reaches the far right-hand side of the artwork. Positioned at the front and centre of *Contribution* is a self-portrait of White, kneeling barefoot on the floor flanked by Robeson and Ferdinand Smith—both prominent Communist labour activists—to his right. As in Seymour Fogel's *The Wealth of the Nation* (1938)*,* resting upon White's knee is a blueprint—plans we know not what for—yet Robeson and Smith look and point towards its direction, suggesting it could be a plan to be enacted through the ideology of communism. Beyond the threshold of White's likeness, the mural is occupied by large traces of red—Harriet Tubman's shawl, Smith's collar, Leadbelly's shirt and guitar, and a red flag in the top right-hand corner. To balance the inward facing, radically posed Nathaniel Turner in the top left-hand side of the mural, White paints Peter Still in the top right-hand corner, a man who escaped slavery in an act of radical subversion. Still waves a flag with the powerfully revolutionary statement: "I will die before I submit to the yoke" as he raises his other hand in

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[123] Bernier, *African American Visual Arts,* 132.
[124] Ibid., 133.

a signal of onward marching.[125] The flag is painted in a deep red with the wording written in a golden yellow—an homage to the Soviet proletarian hammer and sickle flag. As White takes central focus in the mural, he holds the plans to overcome racial oppression. His blueprinted plan of resistance involves the application of communism—something the figure of Frederick Douglass acknowledges as he points towards the direction of the red wave of colour in the mural.

To continue the pedagogical narrative that shows how the weight of oppression can be met with communism, White accentuates his overt language of resistance by imprinting iconography from Mexican socialist murals from Diego Rivera.[126] In the centre of *Contribution* stands a "colossal being"—a looming piece of industrial machinery resurrected from Diego Rivera's *Pan American Unity* (fig. 8) mural painted at the City College of San Francisco, and published in the popular magazines of *TIME* and *Life*.[127] The mural is anchored in the centre by an imposing symbol of capitalism and northern industry, whilst a pantheon of socialist heroes ideologically counteract its presence.[128] Rivera assembles an overlapping array of artists, scientists, prolific individuals, and laborers around the giant machine whilst he confines the threats of fascism to a smaller panel of the mural towards the bottom right-hand side (fig. 9).

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[125] According to Breanne Robertson, in her article "Pan-Americanism, Patriotism, and Race Pride in Charles White's Hampton Mural" for the *American Art* journal, the statement "I will die before I submit to the yolk," was actually the declaration of Peter's father, Levin, to his young master on the eastern shore of Maryland. William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c.…* (1872; repr., Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), 18.

[126] Mexican muralism, commonly from Los Tres Grandes—Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco—became one of the largest influences on interior black muralists working during the Depression. Their artwork is pivotal to the development of black muralism in the US and has been covered extensively in Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins and Shifra M. Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1996). I have actively chosen to refrain from in-depth discussions of Mexican mural influences on interior black muralism because research facilities available to me up to this point yield nothing original to add to LeFalle-Collins and Goldman's already extensive study. An interrogation into the murals of Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros would not only increase the already long word-count of this chapter, but it would lead it down a narrative by-road that does not enhance or develop the chapter's central argument on the ways black muralists adapted their iconography to suit the interior context of the mural. Instead, I have used the relevant information on Rivera to elucidate how White imprinted socialist iconography from *Pan-American Unity* and *Detroit Industry, South Wall* mural. When undertaking my fellowship at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, I have proposed to mine their archives for information on Mexican muralism beyond LeFalle-Collins and Goldman's study that will inform new perspectives on the languages of resistance in black muralism.

[127] Robertson, "Pan-Americanism, Patriotism," 52-59.

[128] Whilst it remains unlikely White visited these two murals, he would have been made familiar of them through the popular publications of *Time* and *Life*. Robertson, "Pan-Americanism," 69.
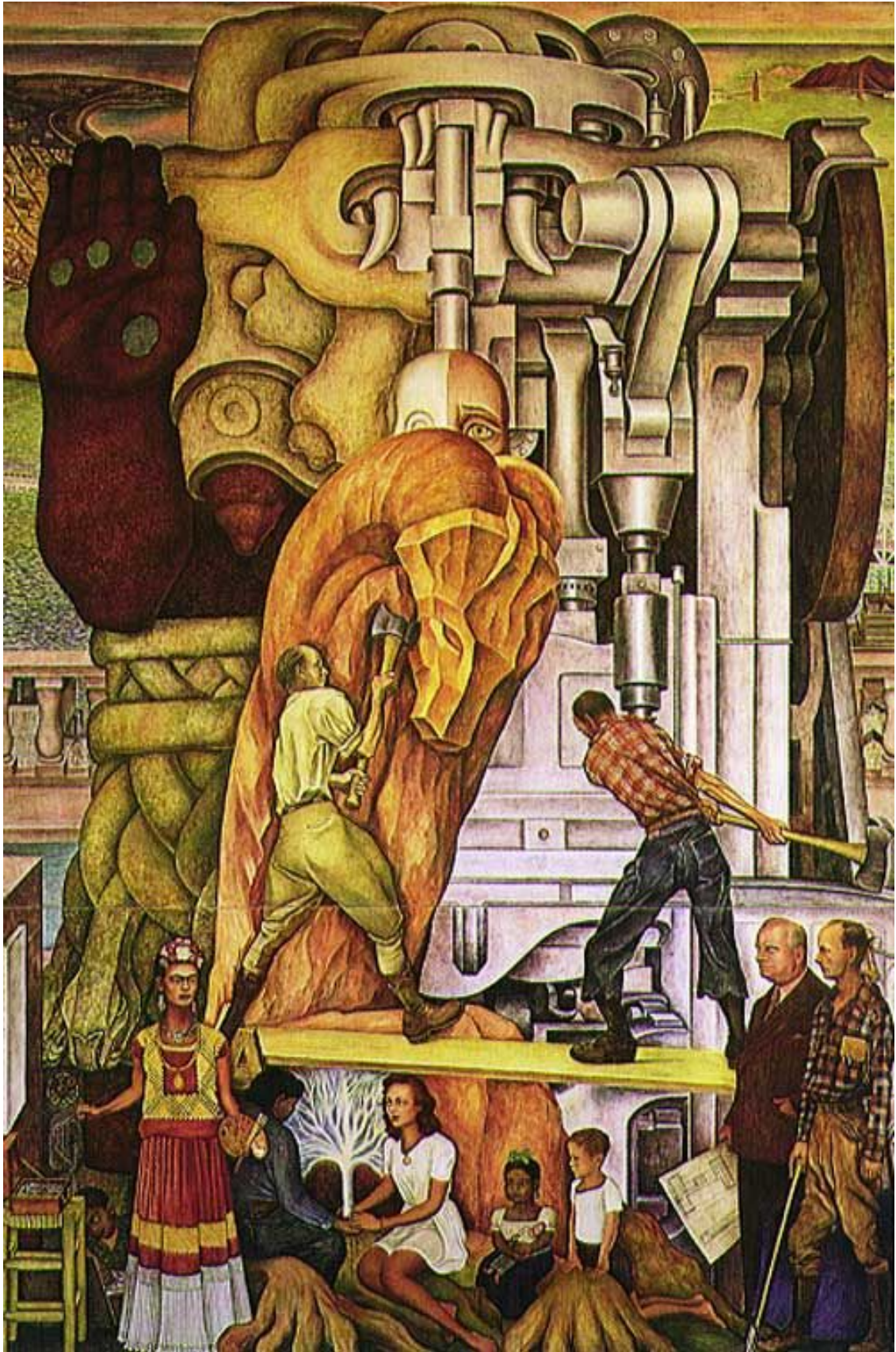
Fig. 8. Diego Rivera, *Pan American Unity* (detail), 1940. Fresco, 22 × 74 ft. City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.

Fig. 9. Diego Rivera, *Pan American Unity* (detail), 1940. Fresco, 22 × 74 ft. City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.

Rivera invokes Hitler's presence through both his literal likeness next to Benito Mussolini and Joseph Stalin, as well as through an homage to Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator* (1940), whereby Chaplin parodies the life of Hitler through the egomaniacal character of Adenoid Hynkel. The mural is replete with swastikas, American flags, Heinrich Himmler and scenes of war as Rivera impresses the growing threat of fascism and its effect throughout the world. But White's "colossal being" imprint in *Contribution* was also redolent of Rivera's 1932-33 *Detroit Industry, South Wall* mural. In an act of sheer serendipity, White unveiled his mural at Hampton University on June 25, 1943, three days after Detroit's race riots—riots that were ignited by the lack of jobs and housing for African Americans in the industrial city. Although unplanned, White's mural not only resurrected the memory of *Pan-American Unity*; it also stood in support of the African American protestors in Detroit by invoking the memory of rebellious heroes of black history who fought against other iterations of bondage throughout history. As a determined Marxist, Rivera portrayed peasants as modern heroes, and much like White's work

during the 1930's and 1940's, he consistently addressed issues of labour.[129] By relying so heavily on the template of an Rivera's murals that are deeply entrenched in a communist aesthetic, White imprinted *Contribution* with the weight and ideological memory of *Pan American Unity*, and *Detroit Industry, South Wall* to strengthen his radical language of leftist resistance and to bring into sharp focus the importance of using communism as an armour against oppression.[130]

White also used the imprint of Rivera's colossal being to further unite historic slavery and economic bondage. In similar fashion to Rivera's pantheon of socialist heroes, the litany of black heroes making up the contents of *Contribution* is didactic. White not only resurrected the historical memories of Turner, Vesey, Still, Douglass, Salem, Tubman and Attucks to illuminate an overlooked black history. He did so to "articulate social commentary of contemporary relevance" and underscore the oppressive similarities between historic slavery of the nineteenth century, and economic bondage in a 1940s capitalist society.[131] A pair of oversized hands of a struggling black man grip tightly to Rivera's imprinted symbol of industrialisation. These angular hands cling desperately to the piece of equipment, turning his knuckles white with desperation to ensure his job—represented here through the industrial machinery—remains firmly in his grasp and not in the hands of a white worker. He grits his teeth and winces at the difficulty of maintaining his job in a factory where African Americans are the last to be hired and the first to be fired. "They cut down low [on people] to keep from laying off, cut down to three days a week or no days a week," African American industrial worker Bill Young recalls of the Inland Steel Company in Indiana.[132]

The worries over job instability and a revival of slave-like conditions are etched into the face of the young worker clinging to his last chance of survival. Placed in an inferior position, the unidentifiable employee looks up towards the sky, and most likely his boss and allegorical 'slave owner,' who stands over him in a hierarchically superior position in both employment and social standing. His upturned face angled towards the sky, accentuated by the white highlighting on his cheeks and nose, intensifies the connections between historic and neo-slavery by evoking connotations of Wedgwood's kneeling enslaved figure who looks upwards to a paternalistic white saviour for freedom. Both images contain a shackled figure in a visually

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[129] Valerie Fletcher, *Crosscurrents of Modernism: Four Latin American Pioneers* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 58; LeFalle-Collins and Goldman, *In the Spirit of Resistance*, 33.

[130] Robertson, "Pan-Americanism," 59.

[131] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 64. There is no information in scholarship on the effect of the mural on students at Hampton University. I believe there to be information on this at the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Special Collections and Archives at Fisk University, however I was unable to visit during my PhD and the library would not scan the archives.

[132] Ruth Needleman, *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel: The Struggle for Democratic Unionism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

inferior position underneath the gaze of an implied white figure. Yet White advances the shackled figure in *Contribution* to evade the connotations of inferiority and subjugation attached to Wedgwood's supplicant slave. Whilst Wedgwood's slave is presented in a passive stance looking towards a white liberator, an oppressor instead looks down upon White's manacled factory labourer—he does not kneel in subservience, nor does he ask for help. Instead, for inspiration and determination, the worker looks towards the sky and beyond his white oppressor, to the resistive historical memory of his forefathers and mothers.

White's engagement with the pantheon of radical black heroes and the presence of the "colossal being" are fundamental to *Contribution's* overt language of resistance during an era of economic bondage. Without the imprint of Rivera's *Pan-American Unity*, the mural becomes a simpler commemoration of radical black history, yet the industrial machine sits in perfect harmony with black history to deepen the connections between historic slavery, contemporary neo-slavery and the fight against economic bondage. White lends further ballast to the allegorical parallels between historic slavery and economic bondage by drawing on the image of Frederick Douglass and the symbolism of chains. Douglass, featured below the industrial worker, acts as a guiding source of inspiration. As one of the largest figures in the mural, Douglass immediately captures the attention of viewers through his stoic yet concentrated gaze and crown of grey hair. He stands proudly with outstretched arms, almost Christ-like. A giant of black history, Douglass is positioned with open arms to invite his brothers and sisters into his revolutionary world and follow in his footsteps to overturn economic bondage. Although White reclaims Douglass's memory by inserting him into a black public space, he also uses the memory of the famed abolitionist to offer a solution to discriminatory employment practices by visually depicting an act of dissidence that goes beyond the possibility of broken chains in *Into Bondage*. His straightened right hand stretches across the industrial imprint and reaches for the hanging shackle around the wrist of the unknown figure. With Douglass as a focal point in the mural, White sandwiches him between two sets of chains to ensure the viewer's eyes are directly drawn to them. The sharp, unswerving shape of Douglass' arm in conjunction with his determined stare suggests he is attempting to relinquish the shackles from the grasp of disparate employment practices and industrial capitalism in the 1940s in similar fashion to the way he was able to reclaim ownership of his body by escaping slavery in 1838.

The final overt image of resistance in White's protest mural occurs through his allegorical layering of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. The mural, painted at the height of World War II, rendered it almost impossible for viewers to look upon the soldiers without evoking the participation of African American soldiers in the contemporary global military

campaign for democracy against the forces of fascism.[133] In fighting Nazi Germany, Allied troops opposed an openly racist, fascist enemy, and yet black Americans fighting in segregated units for justice on the world stage were not afforded the same equality when they returned home.[134] Lacing *Contribution* with references to World War II, White visualised one of his fears to an engaged audience: "that Hitler and fascism threatened us with renewed slavery and extermination of any opportunity for continued cultural advancement and social progress."[135] Subtle homages to the "Double 'V'" campaign through the invocation of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, combined with a communist aesthetic through Rivera's imprint, Peter Still's red flag in the top right corner, and the dark red palette informing the mural's colour scheme, all gesture towards a solution to the growing threat of fascism, domestic economic bondage and unbridled capitalism. Joining the activism of people like Paul Robeson, Richard Wright and Margaret Burroughs, who sought to extend the Popular Front-era demand for "anti-fascist self-scrutiny on the American home front into the World War II era," White, like many 1930s and 1940s artists, "clearly champion[ed] *militant* political activism" as a means of bringing about radical democratic social change within the United States.[136]

In 1943, White created an artwork that highlighted the full capacity of the mural's protest abilities. Whilst Douglas's modernist mural showed how interior black muralism had the capability to evade artistic lilywhitism and still operate as a potent symbol of protest, the social realist mural, *Contribution,* showed the full protest potential of interior black muralism by overtly depicting socialist, radical, empowering and subversive iconography at a time when artwork—like Whyte's Coit Tower murals—were getting censored. Looking at White's mural in dialogue with Douglas's *Into Bondage* underscores both the characteristics and flexibility of artistic style, as well as the impacts of patronage, location and audience on the mural's visual language. It also highlights the intrinsic relationship between politics and public art. "The Negro fight for freedom, is the motivating impulse underlying all my works," suggested White, and by deploying explicit references to economic bondage, neo-slavery, growing spectres of fascism, and racial brutality, he created a mural that was lauded by Hampton Institute as "an important documentary addition to the much-neglected role of the Negro in the common man's struggle for full democracy."[137] Creating a historical mural that showed how slavery was not an isolated incident, but rather embedded in the logic of capitalism, White created an open letter to

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[133] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 67.
[134] Robertson, "Pan-Americanism," 66.
[135] Ibid., n. 48, 72.
[136] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 67.
[137] Robertson, "Pan-Americanism," 53; Bernier, *African American Visual Arts,* 127.

America. "Paint is the only weapon I have with which to fight what I resent," he declared, and by understanding the full potential of his 12 x 17 foot, public-facing wall, he was able to impress to his viewers through an unparalleled artistic medium, the importance of standing with him in the fight against capitalism, the spread of fascism, and the oppressive structure of American society.[138]

The 1930s to the 1950s saw the rise of radical black muralism. Artists figured out the possibilities of the mural form at a time of different artistic movements, constraint and censorship. Inspired by the mural's scale and public-facing qualities, black artists of the New Deal era configured the mural as an adaptable fertile ground upon which to layer their protest agenda in both radical and encoded languages, for one of the most important purposes of the mural was to "speak and teach about the struggles that…fellow black Americans faced." [139] Throughout this chapter we have seen how muralists created ground-breaking artwork in response to an oppressive racial and political climate. This chapter has illuminated not only the widely neglected artistic category of radical black interior muralism, but also the intrinsic relationship between mural art and the social, political and racial climate, which persists throughout the remaining decades explored in this thesis. Dormant through the late 1950s and early 1960s, black muralism re-emerged at the height of the Black Power Movement as a potent tool of black protest during the fight for radical black liberation—only this time, it appeared in the streets. The following chapter charts black muralism's evolution from an interior patron-sponsored tool of black protest in the post-Depression era, into a democratising force of black consciousness in the streets of segregated black America. Although evolved in form, content and location, street murals of the Black Power Movement continued the symbiotic relationship between politics and mural art, extending the empowering and subversive artistic legacy created by Douglas and White into the 1960s.

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[138] Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism,* 42.
[139] Ibid., 43.

Chapter Two
"They call it 'The Wall' but it's more than that": Muralism and Black Consciousness in the Age of Black Power

> So give me a Wall of Respect. Look into my eyes and see my life-style. My/our culture. My culture—unceasing brutality from foreign troops in blue; my culture—pain and frustration and degradation. And with your brush raise my consciousness to a higher level. Give me an outdoor gallery that will bring me outdoors where the struggle outta be—soar me to new realization—to the wall of respect.
>
> Anonymous in *The Greater Milwaukee Star*, 1970.[1]

> The responsibility of artists was to do work which was meaningful to the community in which the work was sited. There was not, prior to 1967, anything at all that would be considered community engagement public art.
>
> Jon Pounds, *Executive Director of Chicago Public Art Group*.[2]

"Everyone's chest started to swell" as they gazed upon "[this] thing of beauty," read an article in *The Greater Milwaukee Star* in 1969.[3] When a class of black students from Milwaukee's Parkman Jr. High School visited Chicago on February 17, 1969, little did they anticipate the cultural awakening about to befall them. After touring a black-owned museum where Miss Megwa of Biafra told stories of overshadowed black history in such inspiring and silencing detail that "you could have heard dust drop", the children pilgrimaged to the streets of 43rd and Langley in Chicago's South Side for their next slice of black culture.[4] Looking upon a rundown electrical store, the black students were taken aback. As they rested their eyes upon the wall in front of them, a pantheon of black figures stared back at the wonderment dancing in the expressions on the young children's faces. In the streets of Chicago, the class witnessed something unprecedented—they finally saw themselves. Their history, their culture and their heroes were woven into the streets of black America for the first time when figures like Brother Malcolm, Amiri Baraka, Nathaniel Turner, Ossie Davis, W.E.B. Du Bois, Gwendolyn Brooks, Stokely Carmichael, Marcus Garvey and Nina Simone textured the urban environment around them, under the title the *Wall of Respect*.

In 1967, when Bill Walker and the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) painted the *Wall of Respect* in Chicago's South Side, it marked a watershed moment in black muralism. It was the first black mural in the streets of America and catalysed a mural movement of over 1,500 murals nationwide. The interior, patron-dictated murals of the Harlem

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[1] *The Greater Milwaukee Star*, July 11, 1970, 7.
[2] Jon Pounds quotation in Tony Smith, "Black Is Beautiful… (Reflections on the Wall of Respect)," YouTube Video, 10:52, May 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvxSRfpRauc&t=1s.
[3] *The Greater Milwaukee Star,* February 22, 1969, 15.
[4] Ibid.

Renaissance and Works Progress Administration (WPA) troughed as the 1940s drew to a close. The large and popular interior black murals by artists such as Aaron Douglas, Charles Alston, Hale Woodruff and Charles White decreased to a faint whisper during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, with muralists Woodruff and John Biggers creating only a handful of interior murals. The political, social and racial backdrop of the 1950s and 1960s changed the landscape of black muralism. America witnessed one of the most turbulent decades in its history, and this tumult brought with it not only an evolution in ideological thought, but also in aesthetic, artistic and cultural forms. Birthed from "the cauldron of those revolutionary times" was a new iteration of black muralism that distilled the pulsing beat of Black Nationalism, Black Power and black pride of the 1960s into a conceptually ground-breaking art form.[5] Evolving from the powerfully evocative and subversive murals of artists such as Douglas and White, black mural art of the 1960s had fewer constraints. It was no longer bound by patronage or confined to the borders of a frame hanging inside a gallery, perhaps behind a pay wall. Instead it was a guerrilla art form in the streets of black communities, interactive yet vulnerable to the elements and open to critique and vandalism from local residents.

The *Wall of Respect* signalled the arrival of empowering black street murals.[6] It boldly reclaimed walls in the *de facto* segregated city of Chicago to become "a pro-Black visual statement that was monumental in size."[7] The mural was a step beyond the interior murals of the Harlem Renaissance and New Deal. Directly located in the exterior environment of an impoverished black neighbourhood, the *Wall of Respect* became a black birthmark upon the community by transforming the "invisible walls…erected by the white society" into a site of black pride and empowerment for the community.[8] The spatial control from white architects over Chicago's Black Belt gave rise to an evolved iteration of black muralism that spatialised blackness by imprinting the memories and likenesses of historic and contemporaneous black heroes onto the walls of the black space. In a "quarantine[d] black neighborhood" on the southern periphery of Chicago's pulsing city centre, the *Wall of Respect* emerged to turn a space of racial segregation

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[5] Jeff Donaldson, "Upside the Wall: An Artist's Retrospective Look at the Original "Wall of Respect", in *The People's Art: Black Murals, 1967-1976*. Exhibition catalogue, (Philadelphia: African American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1986).

[6] Paralleling the rise of black street muralism were Chicano and Latino murals. Whilst black muralism emerged in the streets of Chicago in 1967, muralists like Alfredo Matamoros were painting restaurant scene murals in the streets of Los Angeles. For more information see Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (New York: The Art Alliance Press, 1984) and Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sanchez, *Signs From the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

[7] Rebecca Zorach, *Art for People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 5.

[8] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1965), 11.

into a site of racial congregation; and a space of geographical confinement into a space of black pride.[9] As the mural was birthed on the streets of 43rd and Langley to redefine black agency, imagination and empowerment in a confined geographical location, it did so amidst the rise of a new black consciousness.

When Black Power became a potent force in the North it brought with it a new iteration of 'black consciousness.' As an abstract concept, scholars have found 'black consciousness' challenging to describe as it constantly shifts between decades, protest movements and ideologies. Primary texts from the Black Power Movement, like Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal's *Black Fire* (1968), Floyd Barbour's *The Black Seventies* (1970), and Addison Gayle's *Towards a Black Aesthetic* (1971) provide opaque definitions of a broader black consciousness in the 1960s, without fully offering tangible examples of the term. As a result, secondary scholarship, such as Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977); Manning Marable's *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African American Politics* (1996) and *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (2006); and Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (1998) have all attempted to pin down what black consciousness looked like at heightened moments of racial protest. To do so, Levine and Ward methodologically employ an analytical study of music, as will be discussed later, to comprehend how black consciousness manifested itself amongst the black population throughout the black freedom struggle. Concretising Black Power ideologies, this chapter uses the lens of black mural art to better understand the decade's new black consciousness. Pinpointing the moment when black muralism emerged in the streets in 1967, this chapter argues how black muralism of the 1960s was a physical manifestation of black consciousness.[10] Black consciousness of the decade was

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[9] Arnold Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

[10] This chapter occasionally uses the terms 'collective' and 'communal' black consciousness. This does not infer that black communities are monolithic and united under one ideological thought. When artists worked with communities to create art (whether this was murals, poetry, music or plays) they naturally encountered "rifts with the 'community' that bespoke many different interests." Black communities, like the one around 43rd and Langley where the *Wall of Respect* was painted were not homogenous. They were comprised of a collective of voices, perspectives and professions from businesspeople, social service workers, artists, gang members, prostitutes and drug dealers. When this chapter uses the term "collective" or "communal black consciousness," it discusses the unification of community members around 43rd and Langley who were commonly united through their pride of the *Wall of Respect* in their neighbourhood. Whilst Rebecca Zorach, Abdul Alkalimat and Romi Crawford have mined archival materials to give the most comprehensive study of the *Wall of Respect* in their book *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2017), no materials exist to suggest people did not want, or even like, the wall being in their community. The only anti-narrative to emerge tells of a woman who did not appreciate the likeness of Nina Simone on the wall, complaining that she didn't want to have to look at her face every day. Whilst it would perhaps over-romanticise the narrative to assume every community member enjoyed the presence of the mural, there is currently no other evidence to suggest the contrary, and many of those who lived in the community "have died without leaving a trace of what they thought about it." Zorach speaks more broadly of Chicago Black Arts Movement activities when she says "[p]erhaps it

about black-controlled space; and learning about black history and culture. As such, the *Wall of Respect* provides a case study that shows how Bill Walker and OBAC created a mural that became a tangible expression of the 1960's new black consciousness and elevated the consciousness of its viewers.

Whilst Levine and Ward focus on the emergence of black consciousness amongst 'the masses', this chapter specifically assesses how black consciousness manifested in black grassroots communities throughout the sixties in the form of street art. Focusing on the relationship between art, space and politics, this is a chapter of three parts. The first section provides an understanding of how black consciousness is abstractedly described in the primary literature of the Black Power Movement, and how secondary scholarship has tried to assess its reach amongst the black population. The second section underscores the ways in which the *Wall of Respect* was a physical embodiment of black consciousness, and the third section highlights how the mural elevated the consciousness of the black community around 43rd and Langley. This chapter and the following two chapters are all set against the back drop of the Black Power Movement. Laying the contextual groundwork, this chapter pinpoints how murals became a physical embodiment of black consciousness whilst the Chapters 3 and 4 show how murals as touchstones of black consciousness within the black community, transformed walls into sites of interaction for local residents where alternative forms of literacy, ritual healing, and ritual performance took place.

"You can feel it in the air": Black Power and the rise of a 'New Black Consciousness'

"This twentieth century [Civil Rights] Movement had always been beginning, was always coming into being," Vincent Harding spoke of the 1960s in his essay for the exhibition catalogue, *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963-1973* (1985).[11] "It was there, in the hard breathing of the runaways, in the songs of the slave rebels, in the prayers of the

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goes without saying, or perhaps it needs to be said, that they were not always successful in their efforts to integrate their artistic work with the concerns of the community." For a broader analysis of how artists (musicians, artists, poets, playwrights) "communicated with and collaborated with non-artists in their communities," and the potential obstacles they faced, see Rebecca Zorach's *Art for the People's Sake*, who analyses art forms that emphasise the agency of community members. Zorach, *Art for the People's Sake,* 7-9.

[11] The exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem was concerned with marking "the period that Black artists began to respond in measurable numbers" to the social climate. These artists "organized, exhibited, protested and produced a body of images forged in the molten heat of those turbulent days, a body of images that up to now has been virtually ignored in the history of contemporary American art," curator Mary Schmidt-Campbell wrote in the catalogue's foreword. The exhibition therefore stood as "a celebration of a time of passion and creativity when men and women composed and recited poems on picket lines and turned jail cells into galleries and libraries." The exhibition displayed the works of individuals such as Kay Brown, David Hammons, Charles White, Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold, Hale Woodruff, Benny Andrews, Jacob Lawrence, Ademola Olugebefola and Barbara Jones-Hogu for example. Vincent Harding, "A Long Time Coming: Reflections on the Black Freedom Movement, 1955-1972" *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963 – 1973,* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1985), 17.

desperate mothers, in the blood of all the Black Union soldiers who marched and sang and died on the terrible battlefields of "the freedom war."[12] Feelings of black consciousness—although not known by that name—have existed in the United States since the first Africans were brought to American soil under the bondage of slavery. It is an abstract, ideological, somewhat radical notion concerned with the liberation of the black mind, body and spirit, and can be retrospectively applied to the rhetoric and actions of black activists, abolitionists and formerly enslaved peoples of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although heavy, immovable shackles bound the bodies of the enslaved, their minds remained free. David Walker's words in his 1829 appeal, "Oh! my colored brethren, all over the world, when shall we arise from this death-like apathy? – and be men!!" sat alongside the empowering rhetoric of Moses Roper in 1838, during a lecture tour in Leicester, UK, when he made the bold statement:

> Many will say "this is the slaves' side of the question. The
> slave-holders would tell a different story." You have heard
> the slave-holders' story 250 years ago. Now, I think it is
> time for the slaves to speak.[13]

Joining the canon of radical rhetoric of resistance and subversion are the words from Henry Highland Garnet's 1843 speech at the National Negro Convention when he preached to 70 delegates:

> Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die free men than live to be slaves. Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS![14]

From the minds of imprisoned bodies across the nation, a black consciousness emerged—one that was concerned with empowerment, emancipation and resistance. The subversive script of Walker sewn into the hemlines of clothing and sent throughout the South, the revolution of Nathaniel Turner in 1831, the acts of heroism by Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad; the empowering words of Sojourner Truth, Gabriel Prosser, Martin Delaney and Frederick Douglass, and the countless unsung heroes who risked their lives for the freedom and liberation so wrongly stripped from them upon the blood-stained soil of America, all lay the foundational work for iterations of a black consciousness yet to come.

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[12] Harding, "A Long Time Coming," 17.

[13] *The Leicestershire Mercury and General Advertiser for the Midland Counties.* 19 May 1838, 2.

[14] Peter P. Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2002), 65.

As an incubus for more radical, resistive thought, black consciousness has been articulated through the ideological and critical thinking of individuals such as Martin Delaney, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, C. L. R. James, Robert F. Williams, and Marcus Garvey, and yet is sparingly and elusively covered in secondary scholarship, perhaps due to its intangibility and constant evolutions. In *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African American Politics* (1996), Manning Marable engages in a discussion of black consciousness, and yet refrains from rigorous assessment of the complex term. He instead uses black consciousness as a contextual launch pad for further discussions of racial politics, offering a broad and abstract analysis of what the term means for black America. In a chapter titled "Black Consciousness and History," Marable offers an overarching description of the circumstances that give rise to black consciousness:

> The central theme of black American history has been the constant struggle to overcome the barriers of race and the reality of unequal racial identities between black and white. This racial bifurcation has created parallel realities or racial universes, in which blacks and whites may interact closely with one another but perceive social reality in dramatically different ways. These collective experiences of discrimination, and this memory of resistance and oppression, have given rise to several overlapping group strategies or critical perspectives within the African American community, which have as their objective the ultimate empowerment of black people. In this sense, the contours of struggle for black people have given rise to a very specific consciousness: a sense of our community, its needs and aspirations for itself.[15]

Here, Marable discusses the full spectrum of black history and its relationship to the growth of black consciousness, yet he refrains from unpacking specific timeframes or collective shifts in consciousness throughout different periods of history. Similarly, in *Living Black History*, he alludes to the idea that black consciousness is pervasive and "arose around the recognition that 'race' was the fundamental contradiction within the politics of the American state… [forming] in response to the omnipresent reality of racist violence that generations of African Americans experienced in their daily lives."[16] Whilst Marable's work is useful for gauging a broader understanding of the racial and political circumstances that birthed black consciousness, this chapter, and scholarship from Lawrence Levine and Brian Ward, apply valuable frameworks to yield a more specific assessment of black consciousness—in relation to both specific time periods, and different cultural forms.

Using music, Levine and Ward show what black consciousness looked like for African Americans during enslavement through to the 1940s, and the 1950s to 1970s, respectively. In *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977),

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[15] Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African American Politics* (New York: Verso, 1996), 213.
[16] Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York: Civitas, 2006), 15.

Levine explains how "an examination of the shape and content of slave songs reveals much about slave culture and consciousness."[17] Black consciousness was found in the songs of enslavement that were used to "laugh at each other and the whites around them and to communicate their momentary desires…as well as…the forces that affected their lives profoundly", and it was found in the ways that enslaved African Americans subversively used the subtleties of their songs "to comment on the whites around them with a freedom denied them in other forms of oppression."[18] Pushing his concrete examples into the twentieth century, Levine evidences how black consciousness evolves and progresses throughout time, by citing the example of black prisoners from the 1940s and 1950s. When writer, archivist and ethnomusicologist, Alan Lomax visited the Mississippi State Penitentiary, Levine writes, Lomax discovered how most of the young black prisoners regarded the practice of work-song singing as "oldfogeyism." "Big Bill Broonzy often found blacks in his audience disturbed by his music," Levine writes of Lomax's findings.[19] "This ain't slavery no more," an audience told Broonzy, "why don't you learn to play something else?...the way you play and sing about mules, cotton, corn, levee camps and gang songs. Them days, Big Bill, is gone for ever [sic]."[20] Analysing the content of the exchange between Broonzy and his black inmates, Levine notes: "just as the shift in religious music was related to changes in black thoughts and lifestyle, so too were the transitions in secular music reflective of alterations in black consciousness and culture."[21]

Whilst Levine refrains from interrogating the concept of 'black consciousness', he instead supplements his brief theorising with concrete examples to show what black consciousness looked like through the lens of music. Brian Ward borrows from this methodological framework in *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (1998) to research black music between the 1950s and 1970s. Seeking to "illuminate changes in mass black consciousness during the peak years of the civil rights and black power activities," Ward uses shifts "in black musical style and mass consumer preferences" to analyse "the changing sense of self, community and destiny" of African Americans during this period.[22] Describing his interrogation into the changing ideological climate of the 1960s as an assessment of "mass black consciousness", Ward, like Levine, focuses on the broader remit of black consciousness as a conceptually ambiguous term. Like Levine,

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[17] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.
[18] Ibid., 11-14.
[19] Ibid., 217.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, black consciousness and race relations* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 3.

Ward also refrains from engaging closely with primary writings from black intellectual figures of the era who attempt to make sense of black consciousness as a term. Instead, he focuses on how music can offer a lens through which to discover changes in black consciousness across his time period. Levine and Ward abstain from engaging deeply with the writings from black intellectuals from their respective decades. Yet the body of literature and speeches produced during the 1960s on the concept of black consciousness, although abstract in tone, offer an invaluable starting point for an analysis of what black consciousness meant during the height of Black Power. By using a similar approach to Levine and Ward—in that they use a cultural form to discuss black consciousness—this chapter works closely with the writings of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and other black intellectuals to show how murals were a physical embodiment of the new black consciousness of the 1960s, concurrently inspiring black consciousness amongst its viewers.

Some of the most prominent primary scholarship of the decade comes from Black Arts Movement poet, essayist and cultural theorist, Larry Neal. To Neal, black consciousness of the 1960s was an immaterial hum that black Americans could simply "feel in the air."[23] This new black consciousness, he believed, emerged from the "short-term" gains of the Civil Rights Movement as it disrupted the racial status quo and unearthed the *need* for a new black consciousness. Neal felt:

> The integrationist cause championed by the NAACP, Urban League, early CORE, and SNCC, represent significant watersheds in the history of the black liberation movement. I believe that this evaluation is indisputable even if their concerns were not necessarily the concerns of a broad segment of the black community. In spite of the short-term goals of these organizations, they have contributed significantly to the growth of black consciousness…it was in the midst of these activities that we learned the workings of the system that oppressed us.[24]

Feeling the "Negro leadership had so essentially based its program on integration that it failed to deal with the issues of blacks controlling the institutions," Neal believed "the organizations which claimed to represent us were not even finally controlled by us," because "the control was rooted in the white liberal establishment whose interests could not, ultimately, coincide with ours."[25] Tired of black liberation being rooted in "the white liberal establishment," the new black consciousness of the 1960s was tinged with a nationalist sentiment.[26] Sixties black consciousness was about black control over a black space. It was about reclaiming sites of racial

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[23] Larry Neal, "New Space/The Growth of Black Consciousness in the Sixties," in *The Black Seventies,* ed. Floyd Barbour (Boston: Sargent Porter, 1970), 12.
[24] Ibid., 10.
[25] Ibid., 21-25.
[26] Ibid.

containment in cities like Chicago that were drawn up by white America. The days of demanding seats at lunch counters were long gone, replaced instead by an empowered demand for the land upon which the counters were built.[27] As the demand for black space echoed around communities supporting Black Power, it was regularly fed by the nationalist rhetoric from activists such as Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, all of whom advocated for the separation of black controlled space.

In the 1960s, when the demand for 'Afro-American Nationhood' gained a stronghold throughout the US, words from Black Power activists breathed life into an evolving black consciousness. Pulsing with nationalist, separatist language, the decade heard Carmichael's cries in his 1965 speech in Lowndes County, Alabama when he eulogised:

> In this county, it says majority rules, we are 80% of the majority, we are 80% in this county and we have the right to rule this county…and we're going to rule it. No matter how poor we are, no matter how black we are, we're gonna govern this county.[28]

Similarly, in 1968, when H. Rap Brown addressed the Black Panther Party at a Free Huey Rally, he matched Carmichael's rhetoric:

> You enjoyed being lied to. You find your security in the lies that white America tells you. For four hundred years she told you them, and you lapped it up. You told them to your children. You have your children thinking that everything black was bad. Black cows don't give good milk, black hens don't lay eggs, black for funerals, white for weddings. Everything black is bad, the only black biblical character you knew was Judas… That's white Nationalism.[29]

The control over black space was a cornerstone of the 1960s black consciousness, espoused early in the decade by Malcolm X. Following his public divorce from the Nation of Islam on March 8, 1964, and his reawakening as a Sunni Muslim after his *hajj* to Mecca on April 13 that same year, Malcolm X—then known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz—frequently took to the stage in Harlem to discuss the importance of supporting Black Nationalism in a country governed by the white man. The black political activist had relented somewhat in his opinion towards white Americans, offering them "almost a redemption" and a moderated tolerance.[30] During a speech at the Audubon Ballroom on June 28, 1964, where he spoke of his recently formed religious organisation, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), X offered glimmers of a black consciousness yet to ripen when he impressed to his audience the importance of self-governed black land in the journey towards black liberation. "The political philosophy of black

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[27] Ibid., 9.

[28] Carlos A. Hernandez, "Eyes on the Prize 07 The Time Has Come, 1964 1965," YouTube Video, 2:56, April 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8c8gewXOus.

[29] The truth, "H. Rap Brown Address the Black Panthers (1968)," YouTube Video, 18:33, Jan 18, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_oUpJY6qd0.

[30] Robert E. Terrill, *Malcolm X: Inventing Racial Judgment* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 5.

nationalism…means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community," he preached to a watchful audience.[31] Highlighting the early glows of black consciousness's spatial component, X stressed the level of black control needed in black communities. Black schools should have "Afro-American principles to head these schools," he suggested. "We want Afro-American teachers in these schools. We want textbooks written by Afro-Americans that are acceptable to us to be used in these schools," he continued.[32] Believing the quest for black liberation hinged upon separatist ideals of black-owned, black-controlled spaces, Malcolm X, in tandem with other Black Power activists, provided a foundation for the spatial aspect of the decade's new black consciousness. However, the spatial branch of black consciousness made up only half of the growing ideological moment in the 1960s. Dovetailing with a cultural wing, black consciousness was not just about power, nationhood and space; it was also about filling that space with black identity and black culture to create a space of complete blackness.

Whilst Black Nationalism, consciousness and the soon to be sloganised Black Power, were concerned with control and sovereignty of black spaces, they were also concerned with the salvation of black history. "Our history and our culture were completely destroyed when we were forcibly brought to America in chains. And now it is important for us to know that our history did not begin with slavery's scars," X lamented regarding the non-existent black cultural footprint in US society.[33] "Our culture and our history are as old as man himself and yet we know almost nothing of it," he warned, continuing: "We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy."[34] Black consciousness, therefore, was not just about spatial occupation, it was also about a cultural awakening—an awakening that could be achieved by recuperating black histories and identities erased by dominant white optics. Learning black history, Larry Neal suggested, would enable black Americans "to be comfortable in the knowledge of themselves" so they no longer attacked the "lips, skin, hair, legs…and self that we had been trained to hate."[35] Growing numbers of people "snapp[ed] off the shackles of imitation and [wore] their skin, their hair, and their features 'natural' and with pride."[36] After centuries of being told, "in a million different ways, that they were not beautiful, that whiteness of skin, straightness of hair, and aquilineness

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[31] Ibid., 130.

[32] Abraham Chapman, *New Black Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Afro-American Literature* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 560.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 560-563.

[35] Neal, "New Space," 15.

[36] Fuller, Hoyt. "Towards a Black Aesthetic," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 8.

of features constituted the only measures of beauty, black people have revolted" Black Arts Movement writer Hoyt Fuller wrote in his 1972 essay "Towards a Black Aesthetic.[37]

Recapturing heritage and identity happened in black America through every possible cultural output. Created "for the people, by the people and from the people," art, music, drama, dance, literature, poetry and murals were all made to empower black audiences through connections to a black experience in America.[38] Taking, for example, the poem, "My Blackness is the Beauty of This Land," by Lance Jeffers, published in Neal and Amiri Baraka's seminal anthology, *Black Fire* (1968), the didactic promotions of self-love are evident even in the poem's title. Similarly, the focus of artwork from the arts-collective, AfriCOBRA, comprising of artists Jeff Donaldson, Wadsworth and Jae Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu and Gerald Williams, was about creating "social content—message-oriented art" that included "traditional African art forms," (fig. 1).[39]

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[37] Ibid.

[38] This quote comes from Ron Karenga's essay, "On Black Art" where he discusses the importance of revolutionary art. Ron Karenga, "On Black Art," *Modern American Poetry*, accessed March 20, 2018, http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/blackarts/documents.htm.

[39] Robert L. Douglas, *Wadsworth Jarrell: The Artist as Revolutionary* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1996), 28-29.

Fig. 1. Wadsworth Jarrell, *Liberation Soldiers,* 1972, Acrylic and foil on canvas, 50 x 48 in.

Concerned with empowering black communities under a collective "black aesthetic", AfriCOBRA wanted their art to "mean something for black people," and for it to be functional and to "communicate to its viewer a statement of truth, of action, of education, of conditions and a state of being to our people."[40] American Art at the time was dominated by a western aesthetic and it was time for black America to contest it. White artistic paradigms failed to connect with an antithetical black experience in the US, and white control over American art catalysed black artists to challenge the dominant white perceptions of a black world. Instead, a new black aesthetic was needed, one that corresponded with the reality of black life, and the

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[40] Quotation from Barbara Jones-Hogu in Douglas, *Wadsworth Jarrell*, 29.

Black Arts Movement (BAM) answered this call through the art of individuals like James T. Stewart, Sun-Ra, Sonia Sanchez, Ron Welburn, Marvin E. Jackmon, Dindga McCannon, Ben Jones, Carolyn Lawrence, Jeff Donaldson, Larry Neal, Floyd Barbour, Kay Brown, Ademola Olugebefola, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Dudley Randall, Gwendolyn Brooks, Phil Cohran, Marvin X and Haki Madhubuti. As the BAM functioned as the cultural arm of Black Power, the artwork of its artists therefore offer a deeper understanding the cultural wing of the decade's black consciousness. However, to visualise more concretely what the opaquely-described black consciousness of the 1960s actually looked like, we must turn to murals.[41]

Fig. 2. Dana Chandler and Gary Rickson, *Segregation B.C.,* 1968, Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts.

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[41] In this chapter I actively refrain from uniting murals and the BAM. Murals are seldom mentioned in primary writings from the BAM, something apparent in Hoyt Fuller's 1972 essay, "Towards a Black Aesthetic," when he discusses the OBAC's bold move "toward a definition of a black aesthetic," in poetry, short stories and plays, but not through one of the organisation's most important cultural outputs—the *Wall of Respect*. Seminal BAM books like *Black Fire*, *The Black Seventies* and *Towards a Black Aesthetic*, are saturated with empowering poetry, fiction and drama from contemporaneous artists, yet visual culture, especially murals, seldom receives acknowledgement. Choosing not to categorise murals under the broader remit of the BAM does not mean they are a strictly separate entity. However, BAM scholarship is a small field in itself, and the task of situating murals into the canon of the BAM is beyond the bandwidth of this thesis. Rebecca Zorach's *Art for the People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago 1965-1975,* is the only book that classes murals as a broader extension of the BAM in Chicago, however she does not focus on the complex politics of the BAM across the country. Instead she focuses on a broader artistic movement in Chicago and uses the term BAM to unite murals, poetry, performance, and art. During interviews with Dana Chandler and Eugene Eda Wade, when asked whether they were operating under the remit of the BAM, both suggested that when creating their murals, they did not pay attention to the broader BAM. Therefore, I do not want to pigeonhole their ideological beliefs or their motivations to create such murals.

If black consciousness in the 1960s was comprised of both a spatial and cultural element, then murals became the physical embodiment of what black consciousness actually looked like. Whilst the artistic, literary and musical outputs from the BAM demonstrate the cultural aspect of the decade's black consciousness, they do not highlight the important spatial component of black consciousness. Using empowering and historic black memory to reclaim physical space in black-designated communities, murals became a tangible manifestation of the decade's black consciousness. When over 1,500 black murals lined the streets in urban northern centres following the creation of the *Wall of Respect,* they marked urban landscapes as spaces of ideological, cultural and physical blackness to empower local residents. Murals such as *Segregation BC* (1968) (fig. 2), *Exodus Building Mural* (1968), *Wall of Respect (Up You Mighty Race)* (1968)(fig. 3), *All Power to the People* (1969), *Revelations* (1969), *Peace and Salvation* (1970) and *Wall of Self-Awareness* (1974) (fig. 4), sprang up in black enclaves around the country to give physical form to the abstract term.

Fig. 3. LeRoy White, *Wall of Respect (Up You Mighty Race)*, 1968, St. Louis, Missouri.

"There is a *cultural revolution* [emphasis original] going on which has meaning in terms of what kind of art is being produced," OBAC member Abdul Alkalimat (formerly Gerald McWorter) stated, "what kinds of experiments are going on, and what is happening in the

consciousness of vast numbers of people as they think about their place in the black community and the nature of this community within which they belong."[42] Here, Alkalimat hints at how the position of murals in black communities elevated the consciousness of its residents as they contemplated their relationship to their black neighbourhood and neighbours. Unpacking this relationship between space, community, art, and consciousness, the following section uses the *Wall of Respect* to demonstrate how the mural offered a physical manifestation of black consciousness within a concrete space and made a neglected black community visible in an isolated, *de facto* segregated neighbourhood. It evaluates how the physical and conceptual make-up of the *Wall* exemplified the pulsing mood of black consciousness around 43rd and Langley, and it also unpacks how the *Wall* fostered feelings of black consciousness amongst local residents. In 1971, the *Wall* burned down, and the local community mourned the loss of their monument to blackness. As various stories emerged to speculate the demise of the mural, artists, activists and the black community had their own theory. The suspicious circumstances, constant presence of the FBI throughout the wall's creation, and white America's discomfort with images of black pride left no doubt in the minds of the black community residents: "They did not want images of black consciousness!" musician Phil Cohran declared, "I *know* that's what it was [emphasis original]."[43]

Fig. 4. Mitchell Caton, *Wall of Self-Awareness,* 1974, Chicago, Illinois.

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[42] Zorach, *Art for the People's Sake,* 21.

[43] Jeff Huebner, *Bill Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Arts Movement* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, unpublished manuscript), unpaginated. This book is now published as Jeff Huebner, *Walls of Prophecy and Protest: William Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Art Movement* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2019).

"A memento of the Black Power Movement": Murals as Manifestations of Black Consciousness

"We can use [art] to make ourselves more beautiful to each other," McWorter wrote in an 'all-purpose handout' for OBAC in 1967, "and we have to do that—more beautiful to ourselves, more beautiful to each other, more beautiful to everybody, because somebody who knows they are beautiful *Is* [sic] beautiful, and that's exactly what we have to do."[44] In 1967, the Visual Arts Workshop of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC but pronounced *oh-bah-see*)—emerging out of the meetings of Hoyt Fuller, Abdul Alkalimat and Conrad Kent Rivers—discussed the lack of black artistic talent on display in national art galleries. Prior to 1967, "one could count fewer than a dozen museum exhibitions that had featured the work of African American artists, with the exception of museums at historically black universities and colleges," and when black artwork was on display, it was commonly in segregated spaces.[45] "The art world has been particularly resistant to racial equality" and as a result, the *de facto* segregation of these institutional spaces produced grassroots black art galleries and museums.[46] In the 1960s, most museum professionals "believed the art system was a valid sifting mechanism," allowing quality to rise to the top naturally. If few artists of colour received representation therefore, the shortcomings lay at the feet of the artists and not the system, and when such racial discrepancies were pointed out, museums responded "with platitudes and generalizations: it's not intentional and it's nobody's fault," following up with the caveat that black artists "simply lacked the education and opportunities to improve themselves and reach the level of accomplishment of their white counterparts."[47] The racial politics of art galleries in the Black Power Movement will be unpacked further in the following chapter, but it is important here to understand the racial backdrop of the institutional art world at the time of the *Wall of Respect*'s conception.

OBAC was an organisation founded upon the belief that members "were able to reach a common view that a positive black consciousness (image of the self and world) was essential and that we should and could do something about it."[48] As a result, the group sought to create a collective work of art to challenge the biased white galleried artwork that lay "secure in its fortress museum, safe from the pain of the socially wounded," as well as the notion of art for

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[44] McWorter in Zorach, *Art for People's Sake,* 21.
[45] Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
[46] Ibid., 3.
[47] Ibid., 5.
[48] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 104.

art's sake.[49] The artistic wing of OBAC wanted to contest the white-controlled artworld that held "the Mona Lisa as the global standard."[50] Joined by muralist Bill Walker, the Visual Arts Workshop conceptualised a piece of public art that would contest the white-control of the artworld, and the *de facto* segregation of their black community in Chicago's South Side. They sought to raise the collective consciousness of an impoverished South Side community in their city of Chicago by creating a mural fuelled by the desire for black empowerment.

Whilst the famous battles of the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement took place "in stores at lunch counters, on trains and buses, and in schools," they also took place in the grassroots neighbourhoods of black America.[51] The *Wall of Respect* was a way for the street to speak in a *de facto* segregated space on Chicago's periphery—a space filled with kitchenettes, public housing, and a "prisonized landscape" that was host to excessive levels of surveillance and mesh wire encasing housing projects.[52] When Rashad Shabazz asks in *Spatializing Blackness: Architects of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (2015), "what happens when people are raised in environments built to contain them?" the *Wall of Respect* offers an answer.[53] The black community of Chicago's South Side did not have freedom of movement—hemmed in from the west by the construction of the Dan Ryan Expressway in 1961, and by Lake Michigan to the east—but it did have freedom of imagination, and the *Wall of Respect* was therefore created to reclaim the enforced containment of the black neighbourhood and to visually project the presence of a proud black community onto the racialised landscape. If white America demarcated black space, black residents claimed cultural, ideological and visual ownership of that space to make it their own, and the *Wall of Respect* offered the template. When OBAC and non-member Bill Walker met in 1967 to discuss plans for the *Wall of Respect*, they assessed how to make a public work of art that could become a source of inspiration for an impoverished and forgotten neighbourhood. Inspired by the period's belief that "art held potential to change people's consciousness," Walker and OBAC conceptualised a work of democratising guerrilla street art that was both influenced by the decade's black consciousness and simultaneously fed it back to the community.[54] If black consciousness of the 1960s was about creating spaces of blackness, then the *Wall of Respect* was created in its image. To "establish presence [and] shape space" in a segregated community, the artists transformed a wall in Chicago's South Side into a

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[49] Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, *Cry for Justice.* (Chicago: Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, 1972), unpaginated.
[50] Ibid.*,* 5.
[51] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 53.
[52] Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago,* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 56.
[53] Ibid., 2.
[54] Zorach, *Art for the People's Sake*, 23.

site of black consciousness through images of radical black history and contemporary radical heroes.[55]

The artists found their wall at 43rd and Langley in one of the most decimated areas in the entire South Side and filled the space with "our heritage and our identity…to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy."[56] Sylvia Abernathy, member of OBAC's visual workshop, submitted a complete design for the mural that harmonised with the architectural composition of the chosen building on 43rd and Langley. Broken down into seven sections, each section had a theme, colour scheme, painter and photographer. Bill Walker was assigned 'Religion' with photographs taken by Robert Sengstacke; Norman Parish was given 'Statesmen' with photographs by Roy Lewis; the 'Sports' section had Mirna Weaver on painting and Onikwa on photography; Jeff Donaldson painted the 'Jazz' section with Bill Abernathy on photography; Roy Lewis took photographs for the 'Theater' section whilst Barbara Jones-Hogu did the painting; and Edward Christmas painted 'Literature,' complete with Amiri Baraka's poem 'S.O.S.', whilst Darryl Cowheard took photographs.

Fig. 5. OBAC and Bill Walker, *Wall of Respect* (phase 1), 1967, Chicago, Illinois.

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[55] Ibid., 83.
[56] Ibid.

Demarcated into sections through the use of colour and architectural structure, the mural shows revolutionary leaders adorning the top left-hand section of the mural, painted by Norman Parish (fig. 5). The faces of Brown, Garvey, Carmichael and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. are gazed upon by the larger, somewhat looming, presence of Malcolm X, whose visual depiction dominates the wall. The five statesmen live as separate, individual portraits, but they are connected through the abstract, coloured background stretching from Malcolm X to Brown, and the earthy, tonal colours extending from X towards Garvey in the shape of a pseudo-Black Power fist. Although temporally and ideologically distinct, the heroes coexist in visual harmony on the *Wall* to promote the important tenets of black consciousness with its focus on racial memory and "the unshakable knowledge of who we are, where we have been, and springing from this, where we are going."[57] The neutral colours dancing around their likenesses act as branches on the family tree of black ideological history, connecting the heroes in a continuum of black liberation. Towards the centre of the mural, the architectural protrusion containing African American sportsmen like Muhammad Ali and Wilt Chamberlain, partitions the revolutionaries from the musicians who are laid out in portrait-like fashion on the right side of the wall. The faces of Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Lester Young, Nina Simone and Ornette Coleman sit directly above the second largest portrait on the wall—actress Claudia McNeil. The young McNeil is diametrically opposed to Malcolm X, and the two heroic figures face away from each other, guarding and protecting different sides of the mural— Malcolm X covers the left side whilst McNeil looks out towards the right. It is a significant intervention and commentary on the gender politics of the period when members of OBAC position Claudia McNeil as one of the largest presences on the wall, conveying her as a gatekeeper for the mural. Although the *Wall of Respect* is male-centric with a majority of the faces depicting famous black men, the artists acknowledged the fundamental roles played by women in the movement both culturally and ideologically when they positioned McNeil at eye-level with audiences on the street, giving her prime position on the mural. By painting both a man and a woman as the two most dominant faces on the mural, OBAC challenged the masculinist stereotypes of the Black Power Movement by highlighting the integral role of women, such as McNeil, Ruby Dee and Nina Simone, in the quest for black liberation.

The *Wall of Respect* "didn't just show you some people you may or may not have heard of, but it told you, you had the right to recognize them, that you could recognize them in the way that you wanted to," Carol Adams, President and CEO of the DuSable Museum of African

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[57] Julian Mayfield, "You Touch My Black Aesthetic and I'll Touch Yours," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle Jr. (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), 26.

American History suggested. "You got a chance to understand that your heroes belonged to you [and] that your art belonged to you," she continued, underscoring the consciousness-raising nature of the mural.[58] The mural marked out a physical space in the streets and filled it with empowering images of black history and the present. It was a canvas in the streets of Chicago's South Side that reflected black pride to the residents of 43rd and Langley and beyond, elevating and energising them throughout their everyday lives. "I saw a young man sitting [outside] and I was in the television shop, and I walked out of the television shop," Bill Walker told Victor Sorrel in a 1991 oral history interview discussing the creation of the *Wall of Respect*. "He was sitting in front of the wall. So I said, "How are you doing, brother?" [and] he said, "I'm getting my strength.""[59] To the anonymous man on the street at 43rd and Langley, the *Wall of Respect* created a space of empowerment in his neighbourhood for the contemplation of his black identity, a space for him to learn about himself. By fostering pride and self-love amongst individuals in an impoverished area, the *Wall of Respect* underlined "the need to improve how we felt about ourselves," Pemon Rami, Director of Educational Services at the DuSable Museum suggested.[60] When the historic faces of individuals such as Du Bois, Garvey and Robeson sat alongside the many contemporary figures of X, Ali, Simone, John Coltrane, Amiri Baraka, H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael and James Baldwin, they "rescue[d] a sense of pride" for local residents in the isolated area of Chicago's South Side (figs. 6 and 7).[61]

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[58] Carol Adams quotation in Tony Smith, "Black Is Beautiful."
[59] Oral history interview with William Walker, 1991 June 12-14, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 33.
[60] Permon Rami quotation "Black Is Beautiful."
[61] Carol Adams quotation in Ibid.
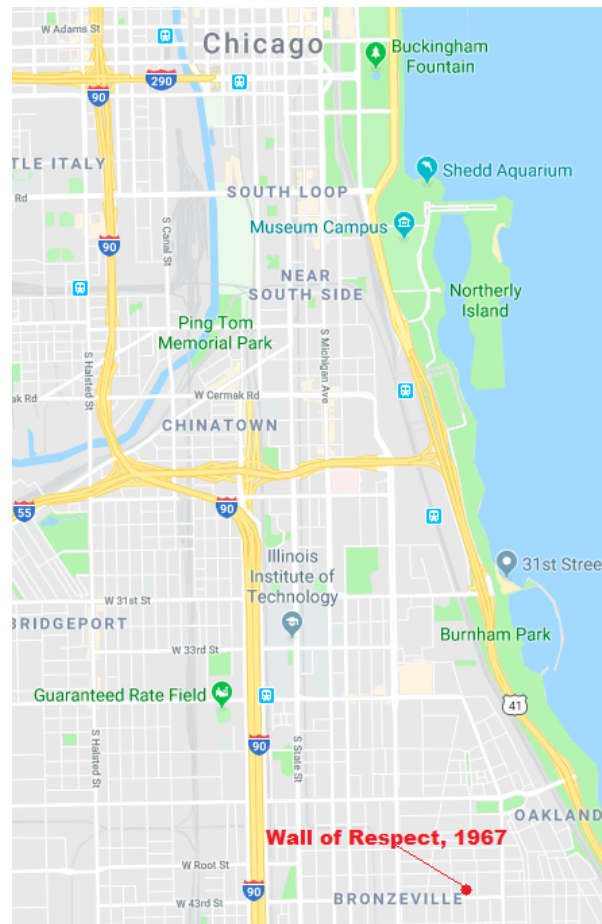
Fig. 6. Position of *Wall of Respect* (1967) in Chicago's South Side, Illinois.

The style in which the pantheon of figures was painted, in conjunction with the photographs of black heroes placed upon the wall, strengthened the relationship between the mural and black consciousness.[62] When viewing the imagery upon the mural, the phrase 'black light'—birthed from the BAM—is invoked. The somewhat oxymoronic term 'black light' was a recurrent metaphor used during the movement that found traction amongst poets, authors, photographers, artists and performers of the 1960s and 1970s. Ubiquitously featured throughout Neal and Baraka's *Black Fire*, 'black light' challenged the racist underpinnings of the associations of light with enlightenment when "the optic itself has been tainted by the racist privileging of whiteness," noted Crawford.[63] Novelist Lindsay Barrett claims that "the very 'possibility' and 'existence' of black light is hard to imagine due to the glare of white light."[64]

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[62] For more information of the relationship between photography and murals see Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago.*

[63] Margo Natalie Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 30.

[64] Ibid.

Yet novelists, poets and photographers used the term to counter the racist and deeply ingrained belief that whiteness and 'white light' equated to purity, cleanliness and realness. The obfuscation of blackness in the mainstream was subverted through the idolisation of blackness when cultural theorists and photographers such as Amiri Baraka and Bill Abernathy created art that "accentuate[d] all the features that antiblack racism has vilified."[65] To artists creating empowering work in the 1960s and 1970s, 'Black light' was a political and aesthetic awakening. It was an expansion and reconfiguration of one's self, as Neal describes: "we know who we are, and we are not invisible, at least not to each other. We are not Kafkaesque creatures stumbling through a white light of confusion and absurdity," he continues.[66] Black light was about making the invisible visible; about illuminating the blackness in a mainstream white narrative. It was an instrumental artistic technique layered into the aesthetics on the *Wall of Respect* to promote positive self-esteem and elevate the consciousness of one's self by showing the black community who they are and where they have been through history.[67]

In "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," Margo Natalie Crawford unpacks how poets and photographers interact with and showcase the metaphorical importance of 'black light' in poems such as Haki Madhubuti's "The Negro" (1968) in which "there is a black light trying to penetrate that whiteness called mr. clean", and 1970 poem, "Judy-One."[68] In the latter poem, Madhubuti subverts the common understanding of dark skin absorbing light whilst being photographed, when he writes "her smile is like / clear light / bouncing off / the darkness of the / mediterranean at nighttime".[69] Here, Madhubuti appropriates the process of photography by transforming the young girl's skin into a bountiful projector of light; no longer an absorbent instrument of the white gaze, her skin is instead a reflection of true blackness. Crawford speaks of the intersections between poetry, photography and the mural—proposing how black light exists in the additional components placed onto the *Wall of Respect* through the poetry of Amiri Baraka, dedications of Gwendolyn Brooks and Haki Madhubuti, and photography of Robert Sengstacke, Darrel Cowherd, Billy Abernathy and Roy Lewis. However, Crawford refrains from discussing the painted elements of the mural itself.

The faces of black heroes, such as McNeil, Simone, Malcolm X, Garvey, Coleman and Armstrong, were either painted in grey-scale—to align with the black and white photography upon the mural—or with deep brown tones. Historically, through the darkening of skin tones,

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 32.
[69] Ibid.

African Americans have been visually demonised to convey the idea of a subhuman race. Yet the *Wall of Respect* subverted the deeply rich colours of black skin by turning them into symbols of pride and respect upon the wall. Blackness served as a light of illumination on the mural when muralists subverted the dominance of the traditional white aesthetic in the faces of black heroes. Undermining the chiaroscuro method of starting a painting with white tones before layering with darker ones, the artists of the *Wall* painted the faces of black heroes in the reverse, beginning with predominantly brown, grey and black colours and ending with a few accents of white.[70] Black artists and authors were accustomed to the biased white tones making up the foundation of many artists' palettes in Western art where "white and light influence[d] the entire palette…creating a predominance of infinite, pastel colors and light and shade." Yet the muralists of OBAC undermined this biased white palette when they created the faces of black heroes with little accentuation of white light, celebrating the "Afrikan velvet skin" admired during the 1960s.[71]

Although Crawford refrains from delineating 'black light' and 'black consciousness,' the oxymoronic metaphor of black light can also be positioned as an extension of the latter term. 'Black light' meant aesthetically showing blackness through new configurations of one's self that invalidated the tainted optics of aesthetic white privilege. This speaks directly to black consciousness. When Neal wrote of 'black light' in *Black Fire,* explaining that "we know who we are, and we are not invisible, at least not to each other," he spoke to the duality of black light—both as a visual awakening through the literal illumination of black skin in poetry and literature, and an ideological awakening that occurs through an immersion in, and understanding of, radical black history which leads to a blackness in both thought and the conception of the self. Therefore, the *Wall of Respect*, engages in the duality of 'black light' when it not only lionises the "Afrikan velvet skin" of the black heroes it visualises, but also sheds light on an ideologically radical black history that remains absent from America's historical and commemorative landscape. One of the reasons the *Wall of Respect* was so intent on visualising figures of black history, Eugene Eda Wade admits, was because "we did have our own sheroes and heroes, that made a contribution, that may not be included in a textbook because of whatever political or

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[70] The concept of 'black light' was something used by artist Faith Ringgold. Subverting the aesthetic 'enlightenment' of white races, Ringgold, in her *The Black Light Series* (1970), visualised the reclamation of 'white light' by replacing the chiaroscuro method of using white pigment to "create 'light' with a system that utilized black pigment to the same end." The accentuation of black light became the focal point of her artwork; it became an awakening. Black pigments were used as a metaphor for race. They were a way "of expressing on canvas, the new 'black is beautiful' sense of ourselves." Lisa E. Farrington, *Faith Ringgold* (Petaluma: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2004), 33.

[71] The line, "Afrikan velvet" skin comes from Gwendolyn Brooks' poem, "An Aspect of Love, Alive in the Ice and Fire" (1971). She writes about how the African velvet skin is "a physical light in the room." Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," n. 25, 30-40; Dan Cameron, Richard Powell, Michele Wallace, *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 162.

social reason."[72] 'Black light' was not just about acknowledging the blackness of one's body, but also the blackness of one's mind. It was about making the invisible visible, not only literally through physical features of the black body which get lost in the tainted optics of white America, but also by reclaiming the nation's past and present by uncovering black heroes who have been erased in a dominant white narrative.

In 1968, the *Wall* underwent a second, unplanned phase. Evolving with the growing sense of Black Nationalism and Black Power in the urban north, Walker "wanted to have [the wall] as a newspaper or a magazine" that "changed from week to week, month to month" because that way the mural would always be a true reflection of current activism for local residents.[73] Eugene Eda Wade, a close friend and mentee of Bill Walker, was instructed by Walker to repaint Norman Parish's elder statesman section without the original artist's permission, sparking controversy that eventually led to the demise of OBAC, and later to the formation of AfriCOBRA. "When that section was whitewashed, and I painted over there, Bill and I's names were absolute mud," Wade recounted sadly during a 2017 oral history interview.[74]

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[72] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

[73] Ibid.

[74] ibid. According to Wade, the incident was something Walker felt guilty about until he passed away, and presently Wade has made attempts to reconnect with members of OBAC; "I did make peace with Wadsworth Jarrell, because we were lecturing together and he was disagreeing on everything I had said, and I was disagreeing on everything he had said and then the end result, I know he would never come up to me and tell me. I walked up to him and said 'Look Wadsworth, perhaps in our next life, we can be brothers.' So that kind of broke the ice and we started talking and we talked and we talked and we talked…and Roy Lewis…was mad as hell with me also, and so I did the same thing with him. After we had finished discussing and talking, I walked up to him and said 'Roy, you know, probably one day we can become brothers.' So we started talking and one thing led to another and before we left, because we were living in the same hotel they put us up in, he came over and we started talking and he wished me luck and whatever. But I would have done that with Jeff and all of them."

Fig. 7. Position of *Wall of Respect* (1967) in Chicago's South Side, Illinois.

While the creation of phase two disturbed the waters of OBAC, it strengthened the mural's function as a talisman of black consciousness in the South Side community, by reflecting "what was current…the movement and the mood."[75] To Wade and Walker, the ideological consciousness of the late sixties "was calling for something…a little more dramatic" to be put on the wall—"the Black Power symbol, the blackness in terms of the color, more blackness, more militan[cy]," Wade suggested.[76] Further assassinations throughout the decade, deepening involvement in Vietnam, and the riotous Democratic National Convention and strengthening Black Panther presence in Chicago needed to be reflected in the community, the muralists believed. Adding to the mural fed the growing black consciousness back into the community by strengthening the union between politics and art.[77]

Paying attention to how the current figures on Parish's section had already empowered local residents, Wade included the faces of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown on the wall but diverged from Parish's initial plans by placing the three men alongside

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[75] Faheem Majeed quotation in Eugene Wade, "Eugene "Eda" Wade talk about the 2nd Phase of the Wall of Respect," YouTube Video, 03:43, June 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A3UzjQVDMg.
[76] Eugene Eda Wade in ibid.
[77] Eugene Perkins, "The Black Arts Movement: Its Challenge and Responsibility," in *The Black Seventies* ed. Floyd Barbour (Boston: Sargent Porter, 1970), 86.

prominent female activist and lawyer, Florynce 'Flo' Kennedy (fig. 8).[78] Focusing more intensely on the composition of this panel in contrast to Parish, Wade placed the figures in a cohesive narrative to convey a more overt message of black empowerment to the community, thus strengthening the relationship between black consciousness, black aesthetics and Black Power. Brown and X face Carmichael and Kennedy, only to be vertically bisected by an authoritative fist of Black Power piercing the space between them. Painted mid-lecture, X and Carmichael look animated, with the pulse of Black Nationalism coursing through their bodies whilst they preach the tenets of black consciousness. With an all-black background symbolically claiming the wall in the South Side as a space of 'blackness', Wade textured the backdrop around Kennedy, Brown and Carmichael with flecked white lines around the raised clenched fist. The white flecks become energetic lines conveying the physical dominance of the Black Power fist; they could also symbolise shards of white authority broken by the empowering hand gesture; or they could be drops of rain, highlighting the reign of radical black ideology in the community of 43rd and Langley.

The *Wall* therefore became a changeable talisman of black consciousness in the neighbourhood, occasionally evolving as the 1960s drew to a close. As Neal, Malcom X, Carmichael and Rap Brown proclaimed at the height of Black Power, black consciousness was about black control over black space, and as X also theorised, it was about remedying the concern that "[o]ur culture and our history are as old as man himself and yet we know almost nothing of it."[79] The *Wall of Respect* made black consciousness tangible within the black community of Chicago's South Side by filling a wall at 43rd and Langley with imagery of the past and present. It claimed ownership of a black space by decorating the walls with radical black memory. The mural became both an ideological and physical reclamation of a contained racialised space, transforming a bleak, blank wall into a site of imagination. It inspired and instilled black consciousness amongst the local residents, and the following section analyses the ways in which the *Wall* was transformative, elevating both the individual and collective consciousness of the black community in unprecedented ways.

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[78] Florynce 'Flo' Kennedy is frequently omitted from discussions of Wade's section of the mural, with people focusing most intensely on Malcolm X, H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael, but during a phone conversation with Wade, after I asked about the female figure in his section he said: "Nobody's ever said anything in reference to who that is or what she did. Perhaps I should have mentioned in before now, but you know, it was always Malcolm X, and H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael… She was amazing. She helped defend H. Rap Brown one time in court, she also helped Bird—that is Charlie Parker—with his royalties and those kinds of things. If you read about her you'll see what she was about and nobody ever asked about her and up until recently I just started talking about her, and I know she's important in terms of representative of the Black woman as well in terms of her contribution you see." Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018. For more information on Kennedy see Sherie M. Randolph's book *Florynce "Flo" Kennedy: The Life of a Black Feminist Radical (Gender and American Culture)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015).
[79] Chapman, *New Black Voices,* 560.

Fig. 8. OBAC, Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Respect* (phase 2), 1968, Chicago, Illinois.

"The Wall belonged to the Community": Raising Black Consciousness through the *Wall of Respect* (1967)

They call it 'the Wall' but it's more than that," Burleigh Hines acknowledged of the wall's potency in the *Chicago Defender* in 1967.[80] "People feel better when they walk by there, and we made it so," Jeff Donaldson commented on the *Wall*.[81] "The effects on the neighborhood were palpable" he continued.[82] There was not, prior to 1967, "anything at all that would be considered community engagement public art."[83] In this respect, the *Wall of Respect* was the pioneer. As the only cultural form physically rooted in a community's exterior space by being painted into it, the mural became a site of imagination by uplifting the consciousness of both the individual and the black community as a whole (fig. 9).[84] It belonged to the community and it gave them

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[80] Wall of Respect Folder, Box 2, Jeff Donaldson Papers, circa 1960-2005 [unmicrofilmed boxes], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[81] Zorach, *Art for the People's Sake,* 5.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Jon Pounds in Tony Smith, "Black Is Beautiful."

[84] Wall of Respect Folder, Box 1, Jeff Donaldson Papers, circa 1960-2005 [unmicrofilmed boxes], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

something to be proud of—it was after all the first black street mural in the US. Whilst Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding* identifies how a broader 'mass black consciousness' emerged in both the North and South through the medium of music, this section uses muralism to show how black consciousness manifested itself in the concentrated pockets of grassroots communities in the height of the Black Power Movement.

Fig. 9. A group of young men stand and contemplate the *Wall of Respect* in 1967, photographer unknown.

"One day I'm going to do a painting over this graffiti," Walker told Wade upon seeing the turf-identifying scrawl from local gangs, after his migration to Chicago's South Side from Memphis.[85] In 1967, when Walker and OBAC created a mural that fused "social content and historical foundation" to elevate the collective self-esteem and identity of a community, they created the mural at a time when self-esteem could not have been lower.[86] Home to one of the oldest 'copping areas' in the city, for more than twenty years, the South Side street corner played host to a continuous stream of heroin sales. The abandoned apartment buildings—soon to be home to the *Wall of Truth* (1968)—became the physical site for addicts to shoot up and sleep when they had nowhere else to go.[87] "Most addicts at 43rd Street supported their habits by nonviolent crimes, primarily burglary, shoplifting, prostitution and gambling," Patrick H. Hughes writes in his psychoanalytical analysis of heroin addiction, *Behind the Wall of Respect: Community Experiments in Heroin Addiction Control* (1977).[88] But 43rd and Langley was not only rife

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[85] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[86] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 5; Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," 34.
[87] Patrick H. Hughes, *Behind the Wall of Respect: Community Experiments in Heroin Addiction Control* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3.
[88] Ibid.

with drugs, gambling, prostitution, burglary and shoplifting—it also was home to some of the most dangerous gangs in the nation: the Blackstone Rangers, the Black Disciples, and the Egyptian Cobras.[89] To Bill Walker and OBAC, no city or community in Chicago needed a *Wall of Respect* more than 43rd and Langley, but if the muralists were to elevate the consciousness of a community, they needed the community's input.

The *Wall of Respect* was not only pioneering for its existence in the streets of black Chicago. It was also ground-breaking for the democratising roots of its creation. In 1967, shortly after coming up with the idea of a street mural that would be "a useful weapon in the struggle for Black Liberation" in a poverty-stricken community, Bill Walker "walked quite a bit" around 43rd and Langley "[getting] to know those people, and those families in and around the communities" and asking their permission to paint a mural.[90] The community members knew Walker, "they respected him and they trusted him," Wade suggested.[91] Shortly after discussions with members of 43rd and Langley, Walker and members of OBAC compiled a newsletter and consulted local residents and militant street gangs in order to seek out which figures of black history and the contemporaneous present could be used to elevate the consciousness in their community. "The men and women depicted on the Wall were carefully chosen, debated and vetted to be a representation of how we saw and understood heroism for Black people," Alkalimat suggested.[92] Given the rise of Black Nationalism in the mid-1960s and the flourishing BAM on the national stage—as well as the rapidly expanding Illinois Black Panther Party on a local level—the community chose individuals that spoke to the contemporaneous shift from non-violent thought to radical, nationalist ideology in the black freedom struggle, selecting

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[89] With such power and gravitas in the local community, Bill Walker felt compelled to get permission from local gang leader, Herbert Coleman, in order to paint the mural on a blank wall adjacent to Johnny Ray's Radio and TV Repair Service.

[90] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018.

[91] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

[92] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 97.

figures from the past and present who "charted their own course" through life and "did not compromise their humanity."[93]
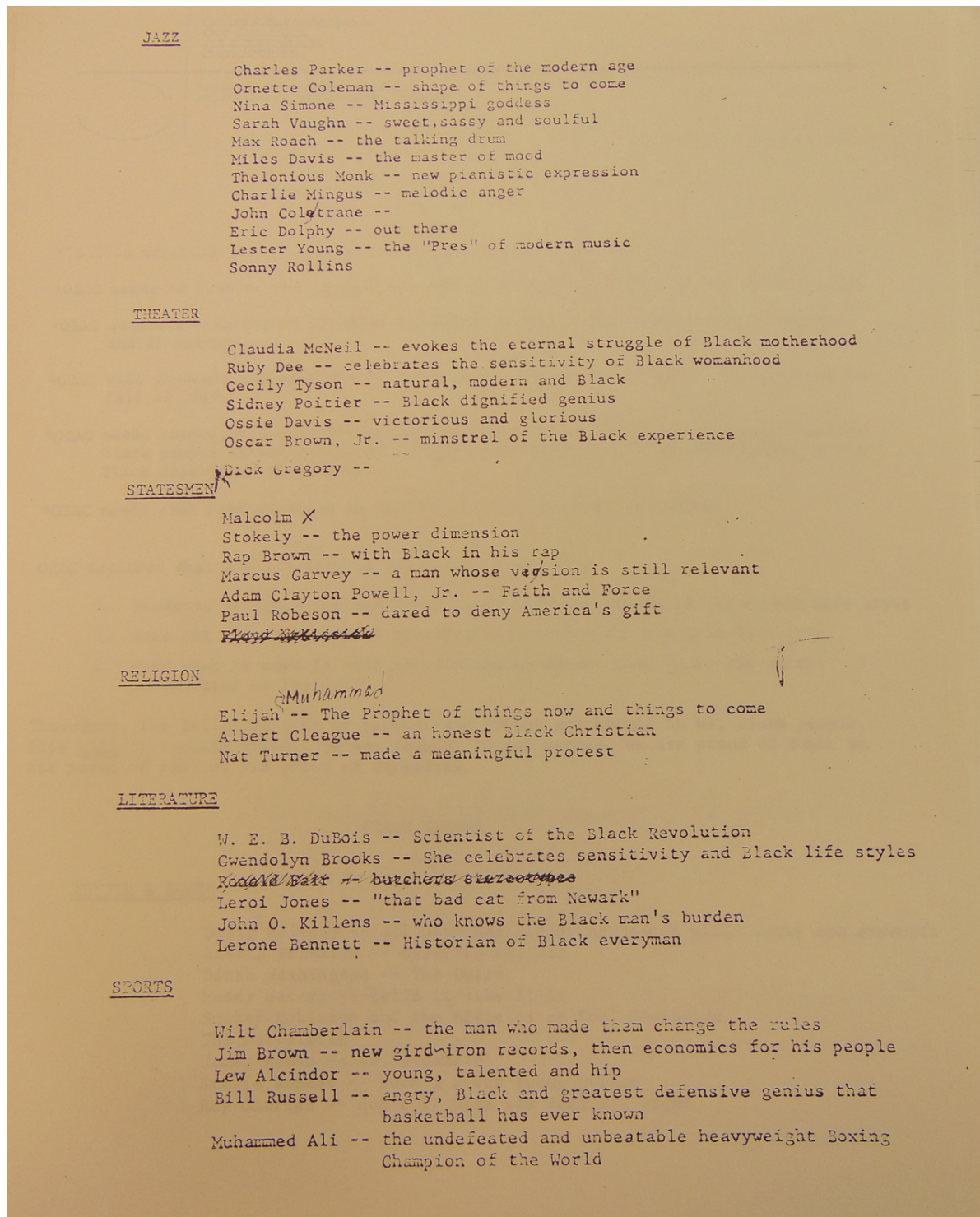
Fig. 10. List of figures selected by the community and organised by OBAC.[94]

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[93] Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," 25.

[94] Wall of Respect Folder, Box 1, Jeff Donaldson Papers, circa 1960-2005 [unmicrofilmed boxes], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

"Charles Parker – prophet of the modern age," "Ossie Davis – victorious and glorious," "Nat Turner – made a meaningful protest," "Marcus Garvey – a man whose vision is still relevant," "W.E.B Du Bois – Scientist of the Black Revolution," and "Stokely – the power dimension," so the selection of black heroes read upon OBAC's original plans (fig. 10).[95] The crossed out names of Ronald Fair and Floyd McKissick hint at how OBAC and Walker were in constant discussion with the neighbourhood residents, working out ways to reflect the collective mind-set of the community back to them through a physical object in their neighbourhood, axing the figures whose life and principles deviated from those in the community. James Brown, James Baldwin, Thelonious Monk, Malcolm X, Nina Simone, Claudia McNeil, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Elijah Muhammad, Nathaniel Turner, Gwendolyn Brooks and Muhammad Ali spoke to the ideological foundation of the community, making the cut to be painted onto the wall. But "we didn't put the Supremes up, or Whitney Young from the Urban League," Jeff Donaldson admitted.[96] Local residents and gang members even flatly rejected the presence of Martin Luther King, Jr. on their talisman of black consciousness. He did not inspire them on a daily basis. "The people in the neighbourhood didn't believe in nonviolence," Bill Walker commented on the ideological undertones of Chicago's grassroots communities.[97] By 1968, when 102 northern cities were in flames, those on the southside of Chicago felt removed both physically and ideologically from their brothers and sisters in the South.

The *Wall of Respect* therefore not only lived and belonged to the community; but it was also a democratising project created by the community, with members of OBAC actively refraining from taking credit for their part in the wall's existence. "There were to be no signatures affixed to the Wall to de-emphasise the artists as individuals and to advance the concept of collective activity in the struggle for Black Liberation," the group decided, for "the Wall belonged to the community." To ensure this was understood by not only local residents, but tourists too, a hand-painted sign was placed upon the wall that read: "This mural was created to honour our black heroes and to beautify our community" (fig. 11).[98] Written from the perspective of the community as opposed to OBAC and Walker, the sign affirmed the mural's position in society, not only as a commemorative talisman to honour black heroes, but also as

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Elijah Muhammad complained about having his face displayed on a mural next to his former protégé, Malcolm X, who held a prominent visual position next to Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. To satiate Muhammad's critique, Walker was asked by the Nation of Islam to paint over the prophet's likeness under threat of being sued. Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," 26-29.

[97] Ibid., 25.

[98] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 105.

a tool of elevation for a collective black consciousness that beautified both the physical and mental landscape of the community.

Fig. 11. Detail of *Wall of Respect,* 1967, Chicago, Illinois.

The mural's uplifting nature was so potent that it acted as a muse for poets, inspiring poetry that commented on how the mural emerged from, and inspired, black consciousness in the community. On August 27, 1967 on the day of the mural dedication ceremony, BAM poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Haki Madhubuti (formerly Don L. Lee), performed two poems both titled, "The Wall". Their works, weighted with pride and nationalist sentiment, poetically describe the mood of collective black consciousness birthed from the wall. In Madhubuti's poem, "negroes from south shore & / hyde park coming to check out / a black creation," and "our heroes, we pick them, for the wall", offer just a few examples of how local residents communally engaged with the mural.[99] In Brooks' poem, she outlines more thoroughly how black consciousness was collectively and culturally displayed by "Women in wool hair chant[ing] their poetry" and "Phil Cohran giv[ing] us messages and music / made of developed bone and polished and honed / cult". Brooks aurally weaves the listener through a black space vibrating with black consciousness where "boy-men on roofs fist out "Black Power!"" alongside the "hundreds of faces, red-brown, brown, black, ivory… / ready to rile the high-flung ground."[100] Since the *Wall of Respect* created and existed in an all-black space and belongs to the community as a whole, "No child has defiled / the Heroes of this Wall" she eulogises. Brooks meta-spatially captures the imagination of her audience by reciting a dedication to a physical site that demarcated Chicago's South Side as a space of ideological blackness. The poem acknowledges how the *Wall of Respect* was a "shrine to Black creativity, a rallying point for revolutionary rhetoric and calls to action, and a national symbol of the heroic Black struggle for liberation in America."[101]

The two poems describe consciousness raising at 43rd and Langley, yet in a secondary complex meta act, the poems themselves, as literary responses to the *Wall of Respect,* simultaneously seek to collectively elevate ideological thinking amongst the audience through their own discussions of black pride. Steeped in radical statements of Black Nationalism and separatism, Madhubuti's poem serves to not only meta-poetically comment on a collective black consciousness in the community, but because he was influenced by the wall, he also uses it as a muse to write his own consciousness-raising poetry. "the wall (the weapon)," "stupid muthafuckas they run from the / the mighty black wall," and "we got black artists / who paint black art / the mighty black wall," he says of the mural's physical potency. Brooks, too, uses her poem to not only discuss "the hundreds of faces…ready to rile the high-flung ground," but to also add a further injection of empowerment and consciousness-raising into the community

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[99] Haki Madhubuti, "The Wall," in ibid., 40.
[100] Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Wall," in ibid., 52.
[101] Donaldson, "Upside the Wall."

through her own poem. "South of success and east of gloss and glass are / sandals; / flowercloth", so Brooks describes the position of the mural in the opening to 'The Wall'. Her geographical allusion to a map of Chicago poetically highlights the cultural and economic distinctions of 'success' for different racialised groups in the city. The wall is situated on Chicago's periphery, south of the 'successful' city centre where white bankers, elites and corporate businessmen live. Brooks acknowledges the parameters where elitism ends and grassroots communities begin when she diametrically opposes the 'gloss' and 'glass' of the corporate metropolis with the 'sandals' and 'flowercloth' of the economically poor but culturally rich South Side where black consciousness is something felt in the air.[102] Influencing Brooks and Madhubuti, the wall became an inspiration for their own poetry that sought to elevate the consciousness of their listeners.

Fig. 12. Young girls sit amongst artists to watch them paint, photographer unknown.

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[102] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017. Twelve days prior to the dedication of the *Wall of Respect*, the *Chicago Picasso*, an untitled sculpture by Pablo Picasso was unveiled in Daley Plaza in the Chicago Loop. The high class, abstract art—which many black artists class as "art of the elite"—stands in contrast to the grassroots mural in Chicago's South Side, and this is something Brooks acknowledges in her diptych poems "The Wall" and "The Chicago Picasso" in *In The Mecca* (1968). When alluding to the 'gloss' and 'glass' of the city's North Side, she could be referencing the Chicago Picasso.

Whilst the democratising process of creating the *Wall of Respect* strengthened the unity of the community, the success of the mural's consciousness-raising can also be measured in the responses to the wall. The wall was more than a static piece of artwork in the neighbourhood (fig. 12.) Examining the interactive relationship between local residents and the mural shows how successful the *Wall of Respect* was as a site of collective uplift, self-transformation, and spatial reclamation, influencing those who came into contact with it. As shown in figure 12, the site of the wall became a space for community members to meet and interact with each other during its creation. Residents frequently talked with the muralists as they gazed and passed judgment on the images around them. As we see in the above photograph, three young girls casually take up seats next to panels of Muhammad Ali and Wilt Chamberlain. Scattered around their feet are buckets of paint, torn up newspapers and a handful of paintbrushes. In much the same way that these inanimate objects became an integral part of the mural-making process, so too did the three young girls who—emblematic of the broader community at 43rd and Langley—offered input from local residents for whom the mural belonged. Additionally, the mural encouraged local community activity from older residents, to gang leaders, and to young children who, shortly after the wall was created, gave "tours" to visitors—turning a profit by charging them a quarter per tour (fig. 13).[103] Whilst the mural stood as a talisman of black consciousness in the streets of 43rd and Langley, residents like young Paul Higgins, interacted with the site of imagination by using the wall to elevate not only their own consciousness, but the consciousness of those in the community—even if the motivation was to make some pocket money.

When OBAC and Walker painted the mural, "they thought they would have to watch it 24 hours a day," Haki Madhubuti confessed, but "the people watched the wall, the people in the community," he continued.[104] Shortly after its creation, the warring gangs of the Black Disciples and the Blackstone Rangers informally declared 43rd and Langley a 'neutral ground' for gang activity. "The Black Disciples who was basically in that area, they decided that they'd protect it from whatever," Wade said in a 2018 interview, and "they saw that it was important in terms of what we were trying to do, and what the community was responding to."[105] Understanding the power of the mural to collectively uplift the local community, Chicago's deadliest street gangs took it upon themselves to become protectors of the wall when they policed it day and night to deter vandals and protect the paints and scaffolding from being

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[103] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 31.

[104] Tony Smith, "Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti ... Hero's on the Wall of Respect," YouTube Video, 06:24, August 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVqVOr6UHFE.

[105] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018.

stolen. During the mural's four-year life-cycle, not a single act of vandalism befell the wall.[106] Its potency for gang members even stretched into the afterlife when Herbert Colbert—a local gang leader-turned-community organiser who acted as prime liaison between OBAC and local residents—was shot dead. His body was later propped up against the wall.[107] The *Wall of Respect* "in all ways…was a collective project," Alkalimat recalled, and by carving out a black space of pride in the community, OBAC created pioneering template to elevate black consciousness and to begin reclaiming the white barriers of a *de facto* segregated enclave.[108]

Fig. 13. Neighbourhood resident, Paul Higgins gives tour to visitors of the wall, photographer unknown.

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[106] Donaldson, "Upside the Wall."

[107] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *Wall of Respect,* 31. The mural also became a frequent site of community organising and street performance, but this is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

[108] Ibid., 32.

Shortly after 1967, Walls of Respect emerged in St. Louis (1968), Watts (1968), and Birmingham (1969), slotting neatly into the growing exterior mural movement that yielded more than 1,500 murals in virtually every urban Black community in the nation.[109] "The *Wall of Respect* was just phenomenal," Masequa Myers, Executive Director of the South Side Community Arts Center suggested. "[I]t was uplifting when you saw pictures and displays" of your black heroes, she continued, and it was "uplifting on the fact that it was bringing people together."[110] In 1967 when the *Wall of Respect* was painted, it was ground-breaking, not only because it was the first African American street mural in the United States, but also because it became a manifestation of the decade's black consciousness. The *Wall of Respect* was painted on a wall in an impoverished, all-black community, and filled that wall with a pantheon of black heroes to show black communities who they are and where they have been. Providing a tangible space for the expression of black consciousness where "new identities would arise", OBAC and Bill Walker fused "social content and historical foundation" together in an outdoor environment to create an unprecedented template for an unprecedented cultural form so successful that it rippled throughout every major city in the US North, evolving in form, content and meaning.[111] As these touchstones of black consciousness emerged in cities such as San Francisco and Detroit, they became imbued with dual purposes—not only to elevate black consciousness within black communities, but to create new spaces of interaction within the black community. Whilst black consciousness remained the ideological bedrock of exterior black muralism at the height of the Black Power Movement, the need to create spaces of education and communication loomed large as black America was continually erased from mainstream narratives. This led to an evolution in the iconography on the walls from pantheons of historic and contemporary heroes to narrative scenes and symbols from black history. With this shift in iconography came a transformation of black community walls into visual newspapers in the streets of Chicago's South Side, and unofficial history textbooks in the streets of Bayview-Hunters Point.

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[109] Donaldson, "Upside the Wall."

[110] Masequa Myers quotation in Tony Smith, "Black is Beautiful."

[111] Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," 34.

Chapter Three

"Africa had no history, and neither did I": Communication, Education and Alternate Literacy in Murals of the Black Power Movement

> Take me into the museum and show me myself, show me my people, show me soul America. If you cannot show me myself, if you cannot teach my people what they need to know—and they need to know the truth, and they need to know that nothing is more important than human life—then why shouldn't I attack the temples of America and blow them up?
>
> <div align="right">June Jordan, poet, essayist, teacher, activist.[1]</div>

> I am a father with a daughter who is seventeen-years-old, a son who is sixteen, and another daughter who is eleven. A part of my obligation to my children is that I construct for them some heroic figure that confers upon them a sense of their importance denied them by our racist board of education.
>
> <div align="right">Ossie Davis, actor and activist on James Baldwin Speaks![2]</div>

"When I was growing up, I was taught in American history books that Africa had no history and neither did I," James Baldwin lamented during the 1965 Oxford Union Debate. "I was a savage about whom the less said the better."[3] Similarly in 1968, when actor Ossie Davis went on *James Baldwin Speaks!* to discuss William Styron's problematic novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), he also commented on the invisibility of black America in school textbooks and public history, emphasising the importance of elevating black heroes in America's public imagination.[4] The erasure of black history and culture permeated every facet of mainstream American life, as noted by Baldwin and Davis, with public and educational spaces like school curriculums, presses, museums and art galleries falling victim to such racial biases. As these white spaces excluded African American cultural and imaginative presences, narratives of blackness found outlets through other means. Whilst the previous chapter showed how murals operated as physical manifestations of the 1960s new black consciousness, this chapter shows how muralists of the Black Power Movement used these touchstones of black consciousness to turn walls into interactive sites of alternate literacy. Throughout this chapter we see how murals transformed walls into unofficial museums, newspapers and history textbooks in the streets of black America to counter the erasure of black history and culture, empower local

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[1] Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 2013), 1.

[2] Ossie Davis quotation in Matthew Siegfried, "James Baldwin Speaks! The Confessions of Nat Turner: with William Styron and Ossie Davis – May 28, 1968," YouTube Video, 55:25, May 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCkpiRM0G4g.

[3] The Riverbends Channel, "James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley (1965)," YouTube Video, 58:57, October 27, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w.

[4] Matthew Siegfried, "James Baldwin Speaks."

residents, and reclaim racial confinement—this time not only the physical isolation of black communities, but the intellectual restrictions from institutional spaces such as the news media and public school.[5]

Institutions such as art galleries and museums were elitist, with a select number of curators and artists deciding which new talent to invite into the inner circle. "For the average person – the average artist – there was no way to enter [the art gallery] unless they got, literally what the slaves got: a note from the master to come in," black artist Benny Andrews recounts of the racial politics of institutional art spaces in the 1960s.[6] Prior to 1967, "one could count fewer than a dozen museum exhibitions that had featured the work of African American artists," and on rare occasions when the work of black artists was shown, "it was typically in segregated contexts."[7] On the rare chance African American history and culture were included in white mainstream galleries and museums, it sat uncomfortably in sites like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Whitney, and the Smithsonian Institution that "represented grand paeans to European culture, with neo-classic architecture and extensive collections of objects categorised as either 'high culture' or 'primitive,'" and when institutions such as these attempted a racial breadth to their collections, they failed unceremoniously.[8]

In 1968, The Whitney held their controversial exhibition, *The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America,* curated by William Agee. Although African American artists were a large presence during this period, creating artwork during the Harlem Renaissance and in Works Progress Administration (WPA) Arts Programs, Agee excluded work by black artists throughout this exhibition, even by such senior established figures like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden. The show included over one hundred works of art by eighty artists and yet black art would not adorn the walls of the Whitney. In response, artists Faith Ringgold, Benny Andrews, Henri Ghent, and a host of others picketed the museum in 1968 before mounting a counter-exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem that same year, titled *Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the 1930s.* The exhibition showcased around fifty works of art from twenty artists such as Charles Alston, Richmond Barthé, Romare Bearden, Joseph Delaney, Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden, Jacob Lawrence and Augusta Savage.

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[5] Although murals evolve and change in form and content from the original *Wall of Respect* as seen in Chapter 2, it does not mean murals in this chapter, and the succeeding chapter, do not also elevate a collective and individual black consciousness.

[6] Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

A year later, in 1969, The Met further stoked the fires of representational inequality when it participated in an exhibition that—whilst attempting to rebuff the appearance of a white elite institution—would also become a huge exhibition failure. Titled *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968,* and co-curated by The Met director Thomas Hoving, and director of the Visual Arts Program for New York City Allon Schoener, the exhibition attempted to explore the cultural history of Harlem's black community, given its close proximity to The Met, yet there was one major flaw with the exhibition: it failed to engage with Harlem's black community. Omitting African American artwork, regardless of the extensive catalogue of Harlem Renaissance artists and artworks, the exhibition instead favoured photographic reproductions of life in Harlem, presented as a docu-journalistic, sociological study replete with images and historical documentation organised by a white curator.

In the 1960s and 1970s, in response to such whitewashing and misrepresentations of black history and culture, a groundswell of black community museums emerged in big cities, seeking to challenge and re-create "new national memories and identities that incorporated the ideas, events, objects and places tied to black history."[9] Staffed primarily by black community leaders instead of museum professionals, the DuSable Museum of African American History (1961), the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History (1965), the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (1967), the Studio Museum in Harlem (1967) and the African American Museum of Philadelphia (1976) sprung up to combat the airbrushing of black history from America's national identity. And alongside these black grassroots institutions sat a collection of black murals with the same goal. In 1971, in response to The Met and the Whitney's offensive and lacklustre attempts to showcase black art in mainstream institutions, The Studio Museum in Harlem mounted another retaliatory exhibition, only this time removing the politics of interior spaces altogether. Subverting the process of museum-going, Studio Museum director, Edward Spriggs, organised a series of mural paintings that brought the museum into the streets of the community to insert "black art into the lives of ordinary Harlem residents—people who were not regular museumgoers."[10] 'Studio in the Streets' was the exterior counterpart to the museum, and through a series of six murals, Curtis Bryan, Joseph Delaney, Babtunde Folayemi, Dindga McCannon, Ted Pontiflet and Vincent Wilson contested the whitewashed narratives lining elitist downtown institutions. They introduced "bold artistic images and the images underlying them, within the context of the broader national Black Arts

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[9] Burns, *From Storefront to Monument,* 5.
[10] Ibid, 3; Janet Braun-Reinitz and Jane Weissman, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), 45.

Movement" into the Harlem community at West 126th and West 128th streets.[11] The attempted cultural and racial diversity from institutions such as The Met motivated Spriggs to reconceptualise murals in the streets of Harlem, seeking to reach as many members of the local community as possible. Turning the Studio Museum inside out to show prideful images of black history, 'Studio in the Streets' depicted honest, unhampered black art of Ghanaian fertility symbols; possible links between Egyptians and the Masai people of Kenya; and images of black Christ figures.[12] By manipulating the physical boundaries of a black community museum, Spriggs reconceptualised how murals had the ability to become exterior counterparts to community museums in the 1960s and 1970s, and part of a movement to contest the white co-option of black history.

As shown by 'Studio in the Streets', black muralism in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to remedy Baldwin's and Davis's concerns. These murals created an alternative space for black history to flourish. The murals of Bryan, Delaney, Wilson, McCannon, Pontiflet and Folayemi are fundamental because of their unique and ground-breaking conceptualisation as—quite literally—a black museum in the streets. However, their role as an exterior community museum is already documented in *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City* (2009), and makes up only a small fragment of the communicative, educative murals of the 1960s and 1970s that emerged to subvert the white biases of institutional spaces.[13] Given the scholarly coverage of mural-based museums in black communities, this chapter instead focuses on how murals gave black communities access to educational spaces by transforming walls into visual newspapers and black studies textbooks to create interactive sites of learning. Current scholarship on the black press and Black Studies curriculums in the 1960s all chart the intricate, narrative history of their presence nationwide, but none assess the visual grassroots methods of education and communication created by murals in local communities.[14] When black studies

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[11] Braun-Reinitz and Weissman, *On the Wall*, 45.

[12] The backlash to these exhibitions was extensive and reverberated throughout the following decade. For more information on these exhibitions see Susan Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 67; 81; 109; 129.

[13] There is a paucity of primary material and artist testimony conveying the mural as a museum in the streets, asides from Dana Chandler's statement speaking of his 1968 murals in Roxbury, Boston: "There is no Black art in the [Boston] Museum of Fine Arts…so we are going to utilize the facades of buildings in our community for our museum." I had a phone conversation with Dana Chandler however, he did not sign an ethics approval form granting me permission to use our conversation in this thesis. Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art,* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 36. Jane Weissman and Janet Braun-Reinitz conducted the case study of 'Studio in the Streets' and unfortunately the six muralists involved in the project are no longer contactable, rendering Weissman and Braun-Reinitz's case study as the only source available on this project.

[14] Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2006); *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords,* directed by Stanley Nelson Jr., (1999; Washington D.C.: PBS Documentaries, 1999); James D. Sullivan, *On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broadsides from the 1960s* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press Urbana & Chicago, 1997); Peniel E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism and the Black Power Movement," *Journal of African American History* 88, no. 22, The

curriculums and the black press both sought to insert black history and culture into America's public imagination, much like black community museums, they were complemented by a slew of complex black murals. These educative murals operated as their unofficial counterparts in the streets of black America, transcending the restrictions of their official equivalents and becoming equally potent cultural forms. They could circumnavigate the issues of "shortened hours [and] limited financial resources"; they were available to read, study, and view at all hours of the day and night; and they offered an affective visual language accessible to illiterate members of the community.[15]

Therefore, this chapter explains how certain murals of the 1960s and 1970s stood at the helm of teaching black history and culture whilst also acting as channels of news dissemination during the Black Power era. It assesses how murals operated as alternate forms of literacy in the streets of black America by visually conveying news headlines that were left out of the mainstream media, and black history overlooked in school curriculums. The first section of this chapter conceptualises the evolving *Wall of Truth* (1968) by Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade as a visual newspaper in the streets of Chicago's South Side. The second part of this chapter frames the large-scale *Education is Truth* (1971) and *The Fire Next Time I* and *II* (1977), by Dewey Crumpler in San Francisco as street-based, community textbooks. We see how muralists made visible the invisible walls of the "dark ghetto" in Chicago's South Side and Bayview-Hunters Point by transforming walls into sites of black imagination and knowledge, but also how their murals operate as a palimpsest. In section one, the mural becomes a vessel of communication through its ability to layer local and national news stories with historical memory and community activist paraphernalia, thus creating a bricolage of information, and in section two, the mural also becomes a palimpsest of transdisciplinary information by layering art with references to literature, music, history and diasporic spirituality to facilitate learning. When black murals lined the streets of black enclaves around the north and west coast in the 1960s, they responded to the whitewashing of black history in an unprecedented manner. By turning the walls in their communities into visual newspapers and history textbooks, muralists not only asserted black ownership of a racialised space, but they sought to prove, at any time of the day or night, that black America *did* have a history, and that it needed to be shared.

History of Student Activism, (Spring 2003): 182-203; *Agents of Change,* directed by Abby Ginzberg and Frank Dawson (2016; Berkeley: Kovno Communications, 2016) DVD; and LaGarret J. King, "The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society" (2017).

[15] Burns, *From Storefront to Monument,* 5.

"Really telling it like it was": Murals as Visual Newspapers

In December of 1969, on the streets of 43rd and Langley, a small stencil of Fred Hampton appeared on the *Wall of Truth*. Although the mural was created in the summer of 1969, it was by no means a finished product. Muralist Bill Walker wanted the mural to become "a newspaper magazine to paint out what was happening during this particular time period," complete with pseudo front-page headlines, smaller internal news stories, an obituary section, and a comments page.[16] So when Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was shot and killed by the FBI on December 4, 1969, the *Wall of Truth* reported it to the black community of Chicago. The mural became a bastion of current and historic information. From week to week and month to month, Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade "changed the scenery and the event—or whatever we had painted—to bring it up to current events."[17] Throughout the mural's two-year lifecycle, scenes of lynching, poverty-ridden families, the Vietnam War, drug addiction, and black heroes of history transformed the wall into panels depicting local and national headlines frequently reported in the black press, but so commonly omitted from mainstream white newspapers.

The black press emerged in 1827 to offer something "the big 'white' newspapers left out" of print—stories of the black experience.[18] The black press became a new space of communication that rebuffed the racist, segregated white press by providing an intellectual arena that reported on black experiences. Since its inception with New York's *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, the black press had lasting success throughout the early 1900s. The *Chicago Defender* reached over half a million African Americans a week and circulation increased to over two million during World War II when the newspaper was used to mobilise support for the Double 'V' Campaign.[19] Yet by the 1960s, circulation of black newspapers declined when a handful of white newspapers became integrated. From 1965, when the Watts riots ricocheted throughout the urban north, white newsrooms suddenly looked for reporters to go undercover for news stories on the Long Hot Summers. The white press needed to "find reporters and photographers who could be dispatched to America's inner cities without looking too conspicuous," and as a result, they raided "the vast talent pool they long had ignored in the

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[16] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[17] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018.
[18] Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, xi.
[19] Nelson Jr. *The Black Press*. In 1905, the *Chicago Defender* was established by Robert Abbott and by 1910, the *Defender* was being sent into the south and garnering an audience two hundred times larger than it did Chicago. It outsold every newspaper in the country and by 1920, it had a circulation of 100,000 copies a week. Unlike the mainstream press, it was one of the few newspapers to report the horrors of lynching on the front page. Between 1882 and 1919, 3,000 African Americans were lynched, equating to 4.5 lynchings a day. Abbott used the *Chicago Defender* to lash out against the evils of lynching. *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords,* directed by Stanley Nelson Jr..

newsrooms of black newspapers and magazines."[20] Subsequently, black papers lost the monopoly on black news, with a wealth of black readers steadily turning to the newly integrated news of the white press.[21]

But although African Americans had a physical presence in the integrated white presses, they still had "little influence over the print and mass media's production and distribution of images."[22] Whilst true integration at white presses would have seen an equal distribution of stories detailing the entire spectrum of black life, instead the daily white press played up "the newer class blacks, the successful doctors and lawyers, the NAACP and the Urban Leagues," leaving grassroots community stories about drug epidemics, rates of poverty and racial inequality on the sidelines.[23] The effects of such journalistic 'integration' resulted in stronger "'community oriented' black presses reporting solely on news about blacks that did not appear in the white press," covering stories like "the home parties, receptions and so on; not the first black vice-president but the guy who got a promotion maybe from a janitor to a supervisor."[24] Buoyed by the power of the community-oriented black newspapers and journals like *Muhammad Speaks,* the *Black Panther,* the *Chicago Sun-Times, Detroit Chronicle, Freedomways,* the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Milwaukee Star,* muralists realised how "the black community could have control over the mass communication of messages through art on the streets."[25] Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade therefore took control over the distribution of black images by creating visual counterparts to the black press in the streets, subverting the institutions of the white press by visualising the stories seldom told in their newspapers (fig 1. and fig. 2).

[20] Washburn, *The African American Newspaper,* xi.
[21] This quotation is from an interview with African American journalists for Henry G. La Brie III's 1973 study on the black press. James D. Sullivan, *On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broadsides from the 1960s* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press Urbana & Chicago, 1997), 200.
[22] Jeff Huebner, *Bill Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Arts Movement* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, unpublished manuscript), unpaginated.
[23] Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 202.
[24] Simeon Booker quotation in ibid., 202.
[25] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated; Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 202.

Fig. 1. Bill Walker (date and mural unknown).

Fig. 2. Eugene Eda Wade, 2017. Chicago Cultural Center.

When Bill Walker conceptualised his murals as ever-evolving vessels of black news, it remains unclear if he was directly influenced by the turbulent climate of the black press during the sixties. Yet when Eugene Eda Wade was asked whether the *Wall of Truth* was used as an alternate form of communication to relay broader black news omitted from mainstream newspapers and channels, he replied:

> I think so. I think that was Bill's concept. He wanted people to know what was going on, and to show what was happening. "Here, you can read this, we are painting it out for you, we are telling you the things that are happening," and so you're absolutely right…yes.[26]

Sharing an audience and address with the *Wall of Respect* meant the *Wall of Truth* reported news to an overlooked community that was "one hundred percent black and poor—destitute…with gangs, with prostitution, with drugs," and where death by gangs, police brutality and overdoses was sadly common.[27] Yet although sharing both a street and spectators, the murals offered different purposes to the impoverished community at 43rd and Langley, thus highlighting the malleable nature of black muralism by showing how there was not just one mural type, but that murals looked different and had multiple purposes within black communities during the Black Power Movement. Whilst the former mural promoted racial pride and elevated black consciousness by extolling black role models, leaders and liberators, the latter wove narrative scenes of poverty, brutality and racism into the fabric of the urban environment. "If one's message was timeless," Jeff Huebner describes of the *Wall of Respect,* "the other's was more topical, based on headlines of the day."[28] Published on a weekly or monthly basis—much like the black press of the decade—the *Wall of Truth* reported honest, gritty news to the community so frequently forgotten in America's mainstream narrative. It told of the stories "people were actually experiencing, such as hunger, things of that sort; the reality of hatred, the reality of things that we felt the community should deal with," Bill Walker suggested.[29]

When newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* ran a headline reading, "Black Jobless Rate Still Unchanged"; the *Chicago Metro News* published a story titled, "Periled by Drug Epidemic"; and the *Milwaukee Star* wrote an article titled, "Drugs strangle ghetto," Walker absorbed the reported topics and aesthetically translated them into a visual vocabulary published on the walls of the community.[30] Reporting local news stories from the area of 43rd and Langley, "Bill was

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[26] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018

[27] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

[28] Huebner, *Bill Walker*, unpaginated.

[29] Oral history interview with William Walker, 1991 June 12-14, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 33.

[30] "Black Jobless Rate Still Unchanged." *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973),* Feb 21, 1970.

painting what he saw and what he knew."[31] "There were people in the neighborhood that didn't have food, there were mothers that didn't have food enough to feed their children…this is what we saw," Wade suggested.[32] In the image of the harsh, honest, local news stories reported in papers like *Bulletin, The Milwaukee Star, Chicago Metro News,* and *Crusader,* Walker and Wade turned the white barriers of racial confinement into their printing press to report the local stories of a pregnant single mother, a starving orphaned boy, and a young girl forced into prostitution.

Fig. 3. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

On one of the largest panels of the mural (fig. 3), multiple bleak vignettes graphically adopt the physical qualities of news articles reported on the inside of a newspaper by tessellating around each other in accordance with the size of each story. Three larger news stories occupy the majority of the 'page' whilst two smaller advert-like sections fill the empty space around them. Working in unison with the physical structure of the derelict building, Walker—painter of this section—artistically removes the fourth wall by painting a cross-section of the interior building to give the community an honest insight into the run-down structure. The wall, usually veiling the realities of daily life at 43rd and Langley, is torn down to report, in Gordon Parks-

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[31] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[32] Ibid.

like fashion, a trio of real narratives. The first inside story on the *Wall of Truth* gives passers-by a glimpse into the life of a young girl forced into prostitution (fig. 4). A father, pimp and daughter stand isolated in an empty apartment. The father grips the pimp's shoulders as the pimp, in a white hat and dark clothing, grasps at the young girl. His hands, large at almost half the size of the young girl's body, envelop her, drawing her into him: he has found his next employee and she cannot escape.

Fig. 4. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

The father gazes down at his daughter as she enters into a life he never imagined for her. The walls are dark, dank and worn and the floor is empty without a single possession in sight, rendering the bare apartment devoid of warmth. The girl stares directly out of her window, meeting the eyes of the viewer as an expression of resignation curves the contours of her face. Her young exterior has been hardened by her childhood in poverty and she no longer looks upon the world with a playful innocence, or even a naivety. Instead she is a victim to the cold, hunger and harsh reality of prostitution. However, conscious not to overwhelm the mural's narrative with melancholy, Walker gives a few strokes of optimism to the image. Although the adults' bodies fade into the background of the empty and foreboding tenement room—leaving them incomplete figures enveloped by poverty—he outlines the edges of the young girl's brown dress in lighter tones to accentuate her strong presence in the room and to indicate that, perhaps, a glimmer of hope remains in her future.

Fig. 5. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

"The reason we named it the *Wall of Truth* was because we dealt with subject matter relating to what was happening in the community," Bill Walker told Victor Sorell in an interview in 1991.[33] As the residents at 43rd and Langley read this news story and understood its resonance in their own community, they were met with an equally desolate sight in the next panel, one that that also rang true in their neighbourhood. A young child sits on the floor with his back against the wall and his hands clasped together as if praying for food to appear in the empty bowl between his legs (fig. 5). Around ten-foot tall, the somewhat emaciated figure stares lifelessly at a fixed point in the distance whilst a rat runs past his feet. Starvation and malaise

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[33] Oral history interview with William Walker, 40.

wash over his body as he inhabits a bare room with nothing but an empty plate and spoon in sight. The door remains ajar as he waits for a parent to return, or perhaps he just hopefully wishes for it—hands knitted tightly together at his chest, pleading for company as well as food. More concentrated with colour in this narrative, Walker subtly uses pastel shades of the Black Liberation flag—red, green and black—to nuance the mural with Pan-African ideologies concerned with the unification and liberation of African people. Although life appears bleak for the young boy as he rests his back against a stained wall, the allusion to the flag of Black Liberation—in addition to the cascade of light enveloping him from up above—tinge the apartment scene with the hint of promise and empowerment. Whilst the boy's face remains buried in the shadows, the pool of light bathing his feet steadily makes its way up his torso to illuminate his face with the hint of a brighter future. Walker outlines this vignette with a thick white border reminiscent of a Polaroid photograph, and in doing so, he evokes a form of docu-journalism. The polaroid operates as a real-life photograph and a truthful report of life at 43rd and Langley, taken to be displayed on the street's community newspaper.

The final and smallest room in the tenement reveals a pregnant mother surrounded by her three children (fig. 6). The children embrace her, cradling her stomach as she gazes upon them. Again, her room remains bare and the walls are blank and stained. Nothing fills the space but a table and chair. The mother forgoes food as she lays three empty plates out for her children in anticipation of their next meal; a glass of water will suffice for her. Her circumstances are unknown but considering the rife drug problems around 43rd and Langley, perhaps she uses drugs to ease her pain, echoing the stories of drug addiction reported in the black press. "At the age of 24 I had 2 little boys and was using drugs like heroin, Benzedrine, dexidrine, goof balls, speed, alcohol and 2 packs of cigarettes a day," a 1969 article in the *Crusader* reported:

> I had to have drugs every day. One day I looked at the life I was leading my 2 little boys into and realized the environment that I was causing them to live in was not at all good for them. I didn't want them to grow up to be like me.[34]

Although we cannot tell if the woman in the mural is involved with drugs, the community's relationship with drugs was inescapable, and haunts this panels.

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[34] *Crusader,* October 31, 1969, 3.

Fig. 6. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

With her hair styled naturally in an afro, Walker laces the image with a revolutionary subtext that sits harmoniously with the black, green and red colours of her neighbour's room. She is a woman politically and culturally fed by the Black Power Movement, because, as Larry Neal suggests, "For a Sister to wear her hair natural asserts the sacred and essentially holy nature of her body."[35] To Neal, the natural prepared her for "the message of a Rap Brown, a Robert Williams, a Huey Newton, a Maulana Karenga," because it destroyed the double consciousness spoken of by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).[36] A woman came to see herself "as a

[35] Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," in *Black Poets and Prophets: A Bold, Uncompromisingly Clear Blueprint for Black Liberation* ed. Woodie King and Earl Anthony (New York: Signet Classics, 1972), 162.
[36] Ibid.

more spiritually total person," and this woman passes this knowledge on to her children as they sit and listen intently at her feet.[37] Like the previous two images, Walker leaves a fragment of hope for viewers about the woman's future situation by highlighting her pregnant stomach with the lightest colour in the room. Whilst the young girl in room number one is outlined by a bright light, and the sitting boy in room number two slowly becomes bathed in a warm spotlight, the mother remains positive for the future of her unborn child as her pregnant stomach glows with faith.

This panel upon the *Wall of Truth,* however, is not the only one to mimic the characteristics of newspaper articles. Creating a site of constantly updated news in the black community, the muralists took their responsibilities seriously by adding a national dimension to their vessel of information. In a small panel to the far right of the mural, Arkansas-born muralist, Eddie Harris, ventured geographically further afield in his news story by "show[ing] people what was going on in the south" (fig. 7).[38] With his childhood spent picking cotton in Arkansas, Harris felt compelled to report southern news stories to the northern community in Chicago's South Side. "This wall was really better than [the *Wall of Respect*]," Harris admitted, because "it was more about poor people trying to survive, how black people were treated."[39] Only five years prior to the erection of the wall, three young civil rights workers named James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were lynched near Philadelphia, Mississippi. In 1967, newspapers like the *Milwaukee Star* reported on the trials surrounding their murders. With northern blacks facing "Modern day lynching" through police brutality, the threat of southern lynching still haunted black families.[40] Lynchings decreased in the South during 1950s and 1960s through the introduction of over 200 antilynching bills, yet the physical act was still very much alive. Harris therefore used his panel on the mural to ensure the horrors of southern racism were not disconnected from northern violence but were instead used to highlight the national reach of violence against all African Americans.

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.
[39] Ibid.
[40] *Milwaukee Star,* December 20, 1969, 4.

Fig. 7. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

His harrowing panel depicts a southern lynching scene. A strong, dark-wooded tree flanks the right-hand side of the image, and a thick branch extends across the panel with three black bodies hanging from it, lifelessly. The bodies dominate the centre of the image whilst the laughing, drinking images of four young white men are positioned above and below them—their skin marked and putrid, rotting with the infections of evil. Two men sit upon the extended

branch facing each other with their legs entwined as their icy blue hands grip bottles to drink from. Two further men stand at the base of the tree, joining in their celebration as they look up to the 'strange fruit' blowing in the wind above them. One man brandishes a cross with the initials 'K.K.K.' at the base of the panel as he stares up at the body of the central black figure, a smile etched into his face as he proudly holds aloft his totem of racism. With the lynched bodies painted in the centre of the panel, the African American men are entombed within the frame and trapped by the actions of racism. The tree creates an impenetrable border to the right-hand side of the panel, and the physical presence of the four white men barricades the top and bottom of the image, whilst chains, a scythe and a wooden pair of hands ornament the left-hand side of the mural. The inescapable pervasiveness of racism at every possible turn resulted in the death of these three young men, and even though the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act had both been passed in 1964 and 1965 respectively, black fatalities at the hands of white racists were still daily occurrences.

Yet much like the official black press, the news reported on the wall was not all "unrelentingly grim."[41] Walker and Wade carved out a large space on the mural to convey empowering and commemorative news stories to report on black history in similar, but more overtly radical fashion than in the *Wall of Respect*. Wanting to "make people aware of what had happened in terms of the struggle," the panel functioned as a visual obituary depicting heroes of history, interspersed with contemporaneous leaders (fig. 8).[42] Wade constructed a grid-like pantheon of black heroes with the likenesses of Marcus Garvey, Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, and a modern portrayal of Harriet Tubman wielding a rifle, wearing an afro, a modern dress and hoop earrings similar to those worn by Angela Davis. Alongside the visual commemoration of the deceased heroes of black history, Wade also included the likenesses of Fannie Lou Hamer and Stokely Carmichael— popular activists still working during the creation of the mural. "We were trying to bring about more awareness, just creating the continuation of a more militant mood in terms of what was happening and taking place in the community," Wade argued.[43] By supplementing the bleak realistic panels of life on 43rd and Langley, the visual obituary communicated a message of empowerment and resistance to the community, especially through the large and militant portrait of Nathaniel Turner.

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[41] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.
[42] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[43] Ibid.

Fig. 8. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

At around ten-foot tall, the shirtless portrait of Turner brandishes a bloodstained sword that has perhaps just taken the life of the man who shackled his wrists and stole his liberty. In an act of self-emancipation, he swipes the sword through the chains binding his freedom and breaks himself free, sending a fragment of the manacles flying into the distance. The sword is gripped firmly as the viewer imagines the muscles on his right arm twitching with the thought of revolution. Braced at his hip, the handle of a shotgun is supported as he wields it upwards in military fashion, pressing the cold steel into his cheek, perhaps about to fall in line with an army of Black Panthers. The use of colour is cleverly manipulated in this panel when Turner's torso is highlighted with accents of red to depict where the light contours his skin. In selecting red as the primary contrasting colour, however, Wade and Walker convey the aftermath of a bloody and violent confrontation upon Turner's body. The inflections of red upon his torso, as well as smattered red across the background, look like smudged, blood-ridden handprints grasping for mercy at the feet of the self-emancipator. Unshackled and liberated, the giant Turner wears a hardened expression on his face, eyes fixed and focused on his freedom. Whilst the image remains largely static—metaphorically representing the quiet after the storm—the dynamism of

the swinging chains haunts the panel to the point where the viewer can almost imagine the sound of slashed and clinking metal.

The visual, historical obituary sits comfortably alongside the interior news stories depicting southern lynchings and local stories of desperate poverty. In doing so, it mirrors characteristics typical of a newspaper by reporting local and national news, as well as printing obituaries.[44] These panels of the mural underscore how Walker and Wade transformed the exterior of a building into an unofficial visual counterpart to the black press, subverting the biases of the 'integrated' white news by telling stories commonly omitted from its printed pages. Yet, the *Wall of Truth* as a newspaper transcended the boundaries of the printed press, becoming—in some respects—more powerful than a newspaper by doing things a newspaper simply could not. The ephemerality of the press renders yesterday's newspapers obsolete almost immediately, readily discarded into the trash. However, the *Wall of Truth* avoids the issue of redundancy. The mural is less about erasure and is instead about addition. As a "changing daily bulletin board, a sort-of proto visual rap—the 'CNN of the streets,' oral folklore made visible, an early form of citizen journalism," the largest panel on the wall became a nucleus of information, constantly being added to with its visual content updated in accordance with the changing news.[45] News stories are not discarded or thrown away, and instead the malleable mural becomes a palimpsest of information with new stories—both historic and contemporary—being constantly layered on top of each other (fig. 9).

Articles and photographs from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Ebony, Jet,* the *Chicago Defender*, and the Civil Rights Movement photography book, *The Movement,* by Loraine Hansberry*,* were physically pasted onto the wall for local residents to gaze upon. By layering these written stories, as opposed to throwing them out, this panel of the mural was able to collectively visualise the diverse news stories from the black press in one united space, elevating them to new heights by keeping them constantly in the public consciousness and in conversation with one another. "As artists we felt that we had the right to paint what was going on…the African Liberation, the whole movement in terms of freedom and equality," Wade said.[46] As a result, the twelve-foot-long section became a bricolage of articles and images dealing with the contemporary racial subjects of Civil Rights, Black Power, the black diaspora, police brutality, and 'black is beautiful' (fig. 9). When Fred Hampton was assassinated on December 4, 1969, his stencil was layered over the newspaper cuttings. When rallies were held to protest racial poverty in black communities, posters were pasted onto the section, and when the growing presence of the

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[44] This will be picked up on in Chapter 5.
[45] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.
[46] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

Panthers intensified nationwide, images of gun-toting, beret-wearing men appeared on the panel. If the panels reporting on the starving families were the inside stories of the newspaper, and the historic faces were the obituary, then this section was the front page, constantly updated with the latest breaking news (fig. 9 and 10).

Fig. 9. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

Fig. 10. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

Unlike the other panels on the mural, this noticeboard of information held no constant artistic narrative. Instead, pages of the *Chicago Defender, Ebony* and *Jet* were cut out and immediately pasted onto the panel to create a bricolage of national news stories about black liberation, radicalism, and politics. Yet this nucleus of communication in the streets not only elevated the mural to heights beyond a newspaper due to its palimpsest-like qualities. The wall also had unique interactive capabilities. This panel was significantly different from the others on the mural—not only because of the frequency in which it changed—but also because it provided a collective space of informative written news requiring action from the members of the neighbourhood. It was a space where people could congregate (fig. 11).

Fig. 11. Men congregating in front of *Wall of Truth*. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

It reported how the 'ghetto' was getting 'gypped'; it gave key dates and times on when and where rallies and community protests would be held; and it displayed rallying cries to "Fight against Poverty [emphasis original]" in attempts to catalyse the community into action. Whilst this section occasionally depicted realistic stories of the blighted area of Chicago's South Side, it became an interactive noticeboard that challenged community members by offering solutions on how to combat the harrowing conditions reported by Walker. During the creation in 1969, Walker and Wade extended the functional purpose of this panel by placing easels in front of it for viewers to explore in a museum-like fashion, containing the next stories ready for print.

Yet, the *Wall of Truth* is not only conceptualised as a more powerful vessel of information due to its palimpsest-like qualities and its interactive relationship with community members. The affective nature of visual imagery enhances the mural's potency through its ability to visually connect periods of black history, and to reach illiterate community members. Reeling in the aftermath of Fred Hampton's assassination in 1969, Eugene Eda Wade was "really telling it like it was" when he published a visual news story of police brutality upon the *Wall of Truth*.[47] Going beyond the minimalist, commemorative stencil of Hampton's preaching

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[47] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated; Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 202.

figure spray-painted onto the mural as a quick homage to the slain leader, Wade's painting depicts the contorted body of a young man laying facedown on the sidewalk (fig. 12). Gunshots pierce his shoulder and chest as his downturned head inertly rests upon the cold, pale concrete. A small pool of blood spills from his face and escapes towards his unnaturally upturned hand. Quite clearly, the man is unarmed—his only weapon is the pen through which he scribes Claude McKay's 1919 lynching poem, 'If We Must Die.' The final line of the poem, "Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" is omitted from the re-written poem, and instead the twisted, lynched figure of Fred Hampton's composite desperately seeks to become the physical enactment of these words.[48] Pressed against the muted colours of the brick wall, the left side of his body conveys signs of struggle—no shoe and sock on the foot, a raised leg and a twisted arm—with the right side of his body attempting to 'fight back'. Tension courses from his outstretched hand to his dressed foot, as the scribed lines from the poem drift away from him in the wind.

The dying man's body is enveloped by a concrete halo, also perforated by the bullets of the assassinators, both of whom stand in the foreground wielding guns in similar fashion to the National Guard in cities like Little Rock, Selma and Birmingham. This is not their first killing. Uniformly gripping the gun, an icy blue hand is devoid of circulation—this is no longer a police officer, but an agent of death and injustice. The wielder of the second gun remains anonymous, however. Painting this image with Fred Hampton in mind, in a 2018 interview, Eugene Eda Wade lamented how Hampton was betrayed.[49] Here, Wade is referring to William O'Neal, who, in return for monthly stipends and the acquittal of his charges for car theft and impersonating a federal officer, infiltrated the Chicago Black Panther Party in order to provide counterintelligence to the Chicago Police Department (CPD), acting under the orders of J. Edgar Hoover's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Shortly after joining the Chicago Panther rank and file, O'Neal became Hampton's bodyguard, and throughout his time undercover with the Panthers, he supplied information and floor plans of the Panther headquarters to the CPD. The floor plans provided by O'Neal proved invaluable to the CPD, who raided the headquarters in the early hours of December 4, 1969, killing both Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. For working on the case, O'Neal was rewarded a bonus by the FBI.[50] Whilst

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[48] Claude McKay, "If We Must Die," (1919) The Poetry Foundation, accessed September 7, 2017, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44694/if-we-must-die.

[49] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, April 7, 2018.

[50] Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1988), 63-76. For more information on the assassination of Fred Hampton and the role of the COINTELPRO had on the Black Panther Party, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the*

O'Neal was an invaluable cog in Hoover's COINTELPRO machine, as an African American man, he was viewed as a traitor to his people. By omitting the second pair of hands gripping the gun on Wade's panel, a powerful warning about trust and loyalty is impressed upon the viewers of Chicago's South Side.

Fig. 12. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

When Wade painted the story of Hampton's assassination upon his mural in an act of commemoration, it was not due to the shortcomings of the black press, but instead due to the restrictions of written newspaper stories. In 1969 and 1970, a slew of newspapers with bold headlines erupted throughout black communities reporting on the Panther deaths. *Crusader* published a front-page article on December 12, reading: 'Chicago Panthers Slain By Police'; in the *Milwaukee Star* on December 20, an inside article read, 'Panther deaths bother Wilkins'; and the *Soul City Times* published an article titled, 'One chilly morning in Chicago.' Whilst the black press responded to the assassinations with written accounts of the incident, their form as a newspaper restricted them. They had the ability to write emotive statements such as "All hell

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United States (Massachusetts: South End Press, 1990); Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2008).

has broken loose in the City of Chicago!", as well as informative facts debunking lies from the police:

> Police claim shots flew from both ways. If so, the Panthers must have been using water pistols. The only evidence the police can point to thus far is a bullet hole in the front door of the apartment. A hole which doesn't look like a shot gun hole. Had the shot which caused the hole been fired from inside and missed the policeman, it would have landed on a wall behind them. There's no hole on that wall.[51]

Yet their confinement to the one-dimensional, written form leaves the accounts of a violent, unjust assassination with a less affective power over the reader. Reporting the important facts of the incident, the words of such articles are static and confined to the pages of a newspaper, unable to transcend historical barriers to underscore the continuum of black killing and injustice, which Wade's panel does. In the mural's panel, through an emotional, visual narrative, Wade positions Hampton's assassination as a contemporary form of lynching by invoking the words and memory of McKay's 1919 poem. Additionally, whilst the news articles reporting Hampton's assassination were emotive, they were impenetrable to illiterate members of the community, thus quashing their affective power and making the newspaper a less accessible source of information and communication. "When you have a language on a wall, it is only readable by those who are literate," Victor Sorell discussed with Bill Walker in a 1991 oral history interview; "one wants to try and be as universal as possible with a public wall, and so you have pros and cons with respect to both the use of words and images," he continued.[52] "The masses of black people aren't readers, but activists," Black Panther Minister of Culture Emory Douglas explained, and by frontloading a visual language, murals spoke to not only literate members of the community, but also those who 'weren't readers,' thus making murals a more accessible way to receive local and national news.[53] As Sorell points out, murals have a discursive function. Operating on another level, mural images "communicate[d] very direct

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[51] *Soul City Times*, December 27, 1969, 12.

[52] Oral history interview with William Walker, 40.

[53] Emory Douglas, "Position Paper #1 on Revolutionary Art (1968)", Its About Time Black Panther Party, accessed June 12, 2017. http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/emory_art/pdf/Position_Paper_on_Revolutionary_Art_No1.pdf. The importance of the image-text relationship on a mural is something mirrored in the artwork of Emory Douglas for the *Black Panther*. In every issues of the *Black Panther,* Douglas supplemented the written component of the newspaper with a visual poster on the back page to be ripped out and pasted onto the walls of the community. Akin to murals, Douglas and the Panther supporters used the community as their gallery when "these extraordinary works of art were not displayed on pristine gallery walls, but [were] wheat-pasted on abandoned buildings in ghettos." They were put up everywhere—from "storefront windows, fences, doorways, telephone poles and booths," to "buses, alleyways, gas stations, barbershops, beauty parlors, Laundromats and liquor stores." Just like murals, his posters were works of art for the community that translated messages into a visual medium. Colette Gaither, "What Revolution Looks Like: The Work of Black Panther Artist Emory Douglas," in Sam Durant, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 96.

messages…because they illustrate, if you will, a lost or silenced history."[54] Whilst a newspaper would be almost defunct to an illiterate member of the community, a viewer unable to read Claude McKay's poem upon the mural would be able to transcend the written qualities and instead access the heart of the visual news story through the image of Hampton's contorted, dying body.

The visual language printed upon the *Wall of Truth* was both potent and affective—so potent in fact, that the *Chicago Sun-Times* deemed Wade's commemoration of Fred Hampton "as powerful as Orozco's 'Christ Destroying His Own Cross' at Dartmouth University."[55] The strength of the mural's visual language, in tandem with its unique purpose of conveying accessible information and communication in the streets of one of America's most impoverished neighbourhoods, made it a target for white America, who were uncomfortable with its presence. On August 14, 1969, in front of two hundred people, Walker nailed a hand-written plaque to the side of a derelict building that read, 'We the people of this community claim this building in order to preserve what is ours' (fig. 13). To the community at 43rd and Langley, the mural was more than a piece of art. Walker and Wade had successfully transformed the wall into a black printing press, a pictorial language, a vessel of communication for a community, and a touchstone of black pride, and in 1969, the subversive power of the mural caught the eye of the FBI.

Although Chicago's South Side had been drawn up by white architects, black residents used the *Wall of Truth* to reclaim the space. To create, as Robin D.G. Kelley suggests of radical art, "a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling," Walker and Wade crafted an interactive site of communication in the streets of a racially segregated neighbourhood that signified the presence of an all-black community and reported news commonly omitted from the mainstream white press.[56] It celebrated radical, militant imagery from the past and present, and proved a nightmare for J. Edgar Hoover. "We had the police, the FBI, all kinds of law enforcement down there to see what we were doing," Eugene Eda Wade recalled.[57] "We knew we had spies and people that were watching us…they would take pictures of whatever we were doing, and they would ask us questions," he continued.[58] To the FBI, the *Wall of Truth* symbolised—much like it did to the black community—a space where black knowledge, nationalism and pride could flourish, so when Mayor Daley unveiled his plans for urban renewal

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[54] Oral history interview with William Walker, 41.
[55] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* 30.
[56] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 11.
[57] Author's telephone interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.
[58] Ibid.

throughout the South Side of Chicago, Hoover breathed a sigh of relief. Protests for the proposed urban renewal rumbled throughout the South Side, reaching boiling point on August 14. By the summer of 1969, the mural had reached "priceless monument" status in the community when swathes of local residents turned out to protect their visual source of information from being razed.[59] Demonstrations stretched over a two-week period, attracting a 150-car parade and over a thousand protestors, including civic leaders, government officials and the Black Panthers. "The wall must stand 'even if it means open warfare with the pig power structure,'" Illinois Panther, Willie Calvin, threatened.[60] The protests were a success, and on August 28, 1969, Third Ward Alderman, Ralph Metcalfe, drew cheers when he announced that plans for demolition had stalled. The mural remained a visual newspaper in the South Side community for two more years, until March 1971, when it was burned down, along with the *Wall of Respect*, in a suspect fire.

Although the physical existence of the *Wall of Truth* was short-lived, its legacy was not. It turned the walls of 43rd and Langley into an unofficial vessel of black news—subversive and occasionally more powerful than its official counterpart, the black press. The mural became "a newspaper [that] people [came] and read from week to week," Walker suggested.[61] Creating a new interactive purpose for black murals, Walker politicised his artwork by subverting the biased politics of white institutional spaces of communication: if white mainstream newspapers relegated the black grassroots experience to the margins, Walker and Wade would create a space to reclaim such news by pasting it onto the walls of the community, turning the walls of confinement into spaces of knowledge. Created from the perspective of black voices, murals provided honest, informative and empowering pictorial languages, and by the mid-1970s, they were no longer only on the streets of Chicago. Shortly after the *Wall of Truth* sprung up in the South Side, muralists across the country scribed visual languages into the streets of their own *de facto* segregated hometowns to counter biased mainstream narratives and assert their presence in isolated neighbourhoods. In the streets of Bayview-Hunters Point, a local muralist by the name of Dewey Crumpler transformed the walls of his black community into textbooks of black history, etching historical memories of heroes erased from school curriculums onto the walls of the urban environment.

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[59] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

Fig. 13. Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Truth* (one panel), (1968), Chicago, Illinois.

"Bringing the community into the campus": Murals as Black Studies Curriculums

"Why did black people leave Africa?" Miss Martin asked a group of young African American school children as they toured around the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (ANM) in Washington D.C. "Because they were afraid of animals," the school children shouted back in unison.[62] Reported in a 1973 article in the *Washington Sunday Star,* ANM assistant director Zora B. Martin recalled how a group of young school children were unaware of their own history whilst touring one of the capital's museums. "Black people didn't want to leave their homes. White people came to Africa, separated the families, and put them into boats. When black people were brought to America, they called them by a different name. Do you know what that was?" Miss Martin asked as a follow up question, this time with less expectation in her voice.[63] "White people?" a child retorted. "No," Miss Martin replied, "they called them slaves."[64]

Although exemplifying a single case study in Washington D.C. in the 1970s, the case of Miss Martin and her group of school children reported in the *Washington Sunday Star* reflected the ubiquitous lack of black history in textbooks and curriculums throughout schools and colleges nationwide. These institutional spaces of knowledge and learning were full of biased narratives reflecting white-only history, relegating black historical experiences to the sidelines. "All the history books have been untruthful…—not with lies—but by what it excluded from the material," ANM museum director John Kinard lamented.[65] As a result, in the 1960s, with the Black Power tenets of self-determination, liberation and empowerment reverberating throughout the country, there was a pronounced nationwide push to bring African American history out from the shadows and place it firmly onto the pages of syllabi, undergraduate courses and history books. The demand for Black Studies degrees peppered cities across the country in tandem with protests to include black history on K-12 curriculums, all in an effort to undo what James Baldwin lamented in 1965: "that Africa had no history, and neither did I."[66]

James Turner, Northwestern PhD student-turned-director of the Black Studies Center at Cornell, wrote in *Ebony* that "the subordination of black people is perpetuated by the educational system, which either refuses to educate or deliberately and systematically mis-educates Black children."[67] The effects of mis-education were emotionally exhausting to black students as one young girl recounts:

> By the time I reached sophomore year I was emotionally exhausted with the material I had to master in classes. I was taught to worship Western civilization, and I could hardly believe

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[62] Burns, *From Storefront to Monument,* 72.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] The Riverbends Channel, "James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley (1965)."
[67] James Turner, "Black Students and their Changing Perspective," *Ebony,* August 1969, 138.

that racial repression was also a fact of history. Balancing inconsistencies and omissions of knowledge is too much for a black student to take alone. When the movement hit Radcliffe—it was a matter of clutching for a straw to save my very soul.[68]

In response to the pervasive, deliberate and systematic mis-education of black students, universities and high schools across the country started effecting change at a grassroots level in the 1960s. Between 1967 and the early 1970s, demands for Black Studies departments and curriculums increased as militant students at both predominantly white institutions, like Columbia University, Cornell and Yale, and historically black universities and colleges (HBCU) like Howard University, protested and staged sit-ins in order to take control of their education.[69] In Chicago for example, African American college students established the Congress of Black College Students and held meetings at the Umoja Student Center. Similarly, various organisations were formed by black students at the South Side's Harper High School, creating groups like the Black Students for Defense and Black Unity; the Afro-American History Club; and Black Students for Advancement. This collection of groups emerged in Chicago to challenge the school administration into developing inclusive curricula; to invest in the academic progression of black students; and to protect themselves from racial violence in the community.[70] In Newark, where the school dropout rate was around 30 per cent, community members demanded reforms such as the teaching of black history from a grade school level; support for a more community controlled school; and a more equitable plan for more black administrators in the educational system. In Berkeley, California, black students appeared before the school board in 1968 to demand more "soul" in their school.[71] But whilst waves of protest rippled across the country from coast to coast in the hope of establishing Black Studies departments and curriculums, the epicentre of Black student activism came from San Francisco State University (SFSU)—home to the largest college strike in US history.[72]

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[68] Ibid, 139.

[69] Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy", 188.

[70] Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 36.

[71] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 103; Rose Marie Walker Levey, "Black Studies in Schools: A Review of Current Policies and Programs," *Education U.S.A. Special Report* (Washington, D.C.: National School Public Relations Associations, 1969), 17. As a result of these demands in Berkeley, school officials agreed and by 1970, Berkeley's high schools had sweeping black studies programs offering several courses such as: Afro-American History, Afro-American Literature, African Civilizations, African Dance, Economics of Afro-Americans, and Afro-American Journalism. For more information on the rates of Black Studies courses integrated into curriculums on a state level, see the above report by Rose Marie Walker Levey.

[72] Kristina Rizga, "Black Studies Matter: How one of the nation's biggest—and most violent—campus protests brought diversity to the rest of America," Mother Jones, May 19 2016, accessed May 9, 2017, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/05/ethnic-studies-agents-of-change-documentary-san-francisco/.

On March 20, 1969, after five months of striking, 600 arrests, countless beatings and violent confrontations, SFSU created the Department of Black Studies, headed up by Dr. Nathan Hare.[73] Witnessing the student strikes in Paris and Prague in May 1968, members of the Black Students Union (BSU) at SFSU felt empowered by the international reach of the student struggle.[74] Jimmy Garrett—SNCC member and friend of Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and Sonia Sanchez—liaised with then San Francisco State President John Summerskill regarding the enrolment of black students to the university. Summerskill agreed, and Garrett and other members of BSU created recruitment programs in order to enrol black students from local communities. As US cities were in flames nationwide, and Black Nationalist organisations like the Black Panther Party emerged from the rubble of burned out cities like Los Angeles, Oakland, Detroit, Chicago and New York, students of the BSU became enticed by the growing rhetoric of Black Power. They had support of the recently created Black Panther Party, with a strong Panther presence on campus on an almost daily basis. Huey P. Newton gave interviews impressing the importance of black history as it meant black students "had self-identity [to] know where our strength is."[75] The words of Newton and the Panthers resonated strongly with San Francisco State teacher George Murray who, at the time of Newton's police shootout resulting in the death of John Frey and the incarceration of Newton himself, joined the Panther rank and file. Murray urged militancy and self-defence amongst his students, and as a result, President Summerskill was ordered by higher authorities to fire Murray. Refusing to do so, Summerskill was fired himself, only to be replaced by President Smith, who had no problem in terminating the employment of the Black Panther.

The BSU were stung by Murray's firing. Shortly after his termination, a press conference was held where a list of 15 demands were issued, three of which were: "That there be a Department of Black Studies which will grant a Bachelor's degree in Black Studies; that the Black Studies Department, chairman, faculty and staff have the sole power to hire faculty and control and determine the destiny of its department" and "That all Black Studies courses being taught through various other departments be immediately part of the Black Studies Department and that all instructors of this department receive full time pay."[76] From November 1968,

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[73]At the time of his appointment to San Francisco State College, Hare was a Chicago-trained sociologist. He was the first co-ordinator to be hired for a black studies program and is often referred to as 'the father of black studies.' Hare was fired after two semesters for refusing to break the five-month student strike, and soon after, he became the founding publisher of *The Black Scholar*. "Nathan Hare," African American Literature Book Club, accessed May 14, 2017, https://aalbc.com/authors/author.php?author_name=Nathan+Hare.

[74] Danny Glover quotation in Ginzberg and Dawson, *Agents of Change.*

[75] Ginzberg and Dawson, *Agents of Change.*

[76] San Francisco State College Strike Collection, "Demands and Explanations by the Black Student Union" San Francisco State College Strike Collection, accessed April 4, 2018, https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187909.

students went on strike and vowed to do so until their demands were met. During this time, the BSU found allies in other student groups and formed the Third World Liberation Front—a coalition that expanded their demands to seek not just a Black Studies Department, but Ethic Studies as well.[77]

As the autumnal weeks rolled into the wintery months, the media covered police confrontations and increased public support for the student strikers, resulting in mothers and fathers of BSU students descending upon campus to share their support. "I'm from the ghetto community and at the sound of my voice, when I rise up just about the masses of Hunters Point rises up too! So I am, I am supporting the Black Students Union, the World Liberation Group one hundred per cent!" mother Ruth Williams bellowed to an energised crowd on campus.[78] With additional support from Julian Bond, founder of SNCC, and Ron Dellums, Berkeley City Council Member, the strikes crossed the threshold of their fourth month before the serious arrests of BSU leadership. Jimmy Garret was arrested and offered 5-25 years in jail or 5 years of probation, so long as he agreed to not enter the city of San Francisco.[79] With other members of the BSU arrested and receiving anything between one to seven years in jail, the strikes ceased on March 20, 1969, and a handful of the 15 listed demands were met—those deemed most essential, including a Black Studies Department; an Ethic Studies Department; and more black students enrolled to the university.[80]

Although the strikes ended prematurely and without all 15 demands being met, student activism on the campus of San Francisco State was a catalyst in the nationwide movement towards creating black spaces for learning black history. The domino effect of over 125 universities and high schools striking for Black Studies across the country following San Francisco State evidences the desire from black communities to learn about black history from a black perspective, and to have physical spaces for learning from black teachers and professors. "For half of a century, black people have programmatically and systematically been miseducated by the most political institution of this country – the institution of education," Dr. Nathan Hare argued during a press conference for the BSU.[81] The cursory mentions of slavery as an economic institution, or Crispus Attucks as the first man to die in the Revolutionary War, on white syllabi in predominantly white institutions robbed black students of their history. They were

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[77] *Agents of Change,* by Abby Ginzberg and Frank Dawson.
[78] Ruth Williams quotation from San Francisco College State Strike Collection, "Black Community at SF State Campus" San Francisco State College Strike, accessed April 2, 2018, https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187200.
[79] *Agents of Change,* Abby Ginzberg and Frank Dawson.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

intellectually and ideologically shut out of the politicised spaces of education. Yet through demanding Black Studies departments, they were able to puncture the biases of white institutions to create their own spaces for learning, teaching, and sharing historic and contemporary black experiences. In the Spring of 1968, for example, the BSU ran courses on 'Ancient Black History'. Taught by Rolland Snellings, the course content read:

> The course in Ancient Black History is extremely important to Black college youth, not only as a positive salve upon the wound of past and present racial oppressions and cultural degradation which has been the lot Black people everywhere, but also as an honest scholarly effort to complete the complex puzzle of human civilization confronting modern man. Modern civilization, contrary to prejudiced views, has resulted from the collective efforts of countless generations of the Races of man, daily pursuing their aim: dreaming, planning, working out their life tasks under indifferent skies. This view of history – which is obvious to the scientific scholar – has been, and in many cases, still is, hotly contested by sterile academies who feel their world-view threatened; by fresh, non-prejudiced approaches. One cannot truly know man until one has known him in all sizes, shapes, and colors upon the isles and continents of earth. The course will not only outline and sketch the various dynasties, empires, political conflicts, etc. of the Ancient Black World, but also its concrete artistic and scientific achievements and discoveries so that the Black student can realistically "see, feel, or touch" the contributions of black peoples, of Africa, to Modern World Culture.[82]

Snellings offered a course that reclaimed the position of the black man and woman in the role of Ancient History, and he was not alone in unpacking the central role of African Americans in history, literature and culture of the past and present. Sonia Sanchez offered a class on creative writing, Mary Lewis ran 'Recurrent Themes in Twentieth Century Afro-American Thought,' and Jim Aliniece lectured on 'Sociology of Black Oppression.' Finally, the biased institutional space of education pursued a "quest for new values and definitions that are meaningful and appropriate for black people…which will give substance and significance to their lives."[83] But whilst the creation of Black Studies curriculums nationwide was undeniably successful—and one of the lasting legacies of the Black Power Movement according to Peniel E. Joseph—the implementation of Black Studies curriculums was not without its limitations.

Giving a speech to the BSU on December 27, 1969, David Hilliard, Chief of Staff for the Black Panther Party discussed the disconnect between campus and community in San Francisco. "I think the one thing we have to hold clear in our minds is that the campus only occupies the teachers and the students 7 or 8 hours a day; and after that they're back into the community," he argued. "So if we have problems, we have to bring the community into campus.

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[82] San Francisco State College Strike Collection, "Black Studies Curriculum Cover (1968)" San Francisco State College Strike, accessed April 3, 2018, https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187916.
[83] Turner, "Black Students and their Changing Perspective," 138.

We have to stop isolating ourselves from the community," he continued.[84] Amiri Baraka expressed similar sentiments when visiting San Francisco State in 1967. "It is my contention that a university has no real moral basis for existence unless it is there to refine experience in the communities at large," he preached.[85] Both Baraka and Hilliard unpacked the necessity for the university to serve the needs of the community, and whilst Hilliard was speaking in relation to waging a revolution against the more abstract struggle of racism in California, by hinting at the separate nature of the black community and the predominately white campus he indirectly raised important questions about the inaccessibility of a much-needed black history curriculum. Baraka points this out in his lecture to the BSU when he says, "we all know for instance that black people, the majority of them, cannot go to college," which in turn begs the following questions: how do those in the community unable to go to university because of lack of funding, insufficient grades, or because they are too old, learn black history?[86] How do those in the community who struggle to read, learn black history? And how do those going to schools where curriculums fail and are never amended, learn black history?

Whilst Hilliard and Baraka acknowledge the important link between the grassroots and the university, and the importance of bringing the community *to* campus in order to create a stronger movement towards the ideological liberation of black people, the relationship between campus and community is mutually exclusive. But the inverse route of bringing the campus *to* the community instead, was not acknowledged by the two lecturers. Yet whilst Baraka and Hilliard overlooked the potentially reciprocal relationship between institution and grassroots communities, black history taught on campuses did find its way into the neighbourhoods of Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco through the murals of Dewey Crumpler (fig. 14).[87] "I was interested in communicating," Crumpler admitted in a lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2017, and through his series of murals around Bayview-Hunters Point, the San Francisco-based artist was able to bring the information provided by campuses *to* the

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[84] David Hilliard, "Black Student Unions: Speech Delivered at San Francisco State College," in *The Black Panthers Speak,* ed. by Philip Foner (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1970), 124.

[85] San Francisco State College Strike Collection, "SF State: Associated Students Meeting & Amiri Baraka" San Francisco State College Strike Collection, accessed April 1, 2018, https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187241.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Whilst this case study specifically focuses on the murals of Dewey Crumpler, murals operating as visual textbooks were not just confined to those by Crumpler in San Francisco. In Chicago, Eugene Eda Wade was creating murals to also subvert the biases of school curriculums. In a 2017 interview Wade said: "They didn't have that [black history] in the curriculum because everything was and is dictated and created in the laws…so what we felt we needed to do was to bring our own heroes and sheroes in and have them painted on the walls so we could explain. We did have our own heroes and sheroes, that made a contribution that may not be included in a textbook because of whatever political or social reason." The idea of murals as a communicative tool for learning black history therefore was frequently used as a motivation for their creation. Author's interview with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

community by creating a visual language that transformed the streets of Bayview into interactive visual textbooks.[88] Like Walker and Wade's murals, the murals of Dewey Crumpler around Bayview-Hunters Point responded to the erasure of a black experience, only this time, not from newspapers but from university curriculums. If black students were not allowed to go to university to learn about black history, Crumpler would subvert the spatial politics of mainstream universities by giving access to an erased black history in the streets of Bayview-Hunters Point—an enclave referred to in scholarship as "a black ghetto."[89] Much like Chicago's South Side, Bayview-Hunters Point was home to around a 95 per cent black population, and was a similar space of racial confinement. Housing projects, increased poverty levels and vast unemployment permeated the neighbourhood but "in addition to its physical isolation, the population [was] essentially isolated emotionally from the rest of the city," when newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle* sensationalised the neighbourhood, constantly referring to it as "a hotbed of juvenile delinquency and gang warfare."[90]
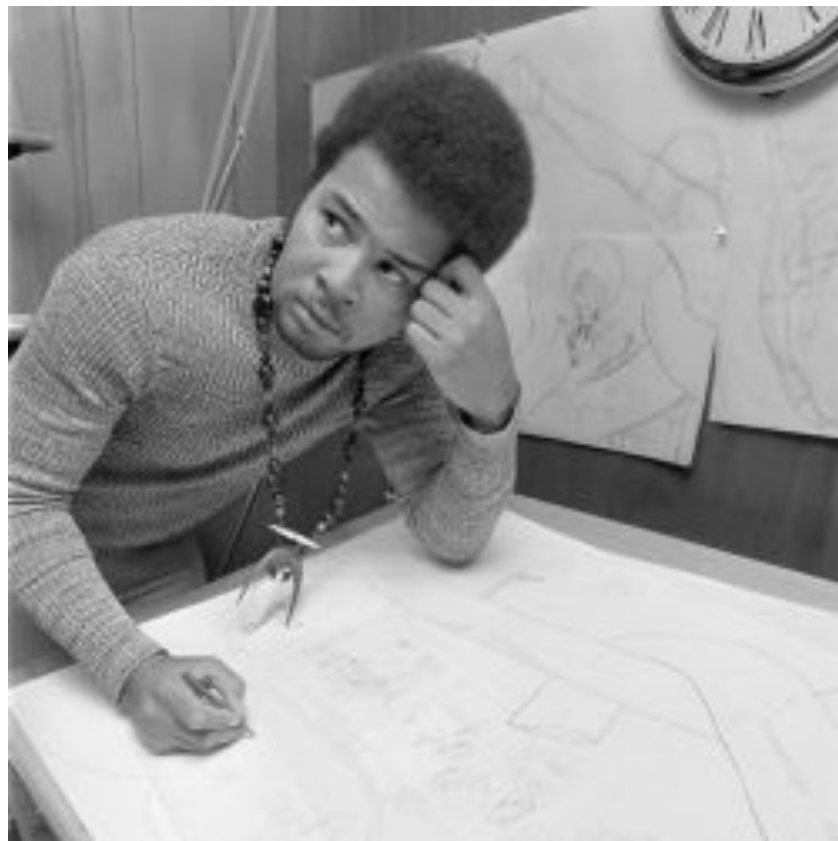
Fig. 14. Dewey Crumpler, date and location unknown.

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[88] SFAI Official, "Dewey Crumpler – CODE Black Futures Month: San Francisco Art Institute 2017," Vimeo Video, 50:03, February 8, 2017, https://deweycrumpler.com/videos/.
[89] Arthur E. Hippler, *Hunter's Point: A Black Ghetto* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1974), 3.
[90] Ibid., 17.

Whilst the murals of Crumpler operated as vessels of communication, this section does not seek to suggest murals are a more successful form of education than Black Studies departments, nor does it seek to debunk the importance of Black Studies curriculums and the work done by those protesting for their implementation. Instead, the case study of Crumpler illustrates the potency of black murals by highlighting how—as unofficial counterparts to Black Studies curriculums in the streets—they were sometimes able to create spaces of knowledge and information for an isolated black community that went beyond the restrictions of Black Studies departments. Finding solutions to the limitations of college curriculums expressed by Baraka and Hilliard, Crumpler brought the information from campuses to the community and put it directly into the streets of his hometown through his expansive, large-scale murals. "Every mural I've ever painted was a form of education," Crumpler said in a 2018 interview, and his series of works around Bayview-Hunters Point join the repertoire of communicative murals of the Black Power Movement as they transformed the walls of San Francisco into history textbooks.[91] "What led me to make murals was my need to record African American history," Crumpler told James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz.[92] "For me…murals became a way to writing novels, writing the history that had not been written," he continued.[93] Therefore, his murals *Education is Truth* (1970)*, Multi-Ethnic Heritage: Black, Asian, Native/Latin American* (1974) and *The Fire Next Time I* and *II* (1977) emerged in an educational capacity to erase the images perpetuated by a model of white only history.[94] Crumpler reclaimed the walls of a racially confined enclave with narrative scenes of prominent figures of the black past and present, such as Harriet Tubman, Paul Robeson, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammad Ali and George Washington Carver. Depicting figures of black history unknown to some local community members, like Tubman, Du Bois and Robeson, Crumpler's

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[91] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

[92] James Prigoff and Robin J. Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Press, 2000), 169.

[93] Ibid.

[94] I do not discuss *Multi-Ethnic Heritage: Black, Asian, Native/Latin American* in the body of this chapter as, although the mural is undeniably educational and equally as potent as *Education is Truth* and *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* it has a different set of spatial politics being painted on the inside of a school as opposed to the streets of a black community. However, it is important to mention not only the content of the mural, but the turbulent journey that led to its creation. In 1974, years after being selected to paint the mural, Crumpler was finally able to paint a wall at George Washington High School in San Francisco, creating *Multi-Ethnic Heritage: Black, Asian, Native/Latin American.* Crumpler, at the age of eighteen, was initially deemed too young to undertake such a large commission. The black students of the school, angered by the revoking of Crumpler's name, threw ink over the building's controversial mural by Victor Arnautoff. In 1971, after much back and forth, Crumpler was re-granted commission. The mural was painted after Crumpler studied muralism in Mexico and met with David Alfaro Siqueiros and Pablo O'Higgins. "Before I went to Mexico…I didn't really understand mural paining in a way that would provide me with the understanding that I got from talking to Pablo and Siqueiros, and that way, you know, I came back and that mural was really quite well received by students and the Panther party and all them," Crumpler said in a 2018 interview. *Multi-Ethnic Heritage: Black, Asian, Native/Latin American* depicts multiple panels displaying Black, Asian and Native/Latin American history. Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

murals, like *Education is Truth*, turned the isolated streets of Bayview into unofficial black studies curriculums with each street operating as a different page in his textbook (fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Dewey Crumpler, *Education is Truth,* (1971), San Francisco, California.

"Part of a problem with American history is that it is based in much part, on inaccurate information or misleading information," Crumpler bemoaned in a 2018 interview, and the educational system in San Francisco was no exception.[95] The curriculum content at schools in San Francisco was damaging to students of colour, and when Black Arts Movement poet, Sonia Sanchez, was accepted as an instructor for the BSU at San Francisco State, she realised she had "a lot of work to do."[96] Black students "knew nothing about themselves," she recalled.[97] Writing names on the blackboard in class—Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, Marcus Garvey—she asked the class who they recognised. "MLK and Malcolm—that was it!" Sanchez exclaimed, "They didn't recognize any of the other people, can you imagine!?" she continued.[98] In 1970, when Crumpler created *Education is Truth* in San Francisco, it was almost as if he was

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[95] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.
[96] Sonia Sanchez quotation in *Agents of Change,* Abby Ginzberg and Frank Dawson.
[97] *Agents of Change,* Abby Ginzberg and Frank Dawson.
[98]Ibid.

working in response to Sanchez's lamentation three years earlier when every stroke on his mural attempted to repair the reality of her story. Crumpler renovated a wall in Bayview-Hunters Point into an unofficial textbook. Yet whilst his murals collectively became street versions of a Black Studies curriculum, *Education is Truth* is the only mural to visually adopt the physical attributes of a history book.[99]

As the mural flanks the street, the pages of a central oversized book splay open. The central book, the only book in the mural to open outwards towards the viewer, displays the likenesses of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They are the largest pages of the mural—perhaps because they are the most well-known, and therefore offer the most accessible entry point into overlooked black history—or perhaps because the two men were recent martyrs to the Black Power and Civil Rights Movement and Crumpler wanted to commemorate them both. On either side of the central, outward-facing book, two smaller textbooks are being read. This time the viewer sees the front and back covers of the book as opposed to their contents, and Crumpler decorates them with the names and images of W.E.B. Du Bois, Harriet Tubman and Muhammad Ali. Ordinarily the act of reading creates a barrier between reader and onlooker—the onlooker not being privy to the words read by the reader—but in *Education is Truth,* Crumpler subverts this dynamic by making the inside of the book outward facing for the community to read as well—perhaps an indirect commentary on the need for universities and curriculums (represented here by the textbooks) to tear down the divide and become accessible to black communities. By making the pages of the textbooks accessible to all, Crumpler provides a commentary on how the act of learning black history is a communal and collective effort; something reinforced through the halo of figures bordering the three enlarged textbooks in the mural.

Two relaxed figures inwardly face each other in the foreground of the mural—front knees cocked and books resting gently in their laps as they sit contemplatively, smiling and reading. They are happy to have the chance to learn their own history, because as the title suggests, education is truth—a truth that has been denied them until this moment. Their extended back legs reach across the mural to frame the silhouettes of four smaller figures that give a meta-commentary on the function of the mural. Crumpler created the mural as a way to teach the local black community about black history, and by painting the silhouettes of a young

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[99] Not all murals about education, and created during the Black Power Movement, functioned as unofficial Black Studies curriculums in the streets. Some murals impressed the importance of going to school to get a black education. For example, Dana Chandler's 1971 mural, *Knowledge is Power, Stay in School,* painted in the Roxbury district of Boston "emphasized the liberating power of education…a distinctly black education." Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 36.

family, they mirror the function of the mural back to the neighbourhood as well as underscoring the intergenerational nature of this education. The history on the textbooks spans from the nineteenth century through to present, and a mother passes this history on to her three young children. They gaze in wonder upon the open pages of the mural, which are illuminated by a warm orange glow quite literally 'shedding light' on an erased history. At last, the images of history shown to the black community were uplifting. "The kinds of images that we saw—no images of African Americans outside of Amos 'n' Andy—saw African Americans in creative acts, except as subservient," Crumpler lamented in relation to the widespread visual assassination of African American history and imagery. "I began…making works that could inspire and speak to African American audiences," he continued.[100] By creating *Education is Truth,* Crumpler reclaimed black history from obscurity and placed it in the streets for the black community to learn from, creating a mural that not only highlighted the presence of a black community in an isolated part of the city, but that became an unofficial visual counterpart to university curriculums.

Much like the visual newspapers of Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, the unofficial textbooks of Crumpler become—in some capacity—more powerful than the physical history textbooks in schools, which are static and rely upon high levels of literacy, but this time also have limited accessibility—7 hours a day, 5 days a week. These unofficial textbooks are somewhat more potent because, like the *Wall of Truth*, they possess palimpsest-like qualities. Whilst the *Wall of Truth* became a palimpsest through the multiple layers of local and national black news pasted upon the wall, Crumpler's murals are transdisciplinary palimpsests. As an unofficial, alternate black studies curriculum in the streets, Crumpler's murals go beyond inserting the likenesses of black historical figures into the urban environment. In conjunction with the pantheons of painted heroes, multiple fields of research are layered onto each other to create a multifaceted body of knowledge from the disciplines of art, literature, music, spirituals, and ancestral history. The power of the mural as a malleable form enabled it to create a transdisciplinary wall of knowledge. With the artistic, painted mural as the foundation of the palimpsest, Crumpler weaves layers of information into his murals, like *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* to share black history and culture—both diasporic and national—with the community of Bayview-Hunters Point. In doing this, he invites active participation from neighbourhood residents, and thus sets a form of unofficial homework for the local community (fig. 16).

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[100] Dewey Crumpler, "Dewey Crumpler – CODE."

Fig. 16. Dewey Crumpler, *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* (1977), San Francisco, California.

Upon his educational palimpsest, Crumpler weaves his first layer of historical memory. Painted on the sides of Joseph Lee Gym, *The Fire Next Time I* and *II* depicts three aspects of black people's lives in the US: education, religion and culture.[101] Students, dancers and athletes span the bottom of the frame whilst the portraits of Harriet Tubman and Paul Robeson look upon them from above as focal points of the mural. "I was interested in education and that education for black people was essential, black people did not see themselves in any way other than the negative portrayals that were so constant in the 1960s," Crumpler said in a 2018 interview, continuing:

> The kind of buffoonish characters, the way blacks were always, if they were ever in movies or television, they were shown as subservient, you know it's the typical argument. It's rather boring and cliché to hear now, but at that time it was absolutely assaulting and part of my reason for ever wanting to be an artist was to attack those kinds of images with images of clarity, or at least images that would *provoke African Americans to ask questions about what that*

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[101] The composition of the mural echoes that of Mexican muralism, especially the works of José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. Crumpler visited Mexico multiple times during his mural painting career. *The Fire Next Time* was influenced by the work he saw there. "Once I'd come back from Mexico and I understood how I wanted to use that fire as a theme, then I understood how to start constructing the actual forms and the mural," he spoke of the 1977 mural. Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018. Tim Drescher, "The Fire Next Time II" Public Art and Architecture, accessed March 18, 2018, April 2, 2013 http://www.artandarchitecture-sf.com/tag/dewey-crumpler.

thing was [emphasis added]—or at least to make pictures about history. So that was my interest in mural painting.[102]

Crumpler used the visual language on his murals to spark questions in the minds of the viewer, and in every mural he made, he sought to have specifically unfamiliar imagery or content because he wanted audiences to probe his work by asking the questions: "what is that," or "why did he do that?"[103] When Crumpler wove figures of African American history into his educational mural, he therefore curated an interrogative call-and-response between the mural and his viewers. If they wanted to learn black history, they would have to actively take part in this educational process. In the hope that viewers would ask such questions—and perhaps also invite questions on the historic imagery layered onto the mural—Crumpler provided a key next to his murals that he hoped would begin to answer the viewers' queries. "I had a key to the symbolism of everything I painted," he admitted, and by doing this, he sought to provide just enough information for curious onlookers to research the historic figures upon his mural in libraries and textbooks.[104]

During the painting of this history section of the mural, Crumpler had a visit from a member of the local community. A young man approached the muralist and asked who the portraits were of. "Harriet Tubman and Paul Robeson," Crumpler replied. Impressing his want for local community members to be put on the wall, the young man retorted back: "They don't live here man, you should put up a couple of locals like Richard and Edwina. They're a stone couple."[105] Seizing the moment to pass on knowledge of black history and underscore the purpose of his murals, Crumpler recounts the following conversation:

> I said 'well these people are of the community' and he replied, 'well I don't know any of them,' so I said 'that's the point, you have to get to know some of these people and the way to do that is go to that library across the street and look some of these people up.' And he'd say, 'well who is that right up there?' and I'd say 'well that's Harriet Tubman,' and he said 'does she live in the community?' and I said 'now see, that's why you have to go across the street, because Harriet Tubman is the reason you live in this community. If it wasn't for Harriet Tubman, you wouldn't be in this community.' And that made him really interested in what I meant.[106]

Several weeks later, after researching Tubman, the young man returned to the site of the mural and admitted to Crumpler that he was right—that black people "needed to know more about important leaders so they could have somebody to respect…and besides, Richard and Edwina

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[102] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Tim W. Drescher, *San Francisco Murals: Community Creates Its Muse, 1914-1990* (Minnesota: Pogo Press, 1991), 35.
[106] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

had broken up."[107] This anecdote exemplifies the interactive nature of Crumpler's murals, not only as touchstones of communication, but as entry points into an otherwise erased black history. Crumpler created a space of learning in Bayview-Hunters Point. It gave a young man access to his history in an intriguing and inviting way that catalysed a desire to read beyond Tubman, and research other 'important leaders' as well.

Provoking further education through call-and-response, Crumpler also layered his mural with references to literature and spirituals through his use of a multifaceted title. When asked during an interview if the phrase 'The Fire Next Time' was a reference to James Baldwin's infamous 1963 essay of the same title, Crumpler explained how his title was actually borrowed from the spiritual, *Mary Don't You Weep*, which sings: 'God gave Noah the rainbow sign/No more water, the fire next time.'[108] Whilst Crumpler believed older generations of African Americans would understand its original meaning, he used the lyric as an educational entry point into the work of James Baldwin. For anybody who looked up the title, "James Baldwin would come up first—that's the introduction to Baldwin. I was very clear on the use of Baldwin," Crumpler suggested.[109] *The Fire Next Time* was published in 1963 and is comprised of two long letters. One, titled "My Dungeon Shook", was written on the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and is addressed to Baldwin's nephew, James. Throughout the letter, he gives an impassioned plea to end the racial nightmare in America, discussing the role that race has played in the US. The second letter, titled "Down At the Cross—Letter from a Region of My Mind," deals with the intersections of race and religion, particularly Baldwin's relationship with Christianity, as well as the growing popularity of Islam in Harlem. Much like the keys of information attached to Crumpler's murals, the title, *The Fire Next Time* also constructed a call-and-response relationship between mural and viewer, where the community were able to engage in their own acts of education, perhaps seeking out the text to read Baldwin's impassioned plea.

Finally, layering a diasporic memory into his mural, Crumpler also provoked another call-and-response relationship with the audience regarding African symbolism. During the creation of *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* Crumpler collected African art and studied Yoruba cosmology. As a result, his interest in African textiles, artefacts—such as masks and doors—

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[107] Drescher, *San Francisco Murals*, 35.

[108] "Mary Don't You Weep," is a spiritual that predates the American Civil War, containing coded messages of hope and resistance. It tells the Biblical story of Mary of Bethany and her pleas to Jesus to raise her brother Lazarus from the dead. It compares the resurrection of Lazarus to the deliverance of slaves from Egypt, and in doing so, parallels resurrection with freedom. Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10; Brian A. Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 196.

[109] Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

and mythical creatures like the senufu bird, bled into his work and required similar personal research from his audience. By including diasporic symbolism, Crumpler sought to create an educational space that not only elevated their understanding of African American history, but ancient African history as well (fig. 17). Whilst the portraits of Robeson and Tubman sit proudly as frontispieces on the side of the gym, a blanket of fire envelops them and frames two nude figures that are painted in front of a patterned backdrop. The two central nude figures are perched upon a magical, ancient-looking door, facing away from each other with their heads angled down towards the fire. The presence of the fire and the unclothed figures incited anger and outrage from members of a local church, but their concerns over the propriety of the mural were soon allayed once Crumpler explained their purpose and symbolism. The two central nude figures symbolised duality, which was important in African cultures like Dogon and Yoruba. The flames, whilst invoking the memory of the recent turmoil of the Long Hot Summers— which had struck Bayview-Hunters Point in 1966—took on the meaning of purifying, much like in the book of Revelations, as opposed to destructive forces, Crumpler explained. After hearing Crumpler's informative, educational descriptions of the symbolism upon his mural, the church members were satisfied, having learned something new, and permitted him to continue his work without their interruption.[110]

In the mural, the engulfing but purifying fire creeps around the corner of the building and spills over onto another façade of the gym that was painted in 1984, evolving into a quilt-like African textile, held firmly by a large hand. Bordering the far side of the building's façade, the black hand holding the textile is mirrored and in the centre of this panel, a large replica of a sixteenth century Ife bronze figure is positioned beside a smaller figure of King Tut. In the 1960s and 1970s, diasporic black history was a prominent ideological feature of Black Power and Black Nationalism, and as a result, Crumpler "felt it absolutely necessary to connect Africa" with everything he did because "African Americans pretty well understood that Africa was a part of their thing completely."[111] In the BSU's 1968 course curriculum, the class on Ancient Black History was designed to help Black students "see, feel or touch the contributions of black peoples, of Africa, to Modern World Culture," and with similar motivations, Crumpler decorated a building in Bayview-Hunters Point to "evoke some kind of questioning" about Ancient Black History in order to deepen community understanding on the diaspora.[112]

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[110] Drescher, *San Francisco Murals*, 35.

[111] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride*, 169.

[112] San Francisco State College Strike, "Black Studies Curriculum Cover (1968)" San Francisco State College Strike, accessed April 4, 2018, https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike/bundles/187916; Author's phone call with Dewey Crumpler, February 22, 2018.

Crumpler's murals highlight how mural art is both malleable—having the ability to create transdisciplinary bodies of knowledge—and a potent form of spatial creation. Becoming more than a painting in the street, Crumpler successfully fused a myriad of disciplines together onto his mural to create a space of educational learning and communication in the streets of Bayview-Hunters Point to ensure the 'campus' was brought to the community. When Crumpler created these murals throughout the sixties and seventies, they countered the biased curriculums of universities and high schools as well as the inaccessibility of education for black people in the community. For a Black Studies department to be implemented at SFSU—or at a stream of other universities across the nation—it had to be agreed to by college boards, university Presidents, and trustees. Protestors had to fight against the almost impenetrable barrier of white only history in predominantly white institutions in order to exist as pockets of black thought in intellectually, ideologically and physically white spaces. But murals, like those of Crumpler, circumvented the politics attached to institutionally white spaces. *Education is Truth* and *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* were painted in black communities without major restrictions to their creation—asides from inquisitive members of the public—to create sites of learning in a black community by giving them access to history they were being denied in schools and universities.

Fig. 17. Dewey Crumpler, *The Fire Next Time I* and *II,* (1984), San Francisco, California.

The notion of 'truth' was fundamental in educational black murals of the 1960s and 1970s—so much so that the word even made it into the titles of two prominent murals of the

era: *Wall of Truth* and *Education is Truth*. For years, decades and centuries, black history was merely a footnote in America's historical narrative but the demand for black culture, history and life to be a presence in mainstream America reached a crescendo during the Black Power Movement. Alongside the call to learn black history and control black news came a swell of murals that used historical memory and narratives of community life to transform the walls of black communities into sites of alternate literacy. The malleability of mural art allowed these murals to become communicative vessels of information that subverted the biases of white institutional spaces such as the mainstream press and public schools. Whilst the significance of these murals stemmed from their ability to create sites of interaction that fostered education and learning within the black community, their power also came from their capacity to transcend the restrictions that bound official modes of communication and education. Unlike newspapers and textbooks, the murals of Walker, Wade and Crumpler were palimpsests of communication and education, layering knowledge and news stories atop each other to create a bricolage of call-and-response information for local community members. These unofficial newspapers and textbooks were free to all community members—available 24 hours a day, and accessible even to those in the neighbourhood who were illiterate, placing these murals equally as powerful as their official counterparts.

At the height of the Black Power Movement, murals operated as manifestations of the decade's black consciousness and were used to assert black presence and transform walls into sites of interaction within a black community, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the murals of Walker, Wade and Crumpler became examples of this. They turned barriers of separation into walls of knowledge and learning. They not only depicted pantheons of black heroes to foster individual and collective feelings of black consciousness, but they also employed historical black memory to imbue murals with pedagogical functions that remedied young James Baldwin's belief that "Africa had no history, and neither did I."[113] Murals were significant in the black freedom struggle for the ways in which they transformed the *de facto* segregated spaces of black communities into interactive spaces of imagination, learning and liberation, yet as the 1960s yielded moments of violent and rebellious protest, murals had yet another role to play. Whilst Chapters 2 and 3 have shown how historical memory has been used upon walls in black communities to create spaces of empowerment and knowledge and signify the presence of a black community, the following chapter shows how murals used black memory to transform walls into both sites of ritual healing, and ritual performance.

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[113] The Riverbends Channel, "James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley (1965)."

Chapter Four
"All Worship the Wall":
Performance, Healing and Rituals in
Murals of the Black Power Movement

> Murals are public-access stained glass windows. They sanctify the community like the Stations of the Cross sanctify the church.
>
> Nelson Stevens, *artist.*[1]

> It was not listed on any official travel brochures as a must-see attraction, but it was a stop that many Black people made while visiting Chicago. My grandfather first showed me the wall; it was in the neighborhood where he grew up. It was a symbol of pride pointed to as a ray of hope by residents of the South Side like my grandfather. Whenever I visited the Wall, there were always other African-American visitors there as well, coming to a modern-day shrine.
>
> Seitu Jones discussing the *Wall of Respect.*[2]

"He restoreth my soul," a line from 'The Lord Is My Shepherd' psalm reads upon a wall in the Cottage Grove neighbourhood of Chicago's South Side in 1981 (fig. 1). "I put the whole poem [up on that wall]", muralist C. Siddha Sila Webber, "and that mural's been there since 1981, 34 years and still unscathed."[3] In 1981, when Webber began painting the religious-themed mural, *Earth is Not Our Home*, upon a wall in an impoverished black neighbourhood in Chicago, little did he realise the epitaph "he restoreth my soul" had a dual meaning for the residents of Cottage Grove. Ordinarily in the context of religion, the restoring of one's soul would come from the Lord himself through the prayerful acts indicated by the psalm on the mural. But to residents of Chicago's South Side, the restoration of one's soul could also be achieved through ritualising acts made during the mural's creation and through its existence.

Early one Saturday morning, during the formative stages of painting, Webber was approached by what he described as "a heroin addict prostitute."[4] Feeling a strong affinity with his goal of achieving "hope and pride and beauty" in the community, the young woman expressed intrigue and admiration for Webber's work.[5] "She begged me to let her paint," Webber said, "and I did…she wanted to contribute something to her community, the area she worked in," and after a few hesitant rejections, Webber handed the young woman a paintbrush

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[1] James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2000), 24.

[2] Seitu Jones, "Public Art That Inspires: Public Art that Informs," in *Critical Issues in Public Art*, ed. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1998), 240.

[3] Rebecca Zorach, "C. Siddha Webber," Never the Same: Conversations about Art Transforming Politics and Community in Chicago and Beyond, accessed July 2, 2018. www.never-the-same.org/interviews/c-siddha-webber/.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 84.

and allowed her to undergo her own personal ritual of catharsis by painting the mural.[6] Working for four hours in the Chicago summer heat, the anonymous woman painted tirelessly "to make a contribution, in her heart."[7] Through the efforts of the young woman in Cottage Grove, *Earth Is Not Our Home* was created through a ritualistic act of healing. Seeking to restore her soul, the woman used the democratising forces of mural making to heal a fractured part of herself by giving something—a mural—back to the community, leaving the mural itself imbued with a ritualising power.

Fig. 1. C. Sidda Sila Webber, *Earth is Not Our Home,* 1981, Cottage Grove, Chicago, Illinois.

The mural, however, was not only created through a mode of ritual; it also invited ritualistic acts to be performed at its site. The finished mural had the inscribed Psalm 23 on the left-hand side, and on the right-hand side were the words:

EARTH IS NOT OUR HOME. EARTH IS THE PREPARER PLACE WHERE KING, MALCOLM, JESUS, JOHN BROWN, LINCOLN, GHANDI, MOHAMMAD, BUDDA & THEM DIED 4 LOVE. WE MUST DIE 4 LOVE ALONE WER EARTH IS NOT OUR HOME.

(OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN) PREPARETH A PLACE 4 US-HERE NOW WE MUST BE FRUITFUL & MULTIPLY, HAVE DOMINION OVER THE EARTH &…

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[6] Zorach, "C. Siddha Webber".
[7] Ibid.

People intentionally walked by the mural at all points of the day, and "sometimes they'd been out all night. And then they would stumble and see the words. And then they would look up and start reading the prayer," Webber said. "Then after they'd read the prayer, they would get hope and embellishment in what they read," he added.[8] Standing or sinking to their knees with heads fixed on the mural, passers-by staged their own performative acts of ritual through praying at the site of the mural, and when they "started praying…it would send them on their way, under that energy with the colours, the ideas, whatever it was," Webber analysed.[9]

Earth is Not Our Home is a ritualistic talisman in the community of Cottage Grove, offering a repenting of one's sins, and, in the case of the young woman, a healing of one's soul, achieved through both the process of creating the mural and the acts of performing prayer at the site of the mural.[10] By dissecting the interactive relationship between local residents and the mural, *Earth is Not Our Home* offers an understanding of how murals became spaces of ritual in the Black Power Movement. Two prominent threads come to the surface through examining *Earth is Not Our Home*: that murals were created in an act of ritual healing, to heal a space—as seen here by the young woman creating the mural to repair her emotional self—and that murals created space for ritual performance at their sites—as seen here by individuals engaging in prayer at the site of the mural. This chapter therefore assesses the intricate connection between murals and ritual, unpacking how murals created different spaces of ritual within the black community. But before diving into such an analysis, it is first important to define what is meant by 'ritual' in this context.

'Ritual' is an abstract and malleable term with a host of practical applications in academic study and everyday life. In 1992, religious and ritual studies scholar Catherine Bell suggested that since the nineteenth century, "many…definitions of ritual have been developed and linked to a wide variety of scholarly endeavors," making it near impossible to pin down a single definition of the term.[11] Permeating a wealth of academic fields, from anthropology to social science, and from cultural theory to religious studies, 'ritual' has been used by individuals such as Biblical scholar W. Robertson Smith, anthropology professor Clifford Geertz and

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Performing prayer at the site of murals during the Black Power Movement was much less common than spoken word, dance, personal tours, poetry, music and plays. *Earth is Not Our Home* is the only mural found to date where inherently religious acts were performed at its site, and hence I will be engaging with ritual scholar Ronald L. Grimes' belief that ritual does not have to be deeply entrenched in religious acts. This will be discussed throughout the chapter.

[11] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.

anthropologist George E. Marcus, all of whom have employed the term to facilitate their analysis of society and understand the dynamics of 'culture', and organise ethnographic texts.[12]

One of the most heralded names in ritual studies, however, is Ronald L. Grimes, who, throughout his extensive body of work, unpacks many possible facets of the term 'ritual'. This chapter will engage with one of Grimes' important claims, that "ritual pervades more of our life than just an isolated realm designated "religious.""[13] Grimes explains the definitions surrounding the term by transplanting it beyond its commonly religious connotations. The murals discussed throughout this chapter all deal with the emotional and spatial healing of a physical urban landscape, and cultural acts of performance, instead of religion. This therefore supports Grimes's analysis that "there is no inherent connection among religion, belief and ritual."[14] Grimes suggests:

> Each culture has its own way of forging or ignoring links among these cultural phenomena. Since there are rites that have nothing to do with religion (e.g. civil ceremonies) and religions that have little to do with mystical beings or powers (e.g. Zen Buddhism), building such qualifiers into a definition is a mistake.[15]

Instead, Grimes impresses the importance of physical action—sometimes meaningful, and sometimes retroactively imbued with meaning through acts of repetition—as well as the use of significant and inanimate objects, in ritualistic endeavours. This chapter works closely in conversation with this concept. "Although rituals consist of actions, it's almost impossible to discover, or even imagine, a ritual without its attendant material culture," Grimes wrote in 2015, and his discussion of tangible "material culture", alongside theorisations of meaningful physical actions, offers a starting point for excavating the relationship between murals and rituals.[16] However, whilst it is useful to apply Grimes' theory that repetition creates rituals, an understanding of the relationship between rituals and black muralism is inadequate and incomplete without acknowledging how 'ritual' has featured in African American art and culture.[17]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Ritual Studies International, 2010), 35.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ronald L. Grimes, "Victor Turner's Definition, Theory and Sense of Ritual," in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology,* ed. Kathleen M. Ashley (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 142.

[16] Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual," *Material Religion* no. 7, 1 (April, 2015): 77.

[17] Nadia Ferrara, *Healing Through Art: Ritualized Space and Cree Identity* (Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 97.

Between 1967 and 1971, Romare Bearden created an art series and exhibition titled *The Prevalence of Ritual*.[18] To Bearden, 'ritual' was "the choreography of daily life, vibrant in movement and in the myriad shades of feelings and emotion common in humanity…nurtured by his knowledge of and experiences in black America."[19] In 1980, Betye Saar released a solo exhibition at The Studio Museum in Harlem, titled *Betye Saar: Rituals.* Two years later she submitted work for a group exhibition at the same museum, titled *Ritual and Myth,* which included over seventy works from forty-five artists*,* and ten and fifteen years later, Saar released two further solo exhibitions at the Joseloff Gallery and Tacoma Art Museum respectively, titled *The Ritual Journey,* and *Ritual and Remembrance.* To Betye Saar, 'ritual' meant harnessing the pull of the ancestral past with its subconscious memory to transform materials and objects into ritualistic touchstones by "investing them with alternative narratives."[20] Throughout the twentieth century, especially at the height of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, a wealth of black artists like Saar and Bearden, created paintings, sculptures, and installations under the thematic umbrella of 'ritual', as it offered artists working in the diaspora a way to cohesively fuse daily routines, objects, ancestral memory and a black experience into an aesthetic vision.

As discussed in The Studio Museum in Harlem's exhibition catalogue, *Ritual and Myth: A Survey of African American Art* (1982), the diaspora, ancestral memory and 'ritual' are closely entwined. With the exhibition laid out in four separate sections—'African Art,' 'The Academic Tradition,' 'The Intuitives and Visionaries,' and 'Caribbean Folklore,'—curator Mary Schmidt-Campbell used the exhibition to convey how,

> rituals and myths, both old and new, which sustain African American artists, represent the survivals, ancestral memories, recollections, reconstructions and innovations of a people on a continued quest to define their experience and presence in the New World.[21]

'Ritual' therefore, under the umbrella of African American art, takes on new meaning from those scribed by white academics. Writing that "Africa is the legacy, the past" in the foreword

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[18] "*The Prevalence of Ritual* marks the mature fruition of a theme that has obsessed Romare Bearden for over thirty years—the aesthetic expression of the life and life style of a people in visual and plastic language," Carroll Greene writes of Bearden's work for the exhibition, *The Prevalence of Ritual.* In talking of his work, Bearden himself commented, "I am trying to explore in terms of the particulars of the life I know best, those things common to all cultures." The exhibition travelled from The Museum of Modern Art in New York to the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, the University Art Museum in Berkeley, Pasadena Art Museum, and finally the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. Carroll Greene, *Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 3.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Jane H. Carpenter and Betye Saar, *Betye Saar* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2003), 28.
[21] Leslie King Hammond, "Ritual and Myth: A Survey in African American Art," *Ritual and Myth: A Survey of African American Art* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1982), 11.

to the exhibition catalogue, Schmidt-Campbell wanted to show how "African art provides a heritage of ritualistic content" for contemporaneous black artists.[22] Therefore, artwork "reflecting the tenacity of a community sustained and kept whole by its ceremonies and rites" lined the walls of galleries such as the California African American Art Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem, displaying ritualistic content, language, signs and symbols that delineated a black experience in the US and the diaspora.[23]

Whilst 'rituals' featured heavily in black gallery artwork in the 1960s and 1970s, the conceptual content also permeated murals of the Black Power Movement, both consciously and unconsciously. Some muralists knowingly created murals as a mode of ritual healing—like Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade—yet other muralists, such as those who created the *Wall of Respect*, remained unaware of how communities would respond to their work—which in many instances was through poetry, dance, and music performances. As shown throughout the two previous chapters, murals of the Black Power Movement were physical manifestations of black consciousness, and they used this potency to transform walls into alternate forms of literacy in the streets to circumvent the politics of institutionally white spaces. Yet amidst the turbulence of racial rioting and the burgeoning pulses of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, certain muralists in Chicago and Detroit used rundown walls as ritualistic talismans in *de facto* segregated black communities, created firstly through ritual healing, and secondly by creating ritual acts of performance at their physical site.

The first part of this chapter will show how some murals of the Black Power Movement were created in acts of ritual to heal physical, social and emotional landscapes. After the Detroit rebellion of 1967, Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade painted three murals in an attempt to heal the scarred city following the racial violence.[24] The *Wall of Dignity* (1968), *Wall of Pride* (1968) and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* (1968) were created to bandage and heal the physical, social and racial space of a fractured, racially disparate city. 'Ritual' in this section is about healing and the creation of new meanings for specific objects—namely murals and streets. Working in conversation with Karen Till's concept of the 'the wounded city,' and Nadia Ferrara's theory of healing through art by creating a new sense of self using fragments of the past, this section will also engage with Saar's definition of ritual as transforming "materials and objects by investing them with alternative narratives, effectively ritualizing them."[25] Whilst

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[22] Mary Schmidt-Campbell, "Foreword," *Ritual and Myth: A Survey of African American Art* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1982), 3.

[23] King Hammond, "Ritual and Myth," 7.

[24] I have actively chosen to use the word 'rebellion' in lieu of 'riots.' Having spoken to individuals like Eugene Eda Wade, who were working in the wake of the rebellions, they prefer the term 'rebellion' over 'riots.'

[25] Carpenter and Saar, *Betye Saar*, 30.

Chapter 3 showed how black historical memory created spaces of alternate literacy in the streets, this chapter examines how black memory was used to *heal* the physical, social and racial landscape of a wounded city.

The second section of the chapter focuses on how murals created spaces of ritual performances. It details how rituals occurred after murals were painted. Geographically centred on Chicago, the two examples in this section come from the South Side of the city. The *Wall of Respect* (1967) and *Universal Alley/Rip-Off* (1968-75) created spaces that inspired frequent acts of performance—street parties, spoken word, dance, poetry, jazz festivals and photography—at their location, which were performed daily, weekly and monthly. This section engages with Grimes and Turner's theorisations of repetitive acts of performance. To Grimes, inanimate objects can inspire and become recipients of ritual acts, and to Turner, ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects performed in a sequestered place. "Essentially, a ritual is transformative, and it is a performance," Turner postulated.[26] By assessing how murals created spaces for ritual performance, this section introduces a new level of interaction between mural and community—when local residents and performers frequently visited the wall to recite poetry, perform a dance, or jam, they became an extended part of the mural itself.

Ritual studies has influenced a variety of disparate research fields from the study of regionalism, to the studies of social justice and commemoration.[27] Although 'ritual' as a concept features in African American art history (mainly in literature on individual artists), ritual studies has been largely absent from the study of muralism and public art. Therefore, in order to understand the intricate relationship between black muralism and ritual, this chapter engages with writings, theorisations and artworks from African American artists and art historians working under the topic of ritual, the work of art therapy scholars, and the seminal texts of ritual studies.

"A healing function between the races": Murals as Ritual Healing

"Don't worry about a long hot summer, we're going to have a cool, calm, constructive summer," New York Police Commissioner, Michael J. Murphy said at a dinner party in 1964, "but if the worst comes, we're prepared."[28] On July 16, 1964, 15-year old James Powell was shot and killed in Manhattan's Upper East Side neighbourhood of Yorkville. Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan, who

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[26] Ferrara, *Healing Through Art*, 4.

[27] *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing* (1992), *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism* (2003), *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas* (2008), and *Ritual and Remembrance in the Ecuadorian Andes* (2012).

[28] New York Public Radio, "The Brian Lehrer Show: Remembering the Harlem Riot of 1964," WNYC, July 16, 2004, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.wnyc.org/story/remembering-harlem-riot-1964.

was in plain clothes that day, dispatched three bullets that punctured the chest of the adolescent Powell, the second of which was deemed fatal.[29] Powell, a resident of the Bronx Soundview public housing project, was attending a summer remedial reading program at the Robert F. Wagner Middle School on 76th and 2nd Avenue—a largely middle-class Irish neighbourhood. At 9:30am on July 16, Patrick Lynch, an apartment superintendent, squirted a hose at a group of black summer school students who were lounging on the stoops of one of his apartments. Retaliating by throwing "bottles and garbage can lids" at Lynch, the boys caught the attention of James Powell and two other boys, also from the Bronx and studying at the summer school.[30] Upon exiting the vestibule, Powell was struck by Gilligan's three bullets, and as an ambulance was called, and Gilligan was quickly rushed from the scene, confrontations broke out between 75 police officers and 300 hysterical students, with teachers attempting to quash their cries.[31] Whilst the night of July 16 ended without a fight or arrests, a powder keg mounted in Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant, waiting to be lit. The following day, after word of the incident reverberated around the boroughs, signs calling for Gilligan's dismissal and sentencing prevailed. For six nights, peaking on July 18, residents took to the streets, looting and launching attacks on police. Around 4,000 New Yorkers took part in both Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant.[32] "This is worse than anything I ever saw in Mississippi," CORE field secretary Louis Smith recalled.[33]

"The Harlem riot of 1964 abruptly cast a spotlight on black urban life in the North," Daniel Matlin writes in *On the Corner* (2013), and whilst it "prompted a radical and enduring shift in perceptions of black America," it also marked the beginning of a fiery and turbulent decade of race rebellions across the North.[34] As Peter B. Levy writes in *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America during the 1960s* (2018), "between 1963 and 1972 America experienced over 750 urban revolts. Upwards of 525 cities were affected including nearly every one with a black population of over 50,000," and in 1965, the Watts rebellion raged for six days with 16,000 National Guard, Los Angeles Police Department, highway patrol and other law enforcement officers attempting to quell the uprising.[35] More than 1,000 people were injured and 4,000

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[29] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

[30] Fred C. Shapiro and James W. Sullivan, *Race Riots* (Springfield: Crowell-Collier Publishing: 1964), 1-7.

[31] Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots*, 175.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 173.

[34] Daniel Matlin, *On the Corner: African American Intellectuals and the Urban Crisis* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

[35] Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America during the 1960s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.

arrested during and following the days of unrest.[36] As the decade ticked on, headlines of the Watts rebellions were quickly replaced by rebellions in Cleveland, San Francisco, and Chicago in 1966, and as 1967 arrived, the volatile decade truly hit its stride as a match lit the tinderbox of the urban north.[37]

"The long, hot summer of 1967 was the blistering height of an urban revolt that had begun in 1964 and which would forever change America's understanding of what was often called "the race problem," Malcolm McLaughlin wrote in his 2014 book *Urban Rebellion in America: The Long, Hot Summer of 1967*.[38] Under the moniker of the Long Hot Summer, from April to July of 1967, cities like Roxbury, New Brunswick, Omaha, Nashville, Louisville, Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Dayton, Buffalo and Minneapolis, erupted in flames of frustration and discontentment, but it was in July of 1967 that the decade of rioting reached its zenith. Between July 12 and 16, Newark was razed to the ground; 27 people died and around 1,100 were injured. "Do you think the cry of Black Power might have added a little fuel to this?" Governor of New Jersey, Richard J. Hughes was asked in 1967. "Undoubtedly," he replied.[39] Many of the African American residents in Newark saw the rebellion as an empowering act due to the collective nature of the challenge to the city's power structure.[40] "That feeling of power, that was an uplift to my community," Edna Thomas of the United Community Corporation said:

> We weren't afraid of the National Guard or anyone, weren't afraid of the guns. It didn't matter—we had been raped so many times and we never cried rape to anybody, so who were we to be afraid of, nobody but to almighty God, but we knew he was on our side, because I knew that a change was gonna come. I knew it had to come because answers were not in the police, they were not in city government, they was with the people.[41]

Just days after the rebellion, the volatile Black Nationalist rhetoric of H. Rap Brown echoed around the city at the first annual National Black Power conference from July 20 to 23. "When I talk about the rebellion, first of all, violence was brought into that black community. Black people did not become violent until the racist honky cops came down in there, with all their

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[36] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (London: University Press and Virginia, 1995), 2.
[37] For more information on the Soldier Field Rally of Chicago and Martin Luther King Jr.'s demands for open housing, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago*, and Amanda I. Seligman, "'But Burn-No,': The Rest of the Crowd in Three Civil Disorders in 1960s Chicago," *Journal of Urban History* 7, no. 2 (2011): 230-255.
[38] Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.
[39] DueProcessTV, "Newark: The Slow Road Back (1987)," YouTube Video, 1:55:33, March 13, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-qHP9ZjInE.
[40] Edna Thomas in The North, "Edna Thomas Describes Feeling Empowered by the 1967 Newark Rebellion," Vimeo Video, 02:12, 2016, www.vimeo.com/179355238.
[41] Ibid.

arms, and then black people began to defend themselves," and it was only seven days later that the black community banded together once more to rise up against the police, following the raid of an after-hours bar in a Midwestern city.[42]

Detroit was the costliest race rebellion in modern US history: 43 fatalities (30 of which were by law enforcement), around 1,100 injured, 2,000 fires, $40m worth of damage, 7,000 arrests and the deployment of the US Army and the National Guard.[43] On July 23, in the early hours of the morning, people at a blind pig—the nickname for an after-hours club—were celebrating the return of two Vietnam soldiers. The police raided the club expecting to find a few people inside and instead found 82 individuals. Everyone was arrested and escorted from the building and whilst this happened, a crowd of 200 people gathered. As the night slowly crept into the next morning, violence and looting emerged on Twelfth Street, and the Detroit rebellion was underway.[44] The rebellion carried on for five days. Mayor Jerome Cavanagh initially sought to quash the uprising with police units, but failed to gain support for this tactic as many African Americans in the city deemed the police the problem.[45] After the rebellion burned out—whether suppressed by the National Guard and federal troops being deployed by President Lyndon Johnson, or from a natural and slow extinguishing of passion and anger— the city was left decimated. Scott Martelle records the aftermath of the riots in his 2012 book, *Detroit [A Biography]*:

> While the riot didn't cause Detroit's white and middle-class flight, it was a powerful propellant behind already existing forces, exacerbating racial and class divides drawn by the national trend towards suburbanization, industrial decentralization by automakers and other industries, and local white reaction to housing desegregation.[46]

The rebellion left the city of Detroit fractured both physically and socially. It was a pivotal moment in its history, confirming racial fears for both African Americans and whites. To whites, the rebellion "affirmed racist perceptions of inner-city blacks," and as a result, it accelerated white flight throughout the 1970s, leaving poverty in its wake. To African Americans, the rebellion legitimised their belief that government institutions were not concerned with their wellbeing.[47] The 1.2m population of white residents in 1960 had shrunk to 816,000 by 1970,

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[42] H. Rap Brown in DueProcessTV, "Newark: The Slow Road Back (1987)."

[43] Scott Martelle, *Detroit [A Biography]* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 193; John Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), ix.

[44] Martelle, *Detroit [A Biography]*, 193; The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 84.

[45] Martelle, *Detroit [A Biography]*, 194.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 195.

and nearly half a century later, the skeletons of buildings and boarded up windows still haunt Twelfth street and its neighbouring blocks.[48]

In 1967, Detroit was a wounded city. Social scientist and sociologist, Karen Till, theorises 'wounded cities,' as "densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetuated violence."[49] Ticking the boxes on Till's checklist of 'physical destruction', 'individual and social trauma', and physical and cultural displacement, Detroit qualified as a 'wounded city', with lacerations left on both its physical and emotional landscape. To Till, wounded cities are home to groups of displaced peoples (citing the example of El Cartucho in Colombia), and by living in these wounded cities, local residents reconsider their "right to the city" through "memory-work" that encourages "political forms of witnessing to respect those who have gone before."[50] In 1968 therefore, when muralists Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade descended upon Detroit to paint the *Wall of Dignity, Wall of Pride* and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* upon the walls of wrecked buildings and churches, they attempted to heal the wounded city by painting an empowering black memory—both national and diasporic—onto the charred, urban landscape to add colour to a visually blighted area, and to soothe the social and emotional wounds of the city's black residents.

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[48] Ibid., 196.
[49] Karen Till, "Wounded Cities: Memory-work and a place-based ethics of care," *Political Geography,* issue 31, (2012): 6.
[50] Ibid., 3.

Fig. 2. William Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Dignity,* 1968, Detroit, Michigan.

Thirty-nine-year-old community organiser Frank Ditto—profiled by *TIME* magazine in 1969 as "the burly, brooding [man] who prowls the streets in a dashiki, arouses fear or hatred in many whites" and is viewed by Detroit's police and school officials as "an irresponsible agitator"—came up with the idea for the *Wall of Dignity* (fig. 2).[51] "Ditto was set about healing and empowering the community," and in 1967, after visiting the *Wall of Respect* in Chicago, Ditto became transfixed by the power of muralism. "You guys got a *Wall of Respect*, well I want a *Wall of Dignity,*" he told muralist Eugene Eda Wade.[52] "I was so fascinated each time I saw [the *Wall of Respect*]. There was such a sense of pride and dignity and history…I couldn't get it out of my mind," Ditto told journalist Jeff Huebner.[53] To Ditto, a mural was the perfect antidote to begin the long, slow process of healing the fractured physical and emotional landscape of Detroit, and on the corner of Mack Avenue and Lillibridge Street stood an abandoned ice skating rink and wrestling gym that was the perfect site for a mural. Although the area was "not a blighted or depressed area," in comparison to 43rd and Langley in Chicago, which was "100% black, and

[51] "Detroit's Ditto," *TIME*, vol. 93 issue 24, June 13, 1969, 24. Ditto was in Detroit a month before the riots, after spending time organising in Chicago but on July 23, when the rebellions broke out, he was listening to the powerful rhetoric of H. Rap Brown and Amiri Baraka at the Black Power conference in Newark. Peter H. Rossi, *Ghetto Revolts* (London: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), 64.

[52] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

[53] Jeff Huebner, *Bill Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Arts Movement,* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, unpublished manuscript), unpaginated.

poor, and destitute…an entity in itself," the 'Map of Civil Disturbance July 1967' from the Jerome Cavanagh Papers details how the blocks surrounding the abandoned building were "destroyed" after "widespread looting" during the rebellions (fig. 3.)[54] The former wrestling gym stood against the backdrop of a physically and socially broken city, and its exterior—a white façade with broken bricks and peeling paint—conveyed a story of dereliction. "Seeking to create a mural that would 'project an expression of unity,'" for the community on a site where looting and property damage took place, a mural offered the chance to heal the space by altering the incumbent violent narrative plaguing the streets of the blighted city. It would display black memory to transform an urban narrative of violence and racial unrest into one detailing "the Black man's contributions to America and world history and culture." [55] In 1968, after raising $2,000 for the mural through his community group, East Side Voice of Independent Detroit (ESVID), Ditto handed the reins over to Walker and Wade, granting them complete autonomy over the visual content of his curative mural.

Fig. 3. Map of looting and violence in Detroit (red boxes) and locations of *Wall of Pride* (point 1) and *Wall of Dignity* and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* (point 2).

Understanding the mood of the city following Detroit's recent violent confrontation, Walker and Wade paid close attention to the visual iconography, meaning, and composition of

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[54] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January, 20 2018; Josh Akers, "Map: Detroit Civil Disturbance July 1967," DETROITography, October, 21 2015, accessed September 23, 2018, www.detroitography.com/2015/10/21/map-detroit-civil-disturbance-july-1967/.
[55] East Side Voices of Independent Detroit, "ESVID Builds a New Wall".

a mural that would stand in the heart of a racially fractured, physically scarred neighbourhood. Unlike the *Wall of Respect* (1967), or the *Wall of Truth* (1968) in Chicago, the recently explosive climate of Detroit would not benefit from inflammatory images of Nathaniel Turner wielding guns, or visualisations of lynchings. Instead, in order to rejuvenate the streets around Mack and Lillibridge, Walker and Wade used a bright, earthy palette to paint diasporic, ancestral imagery onto the urban landscape to challenge a pervasive, violent narrative, physically brighten up the abandoned street, and begin healing a black space haunted by looting and damage. "I felt the need to paint out the contribution of blacks in terms of world history and what they did, especially in reference to Africa," Wade explained during an interview in 2017, converting the city's headlines of death and violence unofficially into visual scenes of diasporic pride. Compartmentalised into three horizontal segments—diasporic ancient history at the top; national black heroes in the middle; and slavery and unity at the bottom—the *Wall of Dignity* (fig. 4) colourfully used diasporic and national black history that was "not included in textbooks during that particular time," to decorate the burned out streets of Mack and Lillibridge.[56]
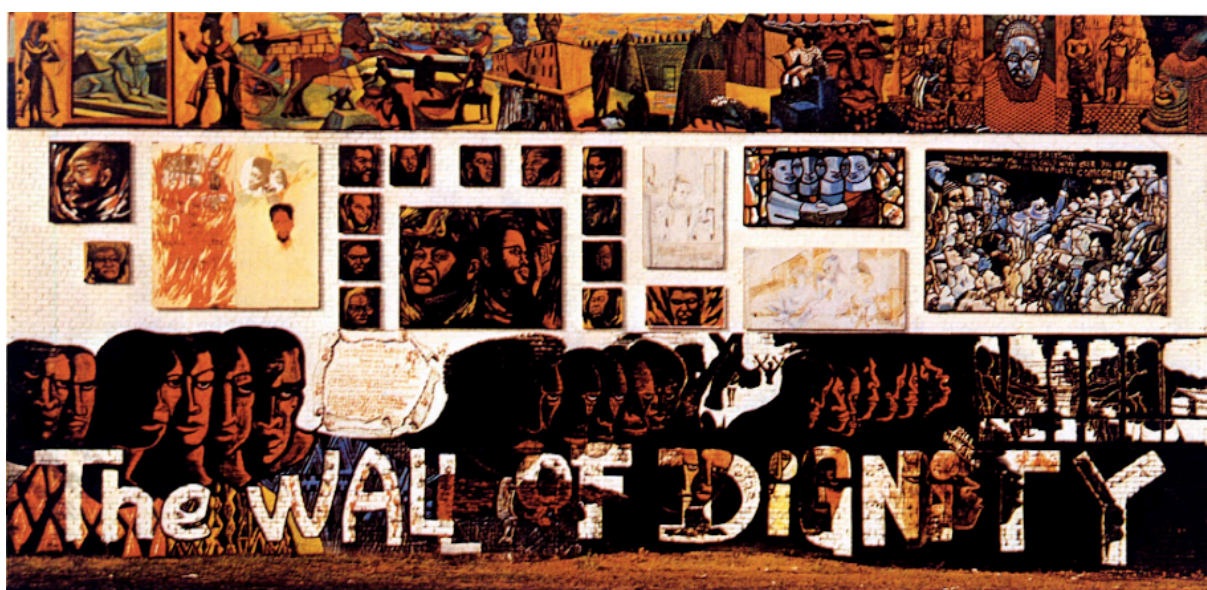
Fig. 4. William Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Wall of Dignity,* 1968, Detroit, Michigan.

The scene of Africa is the only panel of the mural to be painted as a full narrative.[57] "Many black groups in Detroit prefer to look to their African past rather than to their history

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[56] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.
[57] Ibid. During the Black Power Movement, the empowering history of Africa—both ancient and contemporary—permeated various ideological factions at work in the late 1960s: "We want to deal with Pan-Africanism. We want to deal with Nkrumahism," Stokely Carmichael demanded; "In thoughts and dreams we return to Africa," Floyd Barbour wrote; and "Africa is no longer the land we never knew," Adelaide Cromwell Hill postulated in 1968.

of slavery in America," news anchor Marlene Sanders suggested.[58] By understanding the mural's purpose to repair the wounded space as opposed to igniting revolutionary fervour like the *Wall of Truth*, Walker and Wade used ancient African history as a visual bandage wrapped around the bricks of the rundown gym, stretching from one side of the building to the other. Painted by Wade, the panel deals with "ancient culture that you had in Africa [that] made contributions here in America."[59] As viewers gaze upon the left-hand side of the frieze, they are met with a scene rooted in Egypt. Pyramids, Sphinx, pharaohs and warriors in chariots ornament the mural as if lining the walls of a museum, illuminating ancient African history in a similar fashion to Dewey Crumpler's work in Chapter 3—only this time the context and physical location imbues the visual content with the purpose to heal both the physical and emotional wounds of Detroit's landscape and black residents. The strong, dark figures cast silhouette-like shapes upon the frieze when they stand in powerful poses, tension coursing through their bodies as they assert their ownership upon the land—echoing the empowering, self-emancipatory figures in the interior murals of Aaron Douglas.[60]

Moving across the top panel, the viewer is transported south west of Egypt and into Benin City—now present-day Nigeria. Refined, scarified faces of Benin and Ife casters envelop the right-hand side of the mural, shrouded in darker, earthy tones, whilst the central section of the top panel conveys a scene of everyday life in Nubia. Huts and brick walls frame the scene as a ship floats on a glistening blue sea. Here, local people work in unity to ensure everything flows smoothly in their town. The narrative is calm, peaceful and uncomplicated—a prideful glimpse into an ancestral past on the African continent, and a moment of serenity in contrast to the physical location of the mural. "The idealized naturalism of these figures is of great beauty, certainly one of the achievements of human culture," Alan Barnett writes of Wade's African panel on the *Wall of Dignity*. "Eda clearly wanted to impress this on the people of the Detroit ghetto," he continued.[61] Elevating the stature of such beautiful figures, Wade reclaims the colours so commonly associated with fire, by using bright oranges, earthy reds, and pale blues to brighten the bruised street of Mack and Lillibridge. No longer do these colours connote anger, violence and pain. Their original meaning has been replaced; instead they immortalise an

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Stokely Carmichael speech at Howard University in 1970, "The Highest Political Expression of Black Power is Pan-Africanism," *Black Poets and Prophets: A Bold, Uncompromisingly Clear Blueprint for Black Liberation,* ed. Woodie King and Earl Anthony (New York: Signet Classics, 1972), 26; Floyd Barbour, *The Black Power Revolt,* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishing, 1968), 10; Adelaide Cromwell Hill, "What is Africa to Us?" in *The Black Power Revolt*, ed. Floyd Barbour, (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishing, 1968), 127.

[58] "Power, Pride and Self-Help, Aiding Black Movement," *Abilene Reporter-News,* Sunday, August 8, 1971.

[59] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

[60] Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 53.

[61] Ibid.

African ancestral narrative to the streets of Detroit. By converting the narrative of the derelict wrestling gym from one of dereliction and decimation to that of an uplifting ancestral past, Wade began the process of ritually healing the street of a charred city.

'Ritual healing' has many possible meanings. However, if we borrow from Betye Saar's definition in her own artwork, and Nadia Ferrara's artistic theory, the most organic definition of the term means healing something by imbuing the object with a new narrative constructed from past memories. When Jane H. Carpenter writes of Betye Saar's work in 2003, that "Saar transformed materials and objects by investing them with alternative narratives, effectively ritualizing them," little did she realise the same acts of ritual took place in the streets of Detroit in the aftermath of an urban rebellion. Whilst Saar "ritualized" clocks, clothes and mirrors by imbuing them with new and important narratives that harnessed the pull of an ancestral past, muralists ritualised buildings on rundown streets in Detroit through a similar process: by transforming the physical landscape of a burned-out street into one of racial pride and uplift. Nadia Ferrara defines artistic healing as "creating a new self by deconstructing the old, defining the components and building a multivocal self."[62] To Ferrara, healing happens by giving new meaning to the deconstructed aspects of something or someone in order to build a new sense of something or oneself. The *Wall of Dignity* did this in much the same way. Understanding the need to heal the urban landscape, Walker and Wade used the recent memory of Detroit's turbulent rebellion (deconstructing the old) to inform the visual language required on their mural in order to create a new narrative of pride and uplift at Mack and Lillibridge. Taking into account the rebellious confrontations a year earlier which led to the death of 43 people, Walker and Wade "recognized what had happened in Detroit" and "didn't put any guns up there, [because they] were just trying to show both talking to each other [and] showing what needed to be done."[63] Therefore, they offered the area of Mack and Lillibridge a renovated version of itself, replete with a new narrative of pride and dignity.

However, the mural did not just heal the physical black space in the city. It also had an affective, psychological purpose too. It provided a space to heal the social and racial wounds of local black residents. "Things in Detroit were not good at all," Bill Walker told Jeff Huebner during an interview. "[W]e worked toward painting about love, unity, and understanding as best we could. People understood—they had a desire to get along," he continued.[64] The diasporic narrative stretching across the top portion of the mural was supplemented by a selection of

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[62] Ferrara, *Healing Through Art,* 3. Although her definition in this context applies to individuals, her theorisation also transfers to the landscape of a wounded city.
[63] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.
[64] Huebner, *Bill Walker*, unpaginated.

portraits depicting black heroes—both contemporaneous and historic—that would, in tandem with the top panel, attempt to facilitate the community's "desire to get along."[65] Painted by Wade, Walker and Edward Christmas, the likenesses of Martin Luther King Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Frank Ditto himself, all looked upon the residents of Detroit's East Side. "I selected [people] that upheld…my point of view," Wade admitted of the portraits on the wall.[66] "Roy Wilkins…we didn't paint him on the wall and of course, he was supposed to have been a leader too…he said that he didn't care how many people they lynched, he was still going to support America, so we couldn't deal with that kind of concept," Wade continued.[67] Walker, Wade and their team of muralists painted figures whose memories and likenesses promoted pride, hope and black unity in a city recently decimated by urban rebellions, that would "inspire our Black youth today to match and even excel the accomplishments of the great Black personages depicted there."[68] On April 22, 1968, shortly after the mural was painted, its goals and aspirations were answered. In an article published by ESVID, in their organisational newspaper, *The Ghetto Speaks*, the following statement was written regarding the message projected to the community from the mural:

> [The *Wall of Dignity*] says: "HERE WE ARE: WE HAVE BEEN JAILED, ROBBED AND BEATEN. WE HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED, MURDERED AND KIDNAPPED, BECAUSE WE ARE BLACK. WE STAND FOR BLACKNESS. WE ALL, EACH OF US, IN OUR OWN WAY, HAVE STRUGGLED TO BE FREE! WE ARE PROUD OF THIS BLACKNESS; WE LEAVE THIS LEGACY FOR OUR PEOPLE.[69]

The paper offered a declarative statement of spatial reclamation by continuing:

> The purpose of a wall is to separate. But through the artistry and commitment of Black artists Bill Walker, Edaw, A. Saladin Redmand, E. Christmas and A. Williams of Chicago, Illinois, THIS particular wall has inverted the purpose from that of division to one of UNITY![70]

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[65] There is also a third thematic section to the mural, which is the bottom panel. It says the words 'Wall of Dignity' alongside shadowed faces, and silhouettes of enslaves figures lined up in chains alongside a poem that reads: "I am a prince, speak with respect / I shall not be chained to your / bloody deck / To live in this filth and stench? / Ooooaaee a poor soul has died on his bench / This meaning does burst the drums of my ears / Long hours from my home seem like years / A prince to ear the food of jackals!! / My arms, my legs bleed from your shackles / You must look to my woman / What has been done to one, so sweet, so mild? / AHHHHH! Within her was my child / Strange tongued-golden haired man / I will not journey to your land / Leave me…leave me be… / Cast my carcass into the sea / The sea…black / Black like me.

[66] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

[67] Ibid.

[68] East Side Voices of Independent Detroit, "ESVID Builds a New Wall: Detroit's Wall of Dignity," *The Ghetto Speaks,* April 22, 1968. Copy courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

To the members of ESVID and local residents, the *Wall of Dignity* was a bandage that began to heal not just the physical space in the community, but also the psychological trauma caused by the rebellion and years of oppression. It told black people living "in the center of a ghetto, [who] are second-class citizens…'You have something to be proud of; you have something beautiful'"—your history, your ancestors, and therefore yourself. Even though the buildings and streets surrounding Mack and Lillibridge were razed to the ground, the *Wall of Dignity* stood "as a monument to Blackness" in the middle of a ruined area, "lift[ing] people's spirits and ha[ving] a positive effect" by offering an oasis of calm and pride for the emotionally fractured citizens of Detroit.[71] "Here are Black people!" the wall said to local residents, "They are beautiful, they are brilliant, they have made an impact on the world!"[72]

The *Wall of Dignity* was not the only mural in Detroit's urban environment which sought to heal both the wounded emotional and physical landscape, however. Shortly after the mural at Mack and Lillibridge was painted, Walker, Wade and a host of local artists ventured into the epicentre of Detroit's destruction on the West Side to paint a mural that would attempt to heal both the physical and emotional landscape of Twelfth Street. The local Detroit artists included: LeRoy Foster, Kwasi Asante (formerly Robin Harper), Bennie White Jr. Ethiopia Israel (formerly Bennie White), Henri Umbaji King (formerly Henry King), Jon Onye Lockard (formerly Jon Lockard), James Malone, Arthur Roland and Nana Akpan (formerly Gerald Simmons). "The *Wall of Pride* on Twelfth Street at Virginia Park looks almost out of place in the rundown neighborhood surrounding it," *Detroit American* reported in 1968.[73] In the heart of a black community, and painted only nine blocks from where the 1967 rebellion began, the *Wall of Pride* expressed "hope in an area which gives the appearance of having lost all hope—an area of cluttered vacant lots and rows of decaying buildings."[74] Painted on the side of the Grace Episcopal Church, Walker, Wade and the artists used their contacts from ESVID to approach Reverend Marshall Hunt, a white pastor, and Reverend Arther Williams, a black pastor. "We took a definite risk in doing the wall," the thirty-six-year-old Hunt admitted, but "the wall says to the people on the streets something which they do not hear inside the church. It speaks of beauty where there is bleakness."[75]

The faces of black heroes "have meaning in this community," Hunt spoke of the *Wall of Pride*, and for the most part, the likenesses of Malcolm X, Nathaniel Turner, Amiri Baraka,

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[71] Frank Ditto in Huebner, *Bill Walker*, unpaginated.
[72] East Side Voices of Independent Detroit, "ESVID Builds a New Wall".
[73] "Detroit's Wall of Pride Gives City Big Lift," *Detroit American*, August 9, 1968, 12.
[74] Ibid. There are no surviving photos of the *Wall of Pride*.
[75] Ibid.

H. Rap Brown, Muhammad Ali, Sojourner Truth, Jomo Kenyatta, Martin Luther King Jr. W.E.B. Du Bois, and fists of black power, were received in the community with overwhelming favour.[76] The wall elevated feelings of pride—as promised by the title—and much like the *Wall of Dignity,* provided a space for emotional healing, as well as an injection of colour into an otherwise aching street. To the community, the wall became "their wall" and on Sundays, suburban folk would pilgrimage to the mural to catch a glimpse of the "black personalities who represent the diverse elements in the black community."[77] Yet, whilst the community—twenty percent of which attended the Grace Episcopal Church—awarded the mural with monument status in their neighbourhood, more than half the churchgoers attending Grace Episcopal were "well-to-do blacks" living on the north side of Detroit.[78] To these members of the congregation, the portraits of radical figures were unholy, and the fists of black power were unnecessary. Yet Hunt remained unnerved. He understood the healing impact the mural would have not only on the physical landscape, but also the social one as well. He held firm his support of the mural: "although you may disapprove or even dislike some of the people on the wall, you cannot deny that they are a part of the black experience. To have failed to include them would have been less than honest for these are the people who have meaning in this community."[79] The *Wall of Pride* and *Wall of Dignity* pushed the conceptual boundaries of black muralism, exemplifying a neglected aspect of murals—that some murals were created to heal both the physical space and emotional landscape of a wounded city. Yet Walker and Wade elevated the spaces of healing to even larger heights through *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let Me People Go)* when they created a mural on a church to create a space that not just healed individual psychological wounds of the black community, but inter-racial relationships precariously positioned after the rebellions.

The *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* (fig. 5) served as "a healing function between the races," Bill Walker told the *Michigan Chronicle* in 1969, because "the need for respect and understanding between nations and races becomes more and more essential."[80] In 1968, on a church directly opposite the *Wall of Dignity,* Father Thomas Kerwin, Astor of St. Bernard's Church, and Allen J. McNeeley, Director of St. Bernard's Community School, proposed the idea of a "Biblical Wall" to Walker, Wade and a group of local black artists. The mural should offer a sense of understanding between the races in Detroit and should be shown through the narrative "struggle of the Israelites coming out of Egypt."[81] After receiving their thematic

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.
[81] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

outline from Kerwin, but being granted creative license for the composition, style and iconography of the wall, Walker and Wade designed a mural for the façade of St. Bernard's church that promoted a reconciliatory aesthetic for the racially wounded landscape of Detroit's East Side. Their aesthetic was designed to create a site that would unify the masses and foster a sense of understanding between races.

Fig. 5. William Walker and Eugene Eda Wade, *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go),* St. Bernard's Church, Detroit, Michigan.

"Unless we unite all men, we will be drowned in ignorance and unleash the forces of hate," Walker told the *Michigan Chronicle* in 1969, and since St. Bernard's Catholic Church "was predominantly attended by whites" but with an integrated congregation, Wade and Walker used

their mural to tear down the divide between races by equating all forms of human suffering, regardless of skin colour.[82] "Someone recently said that we are living in the darkness of the lies that have been taught about black people," Walker lamented, and "I hope these paintings will help to deliver the message of respect and understanding, for that was the intent," he continued.[83] Walker wanted the *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* to be a place of communal learning for the white churchgoers; he wanted them to understand the lineage of black history; and he wanted to offer visual content that would appeal to both black and white viewers, slowly repairing the fractured relationships between the two racial groups. Seeking to "unite all men", create a space of social healing, and remedy the "darkness of lies" about African Americans, Walker and Wade created a mural that tapped into their reconciliatory goals through iconography familiar to local churchgoers—comparing the struggles of the Israelites in the book of *Exodus* to the suffering of African Americans throughout history.

The mural contains three large panels geometrically in unison with the ornamenting and physical structure of the church. The two side panels—offering a history of enslavement on the right-hand side, and an exodus out of bondage on the left led by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X—supplement the main religious narrative on the frontispiece of the building. In an attempt to teach about black suffering, the left-hand image depicts an array of figures at various stages of enslavement. Solemn individuals stare towards the viewer, half their body in shadow, as manacles shackling inert dark wrists are pulled tautly across their frames. Painted in a faux woodcut style with dark vertical lines vibrating down the long, thin panel, the warbling lines connote the idea of tears and trembling bodies.[84] Moving up the image towards the top left hand corner, two figures are behind bars, tugging at the wrought iron to demand their freedom, whilst at the bottom of the panel, a small group of people dressed in white clothing stare longingly upwards. Their gaze reaches beyond the imprisoned figures to instead rest upon a thick-rimmed circle encasing the profiles of five anonymous men. In an attempt to create a mural that served as "a healing function between races," Walker depicted the men from a rainbow of racial backgrounds.[85] To promote the concept of racial unity, all the figures on the left-hand panel stare towards these prominently situated, racially diverse but socially unified men who—depicted in profile view—carry an air of importance. The first of the five men displays physical attributes akin to those of Frederick Douglass—a proud halo of hair, a rich,

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[82] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 65; Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

[83] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride*, 65.

[84] Barnett, *Community Murals,* 53.

[85] Huebner, *Bill Walker,* unpaginated.

well-kempt beard and an aura of heroism—and in doing so, Walker and Wade hint that perhaps these men are abolitionists working towards the emancipation of the enslaved population.

Reading the mural in the same direction as a history book, the viewer's eyes are next met by the largest panel of the mural—the central panel equating the black freedom struggle with the Israelites' liberation from bondage in Egypt. "There was so much similarity between the fight of the Israelites for freedom and that of black Americans that we used it as a base for teaching history" in the community school, McNeeley told the *Michigan Chronicle*.[86] The story "seemed to have so much relevance for all of society," and given the mural's aim to foster unity and understanding in a city decimated by race rebellions, McNeeley and Father Kerwin wanted to "project that lesson to the community."[87] The background of the panel looms large and imposingly—in a similar style to Aaron Douglas's murals *The Founding of Chicago* (1933) or *Aspiration* (1936)—depicting pyramids and a monument not dissimilar to the Washington Monument. In the distance, three figures are bent double pulling large grey slate or rocks. Underscoring the "similarity between the fight of the Israelites for freedom and that of black Americans," Walker subverts the Israelite narrative by instead inserting African Americans into their visual position. Depicting them as both pharaohs and Moses working together towards liberation, Walker provides a template of racial unity for the community. Whilst the three figures toil away in the background, a young, muscular, dark-skinned pharaoh-figure in the foreground offers a helping hand to "a black Moses."[88] Moses, a visibly older man, steps onto a platform to reach the same physical level as the young leader—the hierarchy of age is irrelevant in Walker's visual memorial, as it should be in real life. If both men work together, liberation will be achieved, in other words: if both races work together in the wounded city of Detroit, the haunting memory of recent violence can be laid to rest.

Presenting a narrative of compassion and reconciliation, the mural achieved the visual, thematic and emotional desires of Kerwin and McNeeley's vision. The mural created a space with a potent, interactive message for churchgoers and community members:

> Let all who study the segments of the memorial wall ask themselves who is the Pharaoh today and who will carry God's command to………………let His (Black, Brown, White and Yellow) people go free of oppression, political exploitation, poverty, fear, unemployment, ignorance, apathy, wars and hate.[89]

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Barnett, *Community Murals,* 53.
[89] Dedication booklet, "The Harriet Ross Tubman Memorial Wall," St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Detroit Parish Collection, Box 3, Folder 33, Archives of the Archdiocese of Detroit.

In the mural's dedication booklet, released in 1968, McNeeley asked for viewers to mentally engage with the figures—who will carry God's command of racial unity? Who will ensure racial injustice and suffering are quashed? And who will work together to fight for liberation, regardless of racial background? As viewers ponder these questions, the pharaoh and Moses in the mural function as malleable, interchangeable figures, taking the form of any interracial leader desired by the viewer, so long as they strive towards the unification of races. At the feet of the powerful young pharaoh, two smaller shirtless figures in loincloths visually represent the stages of emancipation. One leans forward onto a platform, hands and feet shackled together and his head bowed. Lying upon the plinth, he is next in line for his freedom—a freedom that looks like the figure standing behind him. His body coursing with the power of liberty, the figure behind the plinth extends himself with upright fists of solidarity directly above his head. He brandishes his unmanacled wrists proudly for the entire world to see. He is a free man and a visualisation of what can be achieved through the collective work of those in the community.

As the viewer's eyes drift once more from the central panel to the right-hand side of the mural, they are met with another hopeful sight. In accordance with the trajectory of the gaze flowing throughout the mural—upwards from the left hand panel, forwards in the central panel, and downwards in the final panel—a couple hold their baby as they look down at the crowd of unified marchers led by Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and an erased Elijah Muhammad.[90] The host of leaders represent a new exodus out of bondage, out of segregation and out of inequality as they march directly towards the viewer. They stand upon a red, tiled floor that echoes the appearance of a stained-glass window—placing King, X and their followers as saints to the community. Towards the top of the mural, again ensuring the theme of racial unity textures the entirety of the church, three hands of different racial backgrounds extend out, open-palmed in search of a liberated world that perhaps one day they will find in Detroit.

When Walker and Wade painted the *Wall of Dignity, Wall of Pride* and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go),* in Detroit—a city wounded by looting, burning, decimation and rebellions—they began repairing the physical, social and emotional wounds of the city. The sight of a number of "African American men up on scaffolding working together to paint colorful images of black people and history on the façade of staid-looking churches" and buildings, imbued the streets of Detroit with a new narrative—one that looked different to the

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[90] "When Bill painted Elijah Muhammad on the first wall, they threatened to come and sue him because they didn't want him up there alongside a traitor like Malcolm X," Eugene Eda Wade told author in an oral history interview. "What they did is they came in and they painted Elijah Muhammad's image completely out because he was beside Malcolm, and they painted the Holy Quran out of Malcolm's hand. That's all they did." Wade was vague when pressed with the question of who "they" were, but when asked if it was the Nation of Islam, he replied by saying "Right, so Bill had to paint him out." Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, January 20, 2018.

destruction and violence that took place a year earlier.[91] These collective acts of painting, along with the visual content of their murals, were potent enough that they not only created interactive spaces of healing, but began shifting Detroit's narrative from one of charred violence, to one of pride, reconciliation and unity. "It was a hell of a time, man," Walker told Jeff Huebner of his time painting in Detroit, "The spirit of the people, especially young people, was tremendous, they were all trying to do something—they were all trying to do the right thing. That's all I can say. I was privileged to be part of it," he continued.[92] In 1968, when Walker and Wade took on Detroit to work amongst a community of people so willing to alter the national image of their city, little did they realise they would push the conceptual boundaries of black muralism in the US by creating reconciliatory murals and sites of healing. In 1968 when newspaper headlines reverberated around the city claiming: "Detroit's Wall of Pride Gives City Big Lift," and "Power, Pride, Self-Help Aiding Black Movement," it was clear the city of Detroit was slowly beginning to mend.

"An ongoing event": Performance, Ritual and the Multimodal Mural

The *Wall of Dignity, Wall of Pride* and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall (Let My People Go)* were made in acts of ritual healing in the city of Detroit. But this following section shows how murals also transformed walls into spaces for ritual, not through healing, but through acts of performance at their physical location, enacted by those who viewed the artwork. Using the *Wall of Respect* (1967) and *Universal Alley/Rip-Off* (1968-1975), this section examines 'ritual' by focusing on community actions (in other words performances) that took place in the immediate spaces where the mural was painted. When Ronald L. Grimes claims that "cultural processes are decisively affected by the spaces in which they transpire," he inadvertently speaks to acts of performance that occurred at the site of a mural.[93] "[R]itual is transformative, and it is a performance," Victor Turner suggested, and whilst 'ritual' in section one borrowed closely from Betye Saar, and was defined as imbuing an object with an alternate narrative in order to heal; this section of the chapter uses the work of Grimes and Turner to suggest how murals became sites of ritual performance through acts of community interaction that took place in the space around them.[94]

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[91] Huebner, *Bill Walker*, unpaginated.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ronald L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing and Ritualizing: Ritual in Fiction, Liturgical, and Public Places* (Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1993), 87.
[94] Ferrara, *Healing Through Art*, 97.

Certain murals of the Black Power Movement created spaces for performance at the walls. The performative acts that took place at a host of mural sites across the urban north in the 1960s and 1970s included poetry from famous poets; poetry from local community members, traditional African dance, pre-written music, spontaneous music, music battles, and street parties with food and community dancing.[95] These performative acts animated and engaged the space around the mural, proving how the mural was not a static cultural form but instead a dynamic one that inspired multiple types of interaction, speaking closely to what art historian Samella Lewis suggests: that "Performance, installation and environmental art are often related to and dependent on other art forms such as painting, sculpture, drama and dance."[96] Murals of the 1960s and 1970s meant different things for different people at different times depending on their location and visual content. Whilst Chapter 3 unpacked the murals' role a space of education and alternate literacy in the streets of Chicago and Bayview-Hunters Point, this section unveils how murals also created performative spaces, akin to a theatre. In the previous chapter we saw how murals became vessels of transdisciplinary knowledge, but here, to underscore the malleable nature of mural art, we see how murals also became touchstones of multimodal performance, bringing dance, poetry, street festivities and music into their animated space. It shows a deepened level of interaction between community and mural. When neighbourhood residents created performances at the site of a mural, they collapsed—and to a larger degree erased—the boundary between art and community, thus becoming an extension of the mural themselves.

In order for these performative acts to become a ritual, it required one of two things to happen: that the acts became imbued with a deep significance, such as a dedication ceremony; or the acts were repeated frequently. Attending to this latter point, Grimes writes how a "scholarly view is that ritual is:…repeated (e.g., every Sabbath).[97] He discusses how repetition in rituals can be either banal or meaningful, and he cites the example of his students passing a wooden egg darner around the class at the end of every session. The students are given no information as to why they are handling the egg—but no one questions it throughout the semester, although they occasionally ask, "now what?" once everyone has held the egg. The egg passing exercise became part of their class routine, and as an experiment one day, Grimes

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[95] Murals also become sites of political protest and rallying, especially in the age of Black Lives Matter, but this does not fall under the remit of performance, and instead will be discussed in Chapter 5 to analyse how murals create a network of police brutality victims when they become touchstones of community protest.

[96] Samella Lewis, "Performance, Installations and Environments," *International Review of African American Art,* 10, no. 2 (1992): 5.

[97] Ronald L. Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Dec. 1982), 542.

pretended to 'forget' the egg. "Someone notices and inquires," Grimes writes.[98] "What does it matter?" he asked the student. Later, Grimes brought out the egg in the final class of the semester, and after it had successfully done the rounds of the classroom, he asked, "So, shall we burn it? Toss it? What?" The class was mainly horrified at the idea of parting with the object: even though they could not comprehend the purpose of its existence, they felt an attachment to it. "Keep it here with the course, so next year's students will have it too, and that will connect them to us, because we have all handled it," students replied.[99] Grimes then opened the floor up to a discussion of what the egg meant to the students and what it meant to the class. Many students were surprised they had managed to "create ritual."[100] The purpose of Grimes's experiment was to show how, firstly, any object of any value, can become a sacred object of ritual, and secondly, how repetition has the ability to turn a meaningless act into a ritual itself. These same principles apply to acts of performance undertaken at the sites of murals every day, week and month. Inspired by the power of the walls, community members created ritual acts of performance at the mural's physical site, and in doing so became ingratiated into the mural's story through their poetry, dance and music. This becomes evident in the example of *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* (1968-1975), painted by Mitchell Caton and C. Sidda Sila Webber (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Detail of *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* painted by Mitchell Caton and C. Siddha Sila Webber, 1968-1975, Chicago, Illinois.

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[98] Ronald L. Grimes, "Ritual," *Material Religion,* 7, no. 1 (April, 2015): 81.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

In 1968, Webber and Caton took their paints, brushes and ideas to 50th Street between Champlain and St Lawrence, in Chicago's South Side (fig. 7 and 8), six blocks south of the *Wall of Respect*. Between the streets, a small cut-through alley existed where around 50 local residents would meet up on Sundays to throw dice and play music. Like 43rd and Langley where the *Wall of Respect* was painted, the area around *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* was equally impoverished, rife with drug problems, gang crime, murders, and prostitution.[101] "Through art, we could create a change in the environment," Webber reflected on his goal for the mural in 2015.[102] "At that time, it was about giving art to the people, making art relevant to the people, raising the level of consciousness [and] community participation through art," he continued—as was the goal with most murals of the Black Power Movement.[103] After approaching Caton with the idea of a collaborative mural, the two artists planned and prepped an artwork for a rundown alley in a dangerous area, where a selection of local residents already spent their free time. In order to scout out what iconography and content was suitable for their wall, Caton and Webber went to the alley to meet with Jimmy Ellis, a local musician who regularly 'jammed' there. Caton "told me to come on down and check it out, get the vibe," Webber told Rebecca Zorach, "so when I got there, maybe 50 to 100 people were standing around inside an alley, with the big garage door, and there would be maybe 5, 4-5 DJs…in this garage spinning records."[104] The alley was a local spot for community members to meet and socialise, yet the physical buildings were rundown and as a result, Walker and Caton deemed it the perfect location for their mural.

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[101] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 68
[102] Zorach, "C. Siddha Webber". Although Webber was a muralist, he saw himself foremost as a painter.
[103] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 68
[104] Zorach, "C. Siddha Webber"

Fig. 7. Mitchell Caton at *Universal Alley/Rip Off,* date unknown.

Fig 8. C. Siddha Sila Webber, location and date unknown.

The murals that preceded *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* depicted revolutionary figures of black history. However, Caton and Webber's mural opted out of such content. Instead, colourful imagery of musicians playing pianos, trumpets and saxophones organically envelop one another as they dance along the length of the wall. The music reverberating from one instrument—represented by an abundance of geometric shapes—entwines the musical notes from another as they frame the garage doors in the centre of the alley where Jimmy Ellis and his companions 'jammed'. Whilst this portion of the mural is enigmatic and alive with the energy of a visual jazz session, Caton counterbalanced the cultural imagery of the mural with a more macabre message. Two figures are painted with their backs to the viewer as they stand up against the wall (fig. 9).

Their arms are raised in surrender and their legs are spread. The barrel of a silver pistol passes through their torsos and comes out the other side, smoking, as a psychedelic pattern textures the cloud of smoke filling the air around the surrendering figures. "Caton looked on much of the system [the American government] as a rip-off," Webber suggested.[105] When Fred Hampton—who dedicated the mural in 1968—was shot and killed by the Chicago Police Department and J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO a year later, Caton vented his frustrations on the wall through the image of the pistol and surrendering men, which was added in 1970.

Fig. 9. Detail of *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* painted by Mitchell Caton and C. Siddha Sila Webber, 1968-1975, Chicago, Illinois.

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[105] Ibid.

As a "warning sign" against violence, Caton and Webber's mural had successfully begun to "change the dreariness of the ghetto into something that expressed [their] love of color," both through their imagery, and the poetry of Webber.[106] However, it is not just the bright, colourful imagery that makes *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* so significant. Although the alley was already a site of frequent music and gambling, the presence of the mural from 1968 turned the alley into a "safe-zone [for] people" where hordes of local residents gathered weekly to perform music, have jam sessions, music battles and street parties.[107] The colours on the mural created "a magnet to pull people" in to the wall, Webber suggested, and as such, the alley and mural site became animated by the interaction from community members who took to the wall weekly to informally create their own performances.[108] In an area ravaged by murders, rapes and gang crime, the fusion of colourful, culturally significant symbols with newsworthy images promoting the message of systemic racism and police brutality created a space for repeated performative acts, thus transforming *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* into a site of ritual. These performers enhanced the presence and purpose of *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* in the streets of Chicago's South Side. As a mural that sought to offer a visual oasis away from the constant struggle of a life in the black community plagued by drugs, unemployment, and geographical containment, it created a space of purpose for community members who flocked to perform and listen to the music played there, and the performative interaction with the physical space around the mural from local community members transformed them into an extension of the mural.

Prior to the mural's existence, around fifty local residents turned up weekly to play music and throw dice. "Pops" Simpson, the local impresario, would open the red garage door for a handful of people to listen to live music sets being played, but after *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* was painted, the weekly gathering of fifty people skyrocketed to around two to five thousand people, every Sunday. To the left-hand side of the mural, on the entrance to the alley, a sign was pinned up. Colourfully in unison with the mural it read: "CLUB CAPER / BATTLE JAZZ / GUEST DISC JOCKEYS." The promise of weekly jazz battles, guest disc jockeys and an electric atmosphere drew crowds of local residents as "people would come together, thousands, and just enjoy the spirit of being a community. There was maybe 2,000 people in an alley," Webber commented.[109] "They had about 5-6 DJs, and each DJ would have a spin table, and they would play," he continued:

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106 Barnett, *Community Murals,* 199.
107 Zorach, "C. Siddha Webber".
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.

One guy would play a tune, say Dexter Gordon, and the next guy would play a tune, trying to beat that tune, sound better, he would play maybe a Sonny Stitt. And then the next guy would play maybe a Charlie Parker….And then maybe once a month, live musicians would come by and join in that set… So people would be dancing in the garage, some kids would come by, they'd dance with the grown-ups, they'd learn some steps. People would get up and do their own dance. And maybe some cats would get up and improvise to the music. Then, when the live set would happen, live musicians would come. Sometimes they'd be joining in like a jam session…there were guys that would sing, singers, both male and female singers would sing to the band. And some guys had improvisational instruments, something like karaoke—pantomiming an instrument, you know what I mean?[110]

These acts of performance described by Webber were weekly, and sometimes monthly (in the case of live musicians) occurrences at the wall. The mural "created a vibration" when the fifty participants frequenting the alley before the mural turned into five thousand participants every Sunday, dancing and reading poetry.[111]

Rituals can be created by acts of repetition in the same location, at the same time every day, week, month, or year, Grimes notes, and when the crowd of local residents descended upon the alley at 2pm every Sunday afternoon to create music, recite poetry and animate the space around the mural, they performed a non-secular ritual celebration of black culture in their community; a ritual that existed beyond the lifecycle of the mural. Although the weekly ritual no longer takes place in the gathering alley at 50th Street and Champlain, until his death in 2016, Webber, organised a new, somewhat more accessible, location for a yearly "Universal Alley Jazz Jam," which now takes place in front of another mural at East 71st and South Constance Avenue in Chicago's South Side. Although Webber passed away in 2016, the yearly "Jazz Jam" still continues in the image of the weekly rituals at *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* where crowds of local residents perform music, spoken word poetry and dance, celebrating black culture in the community.

In congruence with Grimes' theorisations, *Rip-Off/Universal Alley* shows how murals created ritual through repeated performative acts at their site. However, Grimes also suggests that "ritual is…sacred (related to the Holy; of the utmost significance)."[112] He demonstrates how one-off acts of deep meaning can be forms of ritual, suggesting how "ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places."[113] This speaks directly to dedication ceremonies that took place in communities after the completion of a mural. Commonly after a mural was erected, muralists

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 68.
[112] Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," 542.
[113] Ibid., 541.

and the community hosted one-off dedication ceremonies to ensure the mural was firstly bestowed to the community, and secondly embedded in the urban landscape as a symbol of pride. In order to achieve this, "animated persons enact[ed] formative gestures" at the mural site by performing poetry, dance or music.[114] Animating the space, these acts of performance were significant and meaningful when they became non-secular ceremonial rituals. Dedications could last from a few hours to a few days, and commonly during the 1960s and 1970s, famous guests and local politicians assisted in the process. In 1970 for example, when Eugene Eda Wade finished the *Wall of Meditation* at Blackhawk Street and Cleveland Avenue in Chicago's North Side, Sidney Yates—a Democratic member of the House of Representatives—and Oscar Brown Jr.—a Black Arts Movement poet, musician and civil rights activist—visited the wall, spoke to members of the neighbourhood, and dedicated the mural to the local community. Yet one of the most impressive, lengthy and important dedication ceremonies to take place for a mural was for the *Wall of Respect*—the nation's first African American street mural.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the *Wall of Respect* was initially painted by OBAC and Walker in 1967, before it was re-worked as a constantly evolving work of art through the practices of Walker and Wade. Over its short lifespan, the wall underwent three main visual transitions, each time changing with the growing sense of militancy in the air and becoming more radical than the next, before being burned down by a suspect fire in 1971. The *Wall* was America's first black street mural. The concept of a black mural for the community was new—no one had seen anything quite like it, and in 1967, OBAC photographer, Robert Abbott Sengstacke captured these moments of excitement and intrigue on camera. Awe, admiration and wonderment lace the faces of a group of young men on the street of 43rd and Langley who look towards where the mural is being painted, just out of shot. At the moment of capture, two of the seven men spot Sengstacke and his camera. Their gaze meets the lens and they smile casually, their body language relaxed as they hold cigarettes, papers and a blazer. Behind the two smiling onlookers are two more men standing in the doorway of a rundown building. In a completely candid moment, they pay no attention to Sengstacke and his lens when they instead fix their eyes on the scene out of shot—the muralists creating the *Wall*. To a blighted, graffiti-ridden area rife with prostitution, heroin sales and gang crime, the sight of artists working to cover a wall with "sheroes and heroes" of black history was a sight to behold.[115]

In 1967, around the time of the mural's completion, Sengstacke and Crawford photographed two similarly excitable moments of young children in acts of contemplation over

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[114] Ibid.
[115] Author's interview with Eugene Wade June 1, 2017.

the existence of their new street gallery.[116] The picture taken by Sengstacke is in black and white and depicts two young girls peering out of their window from the rundown apartment block opposite the wall. They gaze at the mural. More is seen of the girl in the left-hand side of the frame. She sits on the windowsill, her body in profile but her head facing forwards—whatever she was doing by sitting on the ledge is no longer occupying her attention. Instead the *Wall* captivates her attention and she contemplates it by casting a long gaze over her left shoulder. The view she considers is new and exciting, and as she enjoys what she sees, a smile creeps over her face and dimples her young skin. Her sister, or perhaps a friend, moves forward to the window to gaze upon the same enchanting spot. Crawford's photograph was taken during the same summer, this time from a worm's eye angle. Standing underneath a building, he looked up and photographed a young boy sitting on a rooftop and staring at the wall. The boy's legs hang from the sill of the building and his face holds an intense gaze. Perhaps the young boy climbed onto the roof in order to get a new perspective of the mural, or perhaps he just wanted a clear view of the wall without the obstruction of masses of onlookers. Either way, the photographs of Sengstacke and Crawford convey just how potent and significant the mural was to the residents—both old and young—who live around 43rd and Langley. Considering the mural elicited such inquisitive and excitable reactions from neighbourhood residents during its creation, it seemed only natural that the mural—the first of its kind—was given a significant community dedication, one that served as a ritualistic non-secular ceremonial dedication.

On August 27, 1967, the *Wall of Respect* created a ritual. The mural's dedication inspired ritualistic acts of performance at the site in a "street…filled with people."[117] Eva Cockroft, John Pitman Weber and John Cockroft reported how "the atmosphere was festive, and vibrant with music. Gwendolyn Brooks and Haki Madhubuti read poems dedicated to the wall and Val Ward, founder of the Kuumba Theater Workshop, recited".[118] Blocks around 43rd and Langley were animated with celebrations. Acts of empowering music, dance and poetry were performed in front of the wall, solidifying Grimes' view that "ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places."[119] The ritual ceremony was undertaken by a collection of artists performing acts of dedication to the wall. Gwendolyn Brooks, Haki Madhubuti, Lester Bowie, Roscoe Mitchell, and Lerone

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[116] I am unable to reproduce the described photographs here as they are subject to copyright and are only printed in Abdul Alkalimat, Romi Crawford and Rebecca Zorach, *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

[117] Eva Cockroft, John Pitman Weber and Jim Cockroft, *Towards a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc, 1977), 4.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," 541.

Bennett all stood in front of the mural and ritualised the space through their performances. Whilst Bennett gave a speech, and Bowie and Mitchell played a duet on the saxophone, Brooks and Lee wrote and performed poetry that described—not only the elevated mood of black consciousness created by the wall as discussed in Chapter 2—but also the sacred relevance of "the mighty black wall" to their community.[120]

"All, worship the Wall," Gwendolyn Brooks eulogised in preacher-like fashion to her audience at 43rd and Langley, as she partook in the ceremonial ritual at the site of the mural. A 'ritual' can be a "sacred" act of "utmost significance", and through her dedication, Brooks comments on the sanctity of the wall, whilst sanctifying and ritualising the space around the wall by reading her poem. Reciting such lines as: "a little black stampede / in African images of brass and flowerswirl, / fist out "Black Power!"" and ""boy-men on roofs fist out "Black Power!"", Brooks unpacks how the *Wall* is a sacred symbol of black pride for the community, where connections to the African diaspora flourish. Haki Madhubuti's poem, also titled *The Wall,* connotes a similar sentiment about the sanctity of the wall.[121] Madhubuti speaks closely to Brooks' analysis of the mural when he discusses an almost pilgrimage-like journey from Chicago residents to visit the wall:

> negroes from south shore &
> hyde park coming to check out
> a black creation
> black art, of the people,
> for the people,
> art for people's sake[122]

Considering "ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places," Brooks performs her poem at the site of the mural to create a ritual dedication ceremony, and in a meta-poetic twist, self-reflexively uses her poem to discuss the process of ritualising when she reads:

> It is the Hour of tribe and of vibration,
> the day-long Hour. It is the Hour
> of ringing, rouse, of ferment-festival[123]

Here, Brooks acknowledges the build-up of the forthcoming festival of dedication. She knows she is not the only participant stepping up to the small, wooden stage to engage in a dedicatory

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[120] Alkalimat, Crawford and Zorach, *The Wall of Respect*, 34.
[121] Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," 541.
[122] Alkalimat, Crawford, and Zorach, *The Wall of Respect,* 39.
[123] Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," 541; *The Wall* (1968) reprinted in Alan W. Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 52.

performance. The day—August 27—would be electric with artists seeking to perform in acts of ritual, with the mural as their backdrop, and she is right. "Women in wool hair chant their poetry" and "Phil Cohran gives us messages and music / made of developed bone and polished and honed / cult" she declares.[124] The dedicatory performances at the wall take all forms. Brooks continues:

> All
> Worship the Wall.
>
> I mount the rattling wood. Walter
> says, "She is good." Says "She
> our Sister is." In front of me
> hundreds of faces, red-brown, brown, black, ivory,
> yield me hot trust, their yea and their
>   Announcement
> that they are ready to rile the high-flung ground.
> Behind me. Paint.[125]

Here, Brooks collapses the boundary between her performance and her poem by narrating her experience of dedicating the mural in real time. Through her meta-commentary on the process of dedicating the mural, Brooks underscores the pivotal role of the mural in the landscape of Chicago's South Side—evidenced through the "hundreds of faces" gathering at the site to see her dedication, as well as the exclamations of "Black Power!" by those who viewed the wall.

Whilst the dedication ceremony may have been scheduled for one day only—August 27—a celebratory festival ensued for the entire following month.[126] Jazz musicians 'jammed,' actors performed, and poets continued to recite their poetry. Those performing at the wall became part of its narrative, enveloped in its meaning, purpose and importance through their acts of ritualistic performance. As Abdul Alkalimat, one of the painters of the *Wall,* recollects in his co-authored book, *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (2017), "milling about the Wall was a panoply of artists, poets, actors, musicians, activists, journalists, community residents of all ages" who are now "part of the history of the Wall as object and performance."[127] The mural "radically changed the immediate space around it. It turned the street into a public forum for poetry, music, theatre, and political rallies," he continued.[128] Here Alkalimat acknowledges how murals had the capability to inspire and create rituals at their sites

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[124] *The Wall* in Barnett, *Community Murals*, 52.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Jeff Huebner, "The Man Behind the Wall," *Chicago Reader,* August 28 1997, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-man-behind-the-wall/Content?oid=894264.
[127] Alkalimat, Crawford, and Zorach, *The Wall of Respect,* 30.
[128] Ibid., 28.

through performance; as well as how community members became interactively embedded into the mural. The *Wall of Respect* created an environment that inspired performative acts of ritual to take place, and between 1967 and 1971, the mural constantly incited ritual performances from a variety of cultural forms when it lived in the community as "an ongoing event."[129]

When people think of murals of the Black Power Movement, they seldom think of rituals. What springs to mind instead is the radical iconography, the empowering reflections of black history, and the democratising, communal efforts to create a mural. This chapter has examined the neglected ritualistic functions of the mural form to prove how murals were, once again, more than works of art in the street. They transformed walls of black communities, this time, into spaces of ritual. This chapter has shown how murals became spaces of ritual healing— being created in an act of ritual to heal the physical, social and racial landscapes of a wounded city—and creating spaces of ritual performance through dedication ceremonies and weekly street parties. Thus, collectively, the three chapters set against the backdrop of the Black Power Movement, have unpacked the ways in which murals transformed, reclaimed, and beautified the streets of black communities with black history and memory to empower residents, protest geographical confinement, and commemorate black heroes during the struggle for physical and intellectual black liberation. These chapters have shown how muralists used walls to create sites of interaction and imagination in neighbourhoods haunted by institutional racism, rioting and *de facto* segregation. As physical manifestations of black consciousness, alternate forms of literacy, and sites of healing and performance, murals stood as a malleable art form, and muralists constantly adapted their visual content and conceptual role to fit the location, needs and context of each community. But as the radical era of Black Power tapered to an end in the late 1970s, the radical potency of black muralism declined also.

Conservatism flourished under the Reagan administration, and the National Endowment for the Arts began to fund murals that placed limits on radical content from the heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. Murals became less *of* the community—its spirit, people and context—and more *for* the community—as a way to beautify and aesthetically improve the area.[130] Refraining from discussions of these murals is not to say they were, in any way, irrelevant or unimportant, only that governmental intervention and sponsorship altered the democratising, subversive and interactive nature of black muralism. As such, murals created during the 1980s and 1990s warrant their own separate study. But in 2009, after the fatal shooting of Oscar Grant, and at a moment of intense racial protest, the black mural as a

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[129] Ibid., 30.
[130] Rebecca Zorach, *Art for People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 216.

democratising, subversive and interactive force emerged in the streets once again. As this thesis traces the genealogy of black muralism at heightened moments of racial protest, the following and final chapter unpacks how murals of the Black Lives Matter Movement are the latest iteration of radical black muralism. It shows how Black Lives Matter murals exist in continuum of artistic protest, and how, like their Black Power predecessors, they too have become sites of interaction, while evolving to suit the demands of the new protest movement. Although functioning as physical manifestations of blackness in unofficially segregated black communities, contemporary murals no longer curate walls of education and literacy. Instead, Black Lives Matter murals transform building façades into commemorative visual gravestones to mark the physical sites at which victims of police brutality were killed, and to counter the racist stereotypical media manipulation of their memory.

Chapter Five
"These Voices Continue to Speak To Us":
Muralism in the Era of Black Lives Matter

They told me that I needed seasoning
Well I told them my flavor's that Sandra Bland, see
If they don't wanna hear what I got to say they can go to the back and pipe down
See I'm black, but my skin tone is that distinct Mike Brown
See they do it for a different reason, they just wanna get seen
But I'm still pissed off that Tamir Rice ain't make it to 15
So I'm standing in the face of injustice, every day
With a hoodie on, no matter who gon' get me
Just to let them know that Trayvon sent me
I still don't know if I'm safe anymore,
'Coz Oscar showed us that even when you play right you still get the metal

Bruce Franks, State Representative Elect 78 District, Missouri House of Representatives.[1]

In 2014, Israel McCloud picked up his paintbrushes to paint an empty, lifeless wall adjacent to a derelict building on the corner of Wheeler and Almeda Streets in Houston, Texas. Motivated by "the intense climate of injustice" pulsing throughout African American communities in the wake of Eric Garner's and Michael Brown's deaths, McCloud layered the wall with the memory of a young victim of violence who had been killed two years earlier (fig.1).[2] Seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin was fatally shot by neighbourhood watchman, George Zimmerman, in Sanford, Florida on February 26, 2012. Carrying only a packet of skittles and a bottle of iced tea, Martin was profiled by Zimmerman as both suspicious and threatening as he passed through the Twin Lakes Housing Community at 7:09pm with his hood up.[3] Seven witness calls to 911 and a fatal shot to Martin's chest later, Zimmerman was apprehended by the police and taken into questioning, only to be released five hours later under the remit of self-defence in accordance with Florida's Stand Your Ground statute.[4] The following year, in July 2013, Zimmerman was tried for the second-degree murder of Martin, as well as the lesser charge of manslaughter. Three weeks later, on July 13, 2013, he was acquitted of both. Protests ensued and the sanctity of the American judicial system was brought into question for months after the trial. As demonstrators marched in the streets demanding justice in the name of Black Lives Matter,

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[1] Jason Kander, "Interview with Bruce Franks", produced by Crooked Media. *Majority 54*, November 17, 2017. Podcast audio. Accessed November 23, 2017.
[2] Trey Serna, "Trayvon Martin Mural Painted in Houston," CW 39 NewsFix, February 3, 2015, accessed May 29, 2017, http://cw39.com/2015/02/03/trayvon-martin-mural-painted-in-houston/.
[3] John Rudolf and Trymaine Lee "Trayvon Martin Case Spotlights Florida History of 'Sloppy' Police Work," Huffington Post, accessed June 10, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/09/trayvonmartin-cops-botched-investigation_n_1409277.html.
[4] Ibid.

Israel McCloud preserved the memory of Trayvon Martin in the best way he knew how—through murals.

Bringing life to the wall on Wheeler and Almeda Streets, he created a tribute to the unjust killing of the unarmed Martin. "I wanted to have a tribute wall," McCloud told CW 39 News Fix: "these voices continue to speak to us, for us to make social change and to look within our own selves." He continued, "it's important that all those who view it remember Trayvon Martin, remember Michael Brown, remember the countless victims of violence and injustice."[5] Standing as an encompassing tribute for all victims of police brutality, the mural, nestled amongst rundown buildings on Almeda Street, depicts the silhouette of a hooded boy looking towards the sky whilst an outstretched figure reaches the length of the unknown outline in a shield-like fashion.

Fig. 1 Israel McLoud, *For Trayvon*, 2014, Houston, Texas.

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[5] Trey Serna, 'Trayvon Martin Mural Painted in Houston.'

To viewers, the hooded figure could be anyone, echoing former-President Obama's famous statement, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."[6] The omission of Martin's face allows viewers to use the mural as a multifaceted memorial to victims of police brutality, and as it stands proudly on Wheeler and Almeda Street to honour the lives of those who have been killed by US law enforcements, it joins the latest wave of black muralism ushered in by the inception of Black Lives Matter.[7]

When Oscar Grant was shot in the back at Fruitvale Station in Oakland, California by Officer Johannes Mehserle in 2009, his death ushered in a new age of muralism in the US, providing a visual accompaniment to the unfolding Black Lives Matter movement.[8] By the 1980s, the empowering, resistive murals of the Black Power Movement had largely given way to funded, government-sanctioned murals devoid of radical, revolutionary content created under the guise of urban renewal. However, by 2010, a new moment of muralism emerged. Murals appeared around Oakland, honouring Grant's life and memorialising his memory in the city where he died, and when his name—already etched into the slate of police brutality victims—was later joined by Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile and Sandra Bland, new memorial murals emerged in cities like Baltimore, Ferguson, Oakland, Houston, Trenton, Baton Rouge, Falcon Heights, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Miami. The most common victims of police brutality memorialised in the 72 murals found to

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[6] Krissah Thompson and Scott Wilson, "Obama on Trayvon Martin: 'If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon,'" The Washington Post, March 23, 2012, accessed June 11, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-if-i-had-a-son-hed-look-like-trayvon/2012/03/23/gIQApKPpVS_story.html?utm_term=.5218f6bc93a1.

[7] #BlackLivesMatter is a watershed movement in protest history, amorphous and unlike anything preceding it. It was birthed in the aftermath of the George Zimmerman verdict on July 13, 2013 when co-creator, Alicia Garza tweeted a statement with the embedded phrase 'Black Lives Matter.' Finding traction on social media, the phrase was picked up by a wealth of protestors demanding the indictment of Zimmerman, and justice for Martin's death. Placards and banners with the words '#BlackLivesMatter' decorated Floridian cities and various others nationwide, as well as lining newsfeeds on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and by forming a "collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement," Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrice Cullors crafted a movement that works towards validating black life in ways where they "are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise." With an emphasis on intersectionality, the contemporary nature of the movement is underscored through the inclusion of sexuality, gender, disabilities and incarceration issues, affirming the lives of "Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum." As a constantly evolving movement, the politics of Black Lives Matter are more fluid than those in protest movements like the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement, but its guiding principles are: "diversity; restorative justice; collective value; unapologetically black; loving engagement; queer affirming; transgender affirming; globalism; black families; empathy; black villages; black women; and intergenerational." There are many articles, in both academic journals and the news media, that draw parallels between Black Lives Matter and Black Power and Civil Rights, such as Dewey M. Clayton's "Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in the United States," (2018), Say Burgin's "Black Lives Matter, Black Power and the Role of White Allies," (2018), and "Comparing the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter," *Medium* (2016). BlackLivesMatter, "About Us," Black Lives Matter, accessed September 4, 2015, http://blacklivesmatter.com/about.

[8] The phrase #BlackLivesMatter was not in circulation during the time of Grant's death, it was the acquittal of George Zimmerman for Trayvon Martin's death that inspired the phrase to be created, but once #BlackLivesMatter gained traction, Grant's name joined the list of police brutality victims connected to the movement.

date are, Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Sandra Bland and Aiyana Jones.[9] I have found these murals by either walking the streets of Google Maps or mining Twitter, Flikr, Tumblr and Instagram.

Black Lives Matter murals are the next iteration of radical black muralism in the artistic tradition outlined in this thesis. Adapting to the contemporary movement of racial protest, Black Lives Matter murals are evolved from their Black Power predecessors due to the need for immediacy and site-specificity. No longer are contemporary murals painted anywhere and everywhere available in the black community as spaces of imagination, self-transformation and spatial reclamation. Instead Black Lives Matter murals spring up instantly in black neighbourhoods to become visual gravestones commemorating the deceased. However, while the locations and immediacy of these murals differ to their Black Power predecessors, Black Lives Matter murals are still connected to their 1960s counterparts when they create spaces of interaction within the black community. I conceptualise Black Lives Matter murals as visual gravestones in two ways. In discussing the murals dedicated to Freddie Gray and Alton Sterling, I firstly show how murals are created in the victims' hometowns and occasionally at the physical sites of their death as ways of commemorating their lives, and like murals discussed in Chapter 4, healing racial pain. Like the Detroit murals discussed in the previous chapter, Black Lives Matter murals serve as sites of mourning and pacifist protest. These murals create a network of police brutality victims as the visual afterlives of the commemorated figures become sites of activism for other victims of the same fate. My second conceptualisation of visual gravestones comes from the murals of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. I engage with Alan Rice's theory of guerrilla memorialisation to show how murals counter mainstream amnesia and subvert the biases and negative portrayals in the media by representing positive and empowering memories of the victims' lives.[10] Like the murals discussed in Chapter 3, Black Lives Matter murals seek to memorialise the lives and figures who are obscured and left out of official commemorations.

Given the contemporary nature of Black Lives Matter, murals have yet to be analysed in embryonic scholarship dealing with the movement. This chapter inserts Black Lives Matter murals into the wider black mural tradition that arcs across moments of heightened racial protest. It also casts light on a neglected visual aspect of what remains a constantly developing

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[9] As part of my research, I have tracked down all the murals that contain the faces of victims of police brutality, as well as murals that are more broadly connected to Black Lives Matter. In doing so, nationwide, I have found 72 murals so far. Whilst I believe this to be a comprehensive list, the ephemeral nature of murals, along with their unacknowledged presence in the mainstream media means there may be certain murals missed. Whilst it remains unknown as to why these specific individuals have the most murals, it is reasonable to believe it is because of the high-profile nature of their death.

[10] Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

protest movement. Although murals provide an important way of understanding community responses to the Black Lives Matter movement, they are entirely overlooked in a burgeoning scholarship. Existing studies instead focus on the politics of Black Lives Matter, for example, its intersectional nature at the crossroads of gender, sexuality and race politics, its broader historical lineage and (dis)continuity with both the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and its leaderless structure and social media platform.[11] Most of the existing literature falls under the remit of the social sciences and psychology, however this chapter writes the artistic grassroots responses of the Black Lives Matter movement finally into the larger narrative.[12] By connecting these murals to a broader artistic tradition, this chapter shows how Black Lives Matter murals transform walls into sites of commemoration and how the contemporary movement engages in methods of grassroots visual protest similar to those deployed in the Black Power Movement.

"Immortalizing a Moment:" Site Specific Murals of the Black Lives Matter Movement

On July 5, 2016, Alton Sterling was shot dead at close range by two police officers. They apprehended the thirty-seven-year-old outside a convenience store in Baton Rouge before pinning him to the ground as he tried to reach for a gun in his pocket. The officers slammed Sterling into the back of a car, Tasered him, shouted profanities at him, and repeatedly threatened to shoot him in the head. Six fatal shots were then fired into his body. Like most cases of police brutality, the event was caught on video; and again, like most cases of police brutality, the police officers were not charged for their actions. The shooting was deemed "reasonable" and the officers were placed on administrative leave. In March 2018 however, new raw footage from police body cameras was released, and Blane Salamoni—the officer who fired the six shots and repeatedly told Sterling he was going to "shoot him in the head"—was fired.[13]

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[11] Examples of contemporary literature on #BlackLivesMatter include: Wesley Lowery, *They Can't Kill Us All: The Story of Black Lives Matter* (2017); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (2016); Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History* (2017); 'The Class Politics of Black Lives Matter,' by Barbara Ransby in *Dissent* (2015); 'Does Black Lives Matter Pick Up Where The Black Panthers Left off?' by Sean Elder on *News Week*; 'How I Use #BlackLivesMatter as an Entry Point and a Disruption Tool,' by Regina N. Bradley in *Meridian: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* (2016); 'Black Lives Matter: Posts-Nihilistic Freedom Dreams,' by Julius Bailey and David J. Leonard in the *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* (2015); and 'Black Lives Matter: Towards a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle,' by Russell Rickford on *New Labour Forum* (2015).

[12] For example, Colin Wayne Leach and Aerielle M. Allen's "The Social Psychology of the Black Lives Matter Meme and Movement" for *Current Directions in Psychological Science*; Jelani Ince, Fabio Rojas and Clayton A. Davis, "The social media response to Black Lives Matter: how Twitter users interact with Black Lives Matter through hashtag use," for *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; and David N. Pellow, "Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge," from *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*.

[13] Richard Fausset, "Baton Rouge Office Is Fired in Alton Sterling Case as Police Release New Videos," New York Times, March 30, 2018, accessed March 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/30/us/baton-rouge-alton-sterling.html.

"These actions were not minor deviations from policy," Chief Murphy Paul of the Baton Rouge Police Department said, "and they contributed to the outcome that resulted in the death of another human being."[14]

Fig. 2 Anonymous, *Untitled,* 2016, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Shortly after Sterling's death, the convenience store where he spent his final hour was transformed into an unofficial memorial. His portrait was painted onto the fifteen-foot

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[14] Ibid.

corrugated iron wall, immortalising his smiling likeness against a bright yellow background at the site of his death (fig. 2).

Fig 3. Community gather at Alton Sterling's site of death in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2016.

Fig. 4. Members of the community write messages of respect upon the wall to honour Alton Sterling, 2016.

Cars displaying the words "Black Lives Matter!" and "37 years, 5 kids, 6 shots" flocked to the site (fig. 3), while around the side of the food mart, stood a second memorial for Sterling, which took on an interactive function for the local community whose members wrote personal messages of love, respect and commemoration for the victim (fig. 4). The murals of Sterling are just one example of how Black Lives Matter murals become memorials due to their immediacy and site-specificity. Whilst murals of the Black Power Movement were commonly painted on any available space in the black community to elevate black consciousness, subvert whitewashed institutional spaces, and inspire ritualistic performances, their contemporary counterparts can be more adequately analysed as 'memorials' due to their specific location in cities and at the sites where victims were shot and killed. In the 1960s and 1970s, murals commemorated black heroes and activists omitted from mainstream public recognition, and to some extent, they did memorialise recently deceased leaders, as seen in Chapter 3's discussion of the *Wall of Truth* (1968), which commemorated the life of Fred Hampton.

However, Black Lives Matter murals do something new—they immediately create memorials by turning sites of black death into places of commemoration. In *Community Murals: The People's Art* (1984), Alan Barnett discusses how Latino murals of the early 1970s operated as memorials to slain gang leaders. In 1972 and 1973, muralist and sign-painter William F. Herrón III created street art that focused on the issue of gang warfare following four gang killings in Lil' Valley, and his murals including *The Wall That Cracked Open* functioned as memorials to the deceased.[15] However, in studies of black murals, such as *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Street Murals* (2000), *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago* (2017) and *Art for the People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975* (2019), murals are rarely theorised as memorials. Additionally, memorial scholarship not only refrains from discussions of murals, but also from discussions of the immediate commemoration of recent events. *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (2006) and *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (1998) give focus to conventional, conservative memorials and the commemoration of historical events as opposed to discussions of the immediacy of memorials in response to contemporary incidents in society. "[T]he manifest purpose of a memorial is to summarise and synthesise the past into a coherent narrative," Owen J. Dwyer writes.[16] Similarly, Robert Winks suggests how the past is "what is commemorated by

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[15] Alan Barnett, *Community Murals: The People's Art* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1984), 111.
[16] Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape" in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory,* ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 18.

monuments and markers, plaques and parades, historic sites and museums."[17] Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford define memory as "the process by which people recall, lay claim to, understand and represent the past," and Kirk Savage discusses how originally, "The impulse behind the public monument was an impulse to mold history into its rightful pattern."[18]

By the above definitions, Black Lives Matter murals do not fall under the remit of a 'memorial' as they do not distil black history into a cohesive narrative upon the wall. They do not deliver a history lesson by looking to represent a black past. Instead, Black Lives Matter murals focus on the present and mark the physical sites of death and atrocity with recent memories of police brutality victims to sanctify the space where the lives of individuals such as Michael Brown, Freddie Gray and Alton Sterling were taken. Black Lives Matter murals conceptually work in direct conversation with Manning Marable's theorisations in *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (2005). Here, Marable suggests that places or sites of racist tragedy in American history "are difficult, if not impossible, to mark for memorialisation" given their purposeful omissions in mainstream narratives.[19] As a result, Black Lives Matter murals subvert this persistent oversight by inserting narratives of tragedy and commemoration into the streets when transforming walls of black communities into unofficial memorials. Black Lives Matter murals engage in the socio-cultural interaction discussed by Ronald Lee Fleming in *The Art of Placemaking: Interpreting Community Through Public Art and Urban Design* (2007), to ensure that unofficial memorials exist to honour the lives of victims, and to serve as visual reminders of the broken racial justice system in the US.[20] When demarcating important 'places', Fleming argues that "place is not merely what was there, but also the interaction of what is there and what happened there."[21] By refraining from using the words 'history' and 'past', and instead focusing on "what happened" at specific sites, and by suggesting that placemaking is about "giving memory a stake in the present," Fleming provides a conception of memorial-making that involves a sense of immediacy.[22] Responding to recent events by honouring what happens at physical locations, Black Lives Matter murals seek to keep the memory of victims alive. Through their immediate installation in cities at sites

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[17] Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham,: Duke University Press, 1998), 65.
[18] Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, "Introduction," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xiii; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth- Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.
[19] Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimaging the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future,* (New York: Civitas Books, 2005), xii.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ronald Lee Fleming, *The Art of Placemaking: Interpreting Community Through Public Art and Urban Design* (New York: Merrell, 2007), 14.
[22] Ibid., 15.

where police brutality victims took their final breaths, these murals become memorials for the dead at sites of atrocity, and nowhere is this more strongly exemplified than in the Baltimore murals dedicated to Freddie Gray.

On April 12, 2015, Freddie Gray was walking around Baltimore's Gilmor Homes housing project in Sandtown-Winchester. Upon seeing Lieutenant Brian W. Rice, Officer Edward Nero, and Officer Garret E. Miller—who at the time were patrolling the area on bikes—Gray started to run.[23] The officers chased him, held him down, and as he screamed in pain, barely able to walk, Gray was put in a police van whilst calling for his inhaler. The request for his inhaler was denied. In pain and in an immovable state, Gray lay in the back of the police van without a seatbelt on.[24] The van made three confirmed stops en route to the police station— one to place him in leg irons because he was becoming 'irate'; another stop was captured on a private camera but the police have not released the reasons as to why; and a third stop was made to check on Gray and place a second prisoner into the van, before arriving at the West District Police Station.[25] At 9:26am, paramedics were called to the police station to transport the unconscious Gray to the hospital. A week later, on April 19, Freddie Gray died. An autopsy revealed his spine was severed and voice box crushed.[26] Whilst the police apprehended Gray, they believed him to be carrying an illegal switchblade, worth up to one year in prison or a $500 penalty.[27] Similar to the deaths of Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Alton Sterling, protestors took to the streets to demand justice for Gray's unlawful killing.[28]

Much like the 8-day period between April 6, and April 14, 1968—following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.—the city of Baltimore burned. Nearly 41 years to the day, the Maryland city was in flames once again. April 12, to May 3, 2015 saw the mostly peaceful protests demanding redemption and justice for the stolen life of Freddie Gray. By April 25, a state of emergency was declared, and the National Guard was brought in, shortly followed by a 10pm curfew.[29] Much like the cities in the Long Hot Summers of 1967 and 1968, Baltimore was

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[23] Amy Davidson, "Freddie Gray's Death Becomes a Murder Case," The New Yorker, May 1, 2015, accessed June 2, 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/freddie-grays-death-becomes-a-murder-case.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Daily News, "Freddie Gray Timeline: The events leading up to Freddie Gray's death in police custody," New York Daily News, April 12, 2015 accessed June 16, 2017, http://m.nydailynews.com/news/national/events-leading-freddie-gray-death-police-custody-article-1.2205414.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Charging Documents for Freddie Gray," The Baltimore Sun, April 20, 2015, accessed June 16, 2017, http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/crime/bal-charging-documents-for-freddie-gray-20150420-htmlstory.html.
[28] BlackLivesMatter, 'About Us.'
[29] Noah Bierman, W.J. Hennigan, and Joseph Tanfani, "Baltimore racked by violence; governor calls out National Guard," LA Times, April 27, 2015, accessed February 1, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-freddie-gray-funeral-baltimore-20150427-story.html#page=1.

wounded. In the wake of Freddie Gray's death, a spotlight was shone on the West Baltimore neighbourhood of Sandtown-Winchester. Often compared to a "third world country" with "block after block of boarded-up windows, collapsed roofs and—since the April [2015] riots—charred buildings," news crews generated footage of the riots whilst simultaneously highlighting what appeared to be a forgotten community.[30] "There are 9,000 vacant properties in this zip code, people are living in an area where 70 or 80% of the houses are boarded up," community organiser J. C. Faulk told NBC News in 2015. "Other people in the city are getting the resources, so why aren't people in this community getting the resources?" he continued, echoing the racial confinement and isolation felt 60 years earlier in enclaves like Chicago's South Side and Bayview-Hunters Point.[31]
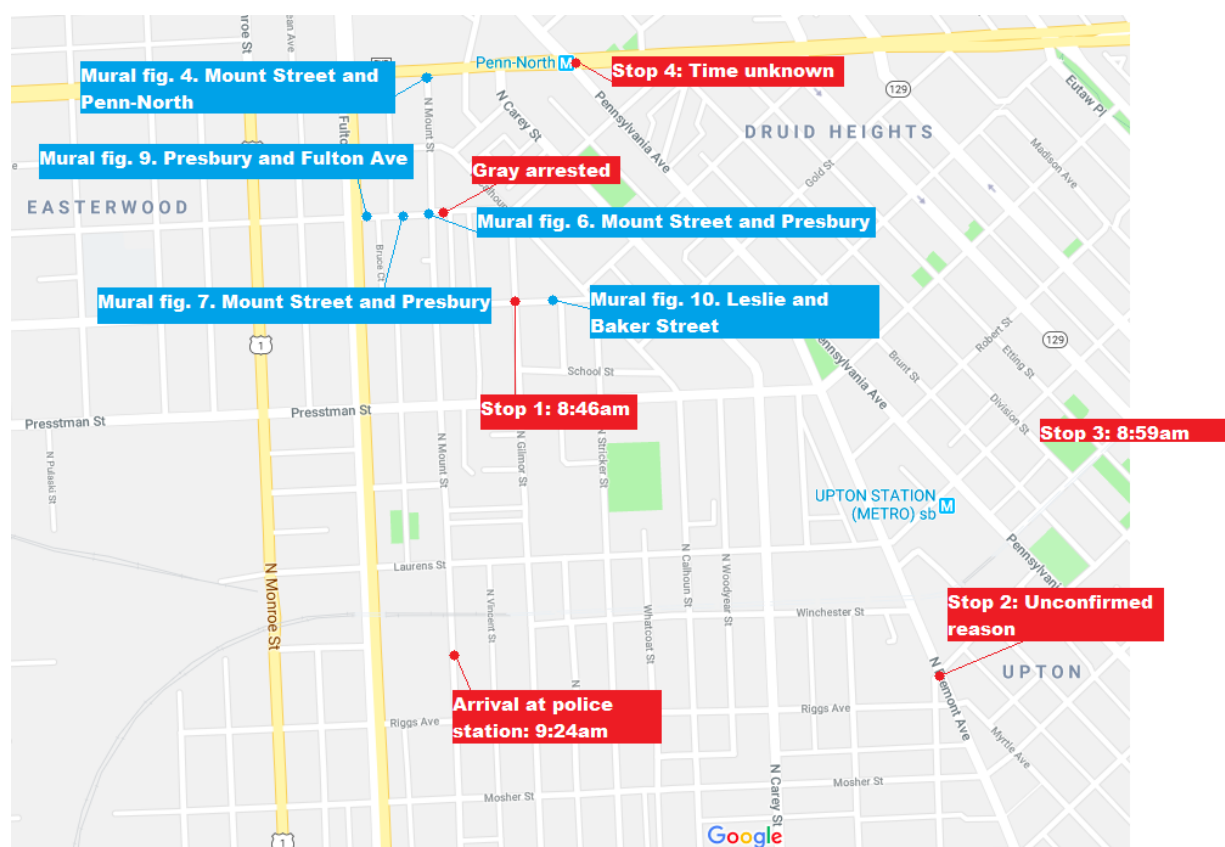

Fig. 5. Map of Freddie Gray's arrest and sites of murals, Baltimore, Maryland,

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[30] John Woodrow Cox, "Murals of pain, anger and hope in Freddie Gray's neighborhood," The Washington Post, December 1, 2015, accessed June 15, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/12/01/murals-of-pain-anger-and-hope-in-freddie-grays-baltimore-neighborhood/?utm_term=.cae6d8d9cac6.

[31] NBC News, "Baltimore Street Artists Bring Murals to Neighborhood of Freddie Gray," YouTube Video, 05:36, July 2, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szjTWahcePI.

When NBC News interviewed Gray's godbrother, Brandon Ross, shortly after Gray's death, he told news reporters how Freddie Gray "wanted to be famous."[32] Recounting the life of Gray throughout the interview, Ross reflected on the first few months without his godbrother before sadly arriving at the conclusion: "well…he's famous now."[33] To commemorate Gray's life in Sandtown-Winchester, various muralists—including Ross—created a series of memorials that aesthetically mapped the route of Gray's final hours in the community (fig.5). Scattered across the neighbourhood on North Avenue, Mount Street, Baker Street, Leslie Street and N. Calhoun Street, the murals line the pavements of the forgotten community with memorials honouring the life of Freddie Gray. The murals serve as a pseudo-walking tour for his life and death, beginning on North Avenue and Mount Street, where Gray began running from the police. Here, a mural painted by an artist under the moniker 'Sores', depicts two peaceful protestors from the Baltimore riots, marching in honour of Gray (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Sores, *For Freddie Gray,* 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Holding the American flag upside down in an act of subversion and protest, the two young men drain it of colour, rendering it lifeless. What the flag supposedly represents—one nation

under God, the protection of human rights, and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—does not speak for the men and women of colour who are shot down in the streets by the forces designed to protect them. The two young men acknowledge this as they invoke a physical symbol of protest made famous by their preceding activist brothers and sisters. A fist of Black Power is held aloft as it punctures the air almost breaking the fourth wall between mural and reality. Making contact with the oppressive climate enveloping the protestors, the fist releases an explosion of colour. Red bleeding into orange bleeding into yellow shines upon the black and white mural, casting light upon the red, white and blue of the protestor's caps. The supposed patriotism of the flag is instead usurped by the patriotism of the two peacefully marching men fighting for justice for the unlawful killing of Freddie Gray. Around the wrists of the puncturing fist hangs a pair of broken handcuffs; neo-shackles of a contemporary society. Hanging limply down the arm of the empowered protestor, the open handcuffs symbolically suggest the inability to shackle the protestor, or perhaps he himself has broken them in an empowering act of self-emancipation that began sixty years ago in Aaron Douglas's *Into Bondage* (1936). Adding a layer of complexity to the narrative, Sores uses the mural to not only honour the life of Freddie Gray, but also to sanctify the space on North Avenue and Mount Street to debunk the stream of negative, violent stereotypes circulating throughout the media in the aftermath of the Baltimore protests. The two young men march peacefully through Sandtown-Winchester facing Mount Street and the direction in which Gray ran from the police.

Heading south on Mount Street to reach Presbury, the walking tour continues to the site where Gray was arrested. In a one-block radius from Mount Street and Presbury, four mural memorials line the streets, honouring both the life of Gray and the strength of the community during the rebellion following his death. Imbued with perhaps the most important site-specific memory, these murals all received national attention on NBC news during a five-minute news segment titled, "Baltimore Street Artists Bring Murals to Neighborhood of Freddie Gray." Standing at the intersection between Mount and Presbury, a mural, painted by Nether—with the input of Gray's godbrother, Ross—connects the turbulent history of black life in America in a cohesive visual continuum of struggle (fig. 7). Paying close attention to the architectural design of the building, Nether compartmentalises the mural into three sections in accordance with three protruding white beams vertically slicing the building into a triptych. On the left-hand section of the wall, Martin Luther King Jr. marches in Selma with a throng of empowered, peaceful protestors dressed in suits and ties, and to the right-hand side, this historic slice of history is mirrored in the present when a group of young activists wearing jeans, jumpers and sunglasses march in the name of Black Lives Matter. Both crowds of people are painted in black

and white, whilst their surroundings and flags are in colour. The central section of the mural depicts the likeness of Freddie Gray. An expression of fear, confusion, pain and calm permeates his facial features, allowing the viewer to interpret a full gamut of emotions. Painted in colour, Gray's dark-brown skin is shadowed by the fiery light of the sky, imbuing the mural with an ominous and impending feeling of doom and sadness. The three white pillars slicing the mural into three sections look like bars. However, by placing Gray in the central panel, the bars are subverted into frames, instead memorialising his likeness and "immortalizing a moment" of pain on display in the urban, outdoor museum of Sandtown-Winchester.[34]

Fig. 7. Nether, *Untitled,* 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

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[34] NBC News, "Baltimore Street Artists".

Fig. 8. GHP, *Freddie Gray*, 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Standing directly at the intersection of North and Mount Street, and looking south down the road, with Nether's mural in the right-hand peripheral vision, a second memorial to Gray textures a wall directly in view. A small headstone-like image laces a brick wall reading: "Freddie Gray – 8.16.89 – 4.19.15" at the physical site where Gray was arrested (fig. 8). Responding immediately to the memory of his arrest, the headstone depicts a blue cloud, shadowed by a muted yellow shape that drips—almost blood-like—onto the ground. Perhaps the sun shines less brightly upon Baltimore after Freddie Gray's death as it begins to melt into the earth and drip away. A pair of bright white wings supports the dissolving clouds, and sitting in between them floats a melted halo. Frequently receiving visitors, the small commemorative mural painted by muralist GHP, stands proudly upon the wall ornamented by flowers, trinkets and personal messages. No longer does the physical site of Gray's arrest and final moments in Sandtown-Winchester dissolve into obscurity. Instead it becomes immortalised upon the community's physical, emotional and political landscape, acting as a communal gathering point for Gray's friends and family to help heal the wounded emotions of local residents. (fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Community gathers at mural painted at site of arrest, 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Continuing the walking tour a few streets west to reach the intersection at Presbury and Fulton lives the most commemorative, memorial-like mural of the collection (fig. 10). Transforming a space in Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester area into a place of commemoration around the site of the haunting memory of Freddie Gray's arrest, the mural, much like the others in the area, sanctifies the land by "giving memory a stake in the present" through the likeness of Gray painted in prophet-like fashion on the left-hand side of the mural from a worm's eye angle.[35] Enveloping Gray's face are blue and orange puzzle pieces, yet the puzzle remains incomplete whilst viewers try to understand why Gray was murdered. The right side of Gray's face is illuminated by a warm yellow glow as he stares towards the sky, peacefully and serenely. Scenes of protest decorate the remainder of the mural with a black and white narrative akin to the many photographs of protestors seen on social media in the aftermath of Gray's death. A group of young adults assemble, raising fists of Black Power in solidarity with Gray and other victims of police brutality listed on the side of the mural: Tyrone West, Mya Hall, Kevin L. Cooper, George V. King, Anthony Anderson, Terry Garnett Jr., Christopher Brown, Fednel Rhinvil and Darin Hutchins. In tandem with the fists of Black Power raised by individuals in contemporary clothing, the popular sixties soundbite, 'Power to the People,' is subverted to remove the militaristic undertones of the statement, and above Gray's face reads the statement: 'The Power of the People.' No longer are the radical cries for Black Power the order of the day, but instead

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[35] Fleming, *The Art of Placemaking*, 14.

they are replaced by an all-encompassing, humanistic slogan that attempts to unify the masses in the name of Freddie Gray. Gray's unofficial memorial acts as an oasis of colour and memory in the blighted, overlooked neighbourhood of Sandtown-Winchester, and when walking 30-seconds down Baker Street, viewers are met by the most unifying mural of all the Gray memorials.

Fig. 10. Anonymous, *The Power of the People,* 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Fig. 11. Anonymous, *Untitled,* 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Painted on Leslie and Baker Street at the exact spot where the police made their first stop at 8:46am to place the 'irate' Gray in leg irons, the mural, similar to those seen in Chapter 4, seeks to soothe and heal the wounded city of Baltimore in the aftermath of the turbulent riots (fig. 11). Countering ubiquitous, warped news coverage of violence and looting in the city, the mural instead echoes Barack Obama's statement that praised the "overwhelming majority of the community in Baltimore [that] handled this appropriately."[36] Creating a meta-street scene, the unknown muralist depicts the opening of an interracial neighbourhood. A symbolic ceremonial ribbon is cut as anonymous black and white individuals shake hands. The mural asks for a fresh start in the community full of communal engagement and mutual respect. As well as the handshake and ceremonial ribbon cutting, two peace candles are lit in the mural to perhaps commemorate Gray or perhaps signify new beginnings, and an anonymous black figure—possibly Freddie Gray—preaches to a diverse audience. In this utopian street scene, all community members unite under his name, again immortalising his memory, not just physically into the urban landscape, but socially too, to strengthen the interracial relationships around Baltimore.

Black Lives Matter murals usher in a watershed moment in black muralism in part due to their sense of immediacy. They sanctify sites of death and injustice by standing as visual gravestones to memorialise victims of police brutality. But the site-specific function of Black Lives Matter murals is taken a step further by community members and activists when these visual gravestones become—much like the murals in Chapter 4—sites of ritual. In 2015 in an article for *Popular Resistance,* an image emerged of a young woman standing in front of a Michael Brown mural in Ferguson (fig. 12). The visual gravestone displayed the face of Brown surrounded by the words "R.I.P", "Stop the Violence," and "Hands Up". With her back towards the camera, head bowed and arms up in surrender, the anonymous woman mirrored the words of the mural. The image became embedded on social media, and the mural, painted in 2014, became a site of resistance as protestors flocked to pay respects whilst staging their own personal demonstrations.

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[36] C-SPAN, "President Obama on Baltimore Riots (C-SPAN)," YouTube Video, 14:00, April 28, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHOdPEFYUg4.

Fig. 12. A protestor stands in front of a Michael Brown mural staging her own protest, 2015, Ferguson, Missouri.

A similar act of protest happened on April 25, 2015 when protestors marched through the streets of Baltimore demanding justice for the death of Freddie Gray. As the demonstrators marched to City Hall, they organised their route to directly pass a mural of Trayvon Martin. During the march, protestors stopped by the likeness of Martin, standing for photos and holding placards and signs that read 'Justice 4 Freddie Gray' (fig. 13). Martin's mural bridged the temporal and geographic distance between the two victims and connected them in an activist network through their visual gravestones, providing a source of empowerment and activism in the name of Black Lives Matter. Similarly, protestors frequently use Nether's mural of Freddie Gray at Presbury and Mount Street as a site of activism to demand justice for the death of Baltimore local, Tyrone West (fig. 14). This visual network of police brutality victims— sparking activism amongst protestors—is unprecedented in black muralism of the Black Freedom Struggle. Never before have the visual afterlives of police brutality victims created a network of memory and activism against police violence across the nation. Black Lives Matter murals are therefore unique in the artistic black mural tradition, not only for how they become memorials marking physical sites of violence, but also for how they turn the physical sites of

death into a commemorative space for the deceased in order to facilitate protest and create a tangible rallying point for communities.

Fig. 13. Protestors march past Trayvon Martin mural during Freddie Gray demonstration, 2015, Baltimore, Maryland.

Fig. 14. Protestors congregate at Freddie Gray mural to demand justice for Tyrone West.

"Holding onto Hulk Hogan": Correcting Mainstream Misrepresentations Through Black Lives Matter Murals

When Freddie Gray died on April 19, 2015, peaceful protests filled the streets of Baltimore. But on April 27—when the protests turned violent—the media suddenly decided to cover the story. The period of rioting in the closing days of April saw media coverage on cable news spike by 162 per cent in comparison to coverage of the peaceful protesting in the week prior.[37] CNN was criticised for sensationalising its coverage with dramatic interviews and looping negative imagery of flaming cars and clashes with police. Protestor Danielle Williams called out MSNBC's coverage to news anchor Thomas Roberts, making the valid and irrefutable claim that "when we were out here protesting all last week for six days straight peacefully, there were no news cameras…So now that we've burned down buildings and set businesses on fire…all of a sudden everybody wants to hear us."[38] During school closures in Baltimore, children swept the sidewalks, young African American boys handed out water bottles to police officers, crowds of peaceful protestors broke into spontaneous song, and individuals formed human barriers between the police and frustrated protestors to prevent violent clashes. Yet depictions of arson, looting and violence prevailed throughout the media, perpetuating damaging stereotypes and furthering a racial divide. Speaking on the media bias covering the Baltimore riots, even President Obama admonished how violence and looting across the city distracted media attention away from the peaceful protests:

> The violence that happened yesterday distracted [from the fact] that you had seen multiple days of peaceful protests that were focused on entirely legitimate concerns of these communities in Baltimore by clergy and community leaders. And they were thoughtful and they were constructive—and frankly didn't get that much attention, and one burning building will be looped on television over, and over, and over again, and the thousands of demonstrators who did it the right way, I think, have been lost in the discussion. The overwhelming majority of the community in Baltimore have handled this appropriately, expressing real concern and outrage over the possibility that our laws were not applied evenly in the case of Mr. Gray, and that accountability needs to exist.[39]

Whilst Obama critiqued media coverage of the Baltimore protestors, similar mainstream distortions occurred a year earlier during the Ferguson protests following the death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014.

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[37] Alex T. Williams, "Did the media cover only the violent protests in Baltimore?" The Washington Post, May 13, 2015, accessed September 26, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/05/13/did-the-media-cover-only-the-violent-protests-in-baltimore/?utm_term=.f2bfdb02c589.

[38] Rashad Robinson, "Media's Biased and Dehumanizing Coverage of Baltimore Fails to Tell the City's Real Story," *The Root,* May 1, 2015, accessed September 26, 2017, https://www.theroot.com/media-s-biased-and-dehumanizing-coverage-of-baltimore-f-1790859651.

[39] C-SPAN, "President Obama on Baltimore Riots (C-SPAN)."

Protests shook Ferguson for sixteen days after Officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown dead in the streets, his body left to bake for nearly six hours in the sun. Between the days of August 9 and August 25, over 300 citizens were arrested, and the events drew national attention when police reacted to protestors with military-grade equipment including armoured vehicles, tear gas, rubber bullets and sound canons.[40] Local residents took to the streets to demand the trial of Officer Darren Wilson, who was later acquitted of all charges. Whilst protestors were both enflamed and peaceful, the news media surprised no one when it decided to cover only one side of the events in Ferguson over the sixteen days. "Thanks to 'its culture of frenzied coverage and insatiable appetite for something, anything to talk about,'" the party that should be indicted for the Ferguson shooting is the news media, John Solomon wrote in a *Washington Times* op-ed piece.[41] The media coverage of Michael Brown's death failed to address "the broader questions about how unarmed black people are treated by the police," and instead commonly used a "riot frame" when describing the protests to convey vivid descriptions of disorder and danger. The *LA Times* for example, ran an article titled "TURMOIL IN FERGUSON; Ferguson's anger builds and spreads; Many residents appear to be shocked by destruction. Protests in other cities are more peaceful.'"[42] The media coverage failed to "adequately explain the reason for the protests," leaving a slew of misrepresentations throughout many news outlets.[43] Whilst such distortions permeated every mainstream headline, it also extended from the activists in the streets demanding justice for the latest victim of police brutality, to the victims themselves.

"Michael Brown, 18, due to be buried on Monday, was no angel," John Eligon wrote in the *New York Times* on August 24, 2014, shortly after Brown's death.[44] Eligon's damning words are just one example of the media's negative presentment of police brutality victims and Black Lives Matter protestors. In 2016, Calvin Johnson Smiley and David Fakunle conducted a study that focused on the dehumanising process applied to unarmed black men posthumously. Looking at the case studies of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Akia Gurley, Tamir Rice, Tony Robinson and Freddie Gray, Smiley and Fakunle used local, national and international media

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[40] German Lopez, "What were the 2014 Ferguson protest about?" Vox, last updated January 27, 2016, accessed February 28, 2019 https://www.vox.com/2015/5/31/17937764/ferguson-missouri-protests-2014-michael-brown-police-shooting.

[41] Mohamad Hamas Elmasry and Mohammed el-Naway, "Do Black Lives Matter? A content analysis of *New York Times* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* coverage of Michael Brown protests," *Journalism Practice* 11, no. 7, (2017): 857.

[42] Eric Deggans of National Public Radio quoted in Elmasry and el-Naway, "Do Black Lives Matter?", 857; Joy Leopold and Myrtle P. Bell, "News media and the racialization of protest: an analysis of Black Lives Matter articles," Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 36, no. 8, (2017): 725.

[43] Leopold and Bell, "News media and the racialization of protest," 730.

[44] John Elgion, "Michael Brown Spent Last Weeks Grappling with Problems and Promise," New York Times, August 24, 2014, accessed February 28, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/us/michael-brown-spent-last-weeks-grappling-with-lifes-mysteries.html.

coverage to reveal how these men were portrayed as "thugs and criminals to seemingly justify their deaths while simultaneously shifting blame away from law enforcement."[45] Whilst Garner's representation in newspapers featured micro-invalidations around his size and health issues: "a 400-pound asthmatic Staten Island dad,"/"the 350-pound man", representations of Michael Brown oscillated around his facial expressions, behaviour, and much like Garner, his size.[46] With the damning description of "no angel" lining the front page of the *New York Times*, the reports of Brown robbing a convenience store prior to his death took precedence in the overall narrative of an unarmed eighteen-year-old African American being shot several times by white police officer Darren Wilson, which Columbia Journalism Review believed was "designed to reverse perceptions about the young shooting victim."[47]

Shortly after his death, a collection of photographs circulated throughout the media—some real and some fake—serving to promote a visual character profile of Brown. Whilst a photograph of Brown in his graduation robes was released, the optics surrounding his life in the media were largely dominated by photographs depicting him flashing a peace sign, which, "to those with a political axe to grind," was referred to as a gang sign (fig. 15).[48]

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[45] Calvin John Smiley and David Fakunle, "From 'brute' to 'thug:' The demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America," *Journal of Human Behavior and Social Environment,* 26, 4 (2016), 351.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Deron Lee, "In Ferguson, local news coverage shines," Columbia Journalism Review, August 20, 2014, accessed February 26, 2019, https://archives.cjr.org/united_states_project/local_coverage_ferguson_michae.php.
[48] Ibid.

Fig. 15. Photograph of Michael Brown shortly after his death, described holding "a gang sign."

The selective photographs chosen by the media sparked a now viral online sensation titled '#IfTheyGunnedMeDown,' where young African Americans posted two pictures—one where they look "friendly" and a second where they look "imposing or angry,"—before asking the rhetorical question: which would the media use?[49] When Wilson's testimony was published a few months after Brown's death, his account added ballast to the negative, biased, stereotypical photographic afterlife of the eighteen-year-old unarmed teenager. "When I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan," Wilson said of their physical altercation, harmfully presenting himself as the victim by following up with the

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[49] Ibid.

leading question: "What do I do not to get beaten inside my car?"[50] He continued dehumanising Brown by suggesting he made "a grunting, like aggravated sound" as he "looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked."[51] Whilst Wilson described Brown as a colossal figure, supposedly feeling akin to a five-year-old grabbing onto Hulk Hogan, Wilson, at 6'4", measured the same height as Brown, weighing 201lbs to Brown's 292lbs.[52]

Wilson's language—along with the ubiquitous language and imagery in news outlets during the aftermath of police brutality cases—is damaging. It dehumanises victims of police brutality and vilifies protestors, but countering the dehumanising language of brutality victims are Black Lives Matter murals. Visually evolved from the empowering and inflammatory content of 1960s murals, Black Lives Matter murals are more commemorative in imagery, using spiritual, peaceful iconography to contest the distorted news media portrayals, and to provide a positive, commemorative image of police brutality victim, thus correcting the warped optics of their visual afterlife in the media and public eye. The role played by these murals echoes Alan Rice's discussion of guerrilla memorialisation, a process that "works to rewrite the national story from the bottom up."[53] In *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (2010), Rice argues how guerrilla memorials adopt "an overtly political character in order to challenge dominating historical narratives" and cultural amnesia.[54] For example, Frederick Douglass' autobiography became a guerrilla memorial "to set against the official amnesia of his presence."[55] By challenging dominant media narratives—Black Lives Matter murals become a form of guerrilla memorialisation. They exist as an "active and performative expression" that opposes a "wilful amnesia" and the distorted life narratives of police brutality victims.[56] Replete with doves, flowers, halos, wings and wreaths, Black Lives Matter murals display uplifting commemorative iconography in order to reclaim the warped visual afterlives of victims. Re-writing the warped narrative of each victim's life, murals become visual

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[50] Terrance McCoy, "Darren Wilson explains why he killed Michael Brown," The Washington Post, November 25, 2014, accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/11/25/why-darren-wilson-said-he-killed-michael-brown/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.00b783d33c1c.

[51] Larry Buchanan, Ford Fessenden, K.K. Rebecca Lai, Haeyoun Park, Alicia Parlapiano, Archie Tse, Tim Wallace, Derek Watkins and Karen Yourish, "Q & A: What happened in Ferguson?" New York Times, August 10, 2015, accessed February 9, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html.

[52] Smiley and Fakunle, "From 'brute' to 'thug:'", 359.

[53] Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic,* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 11.

[54] Ibid., 13.

[55] Ibid., 11.

[56] Ibid., 13.

gravestones in black communities, honouring the lives of those who wrongfully died at the hands of the police. Wilson's damaging testimony and the circulation of fake imagery disregard the descriptions of Michael Brown as a "gentle giant" and "a quiet but outgoing eighteen-year-old, with plans to start a business and dreams of becoming a star." [57] Through acts of guerrilla memorialisation, Black Lives Matter murals are painted in black communities to commemorate the lives of police brutality victims in a way that that *re*-humanises, rather than dehumanises, these individuals.

In Portland, Oregon, on November 25, 2014, two days after Darren Wilson was acquitted of charges for the death of Michael Brown, muralist Ashley Montague painted one of the most visually striking murals of Brown on the side of the well-loved eatery, the Bonfire Lounge (fig. 16). Laced with a spiritual aesthetic, Montague created a guerrilla memorial that immediately debunks the critique of Brown as "no angel" as he paints him standing in the centre of the mural, palms upturned, and arms outstretched in homage to the increasingly popular slogan of the movement, #HandsUpDontShoot. He does not look like Hulk Hogan, grunting with a demonic facial expression, as Wilson described. Instead he stands serenely with his eyes closed and face angled towards the sky as his hands glow with a light orange hue. His heart lifts and pulsates from his chest, waiting to be carried by a dove into the chamber of police brutality victims to be protected. The double collar on the left-hand side of Brown's shirt looks almost page-like, and when coupled with his open, prayer-like pose, the collar takes the form of the Bible, with Brown seeking comfort and solace in his final hour.

Fig. 16. Ashley Montague, *For Michael Brown,* 2014, Portland, Oregon.

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[57] Deron Lee, "In Ferguson, local news coverage shines."

Alternatively, the page-like qualities of Brown's collar are also redolent of a school textbook, and when considering the colours used by Montague—a green top with a dark red colour protruding from his left hand—the muralist subtly mirrors the colours of Brown's graduation robes in one of the few photographs released of him in the aftermath of his death, in which Brown stands before a camera in a green robe and a dark red sash. By playing on the importance of education, Montague reminds viewers that Brown was only eighteen-years-old, with his whole life ahead of him.

Positioned with his face tilted towards the sky and his arms open and unthreatening, Brown's body language begs the question of 'why am I still being killed in 2017?' In the back of his mind, quite literally, he knows the answer—the systemically racist issue of police brutality in the US judicial system. Refraining from overtly violent imagery, Montague laces the mural with connotations of a videogame as the back of Brown's head crumbles into pixels and blocks. The police stand behind Brown, incongruously threatening to the messiah-like figure being killed at their feet. Whilst Montague uses warm, natural colours, to envelop the face of the dying young Brown, the police counteract this image with an unnatural shade of bright purple to highlight their imposing and unnecessary presence. Montague omits the image of Officer Darren Wilson from the mural, and instead dresses the police in full riot gear, complete with shields, guns and headwear to give them anonymity and invoke the memory of many officers who have shot and killed African Americans—Daniel Pantaleo; Johannes Mehserle; George Zimmerman; Blane Salamoni.

The presence of the police was a point of controversy for the mural when building owner, George Kassapakis, demanded Montague paint over the officers, frequently placing his garbage bins in front of the mural to obscure the message.[58] Shortly after these demands, however, the Bonfire Lounge changed owners and the new owner, Travis Miranda, warned Montague of his plans to paint over the entire mural because, according to him, "the neighborhood fucking hated it."[59] Montague took to Facebook to garner support for his mural and after 500 shares and 100 comments, local residents threatened to boycott all of Miranda's businesses.[60] The mural was an unnerving "representation of the beauty and violence in life mixed together…and in really white Portland, it's jarring to be faced with that reality," local black activist, Royal Harris suggested.[61] As of October 2016, the mural remained half painted

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[58] Enid Spitz, "Can Federal Law Save This Threatened Black Lives Matter Mural?" Willamette Week, July 19, 2016, accessed June 2, 2017, http://www.wweek.com/arts/2016/07/19/can-federal-law-save-this-threatened-black-lives-matter-mural/.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

over (the two police officers had been removed), and was still largely obscured by dumpsters. Regardless of its current physical obfuscation however, the purpose and aesthetics of the guerrilla memorial was to remedy the slew of negative press defaming the life and memory of Michael Brown. Montague invoked a powerfully spiritual aesthetic that countered the misrepresentations of Brown's 'hulking' size and aggressive face by instead reminding the world of the basic facts so easily forgotten in the media—he was an eighteen-year-old victim of police brutality who wanted to go to college and who thought he had his whole life ahead of him.

The spiritual aesthetic in Montague's mural is common throughout murals of the Black Lives Matter movement. The militant iconography of the 1960s Black Power murals gives way to mournful imagery when these murals no longer demand the picking up of a gun in the revolutionary fight, nor the use of radical black memory to empower black communities into action. Instead, Black Lives Matter murals become sites of bereavement, articulating a sense of communal frustration at the systemic racial violence still taking the lives of men, women and children of colour. When Oscar Grant was shot and killed in 2009 in Oakland, the city became a site for his memorialisation. Trust Your Struggle (TYS) created two murals titled *Demand Justice for Oscar Grant* that commemorated Grant's memory in his home city. In TYS's first mural, his face looks out towards viewers with a slight smile fixed on his face (fig. 17).

Fig. 17. Trust Your Struggle, *Demand Justice for Oscar Grant* (2010), Oakland, California.

Fig. 18. Trust Your Struggle, *We Are All Oscar Grant* (2010) Oakland, California.

Surrounded by a halo of light, Grant becomes enveloped by four white roses, reminiscent of a commemorative wreath, and in the second mural, he holds his four-year-old daughter, Tatiana, to remind the world that he is not just a statistic—he was a father too (fig. 18). Surrounded by the words 'We are all Oscar Grant…' the mural extends outwards with the names of individuals who were also victims of the same fate: Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Casper Banjo and Anthony Baez. Layered beneath the names are the faces of unknown demonstrators, some holding megaphones and some holding empty signs—perhaps speechless at the circumstances in which they are protesting. Others hold white cloths—perhaps in surrender to, or protection from, the police—and a young girl holds a sign saying, 'We Are Oscar Grant.' No longer do the protestors directly state, 'I Am A Man,' as they did during the Civil Rights Movement, but instead, the sign is inclusionary: when you kill one of us, you kill all of us.

On August 21, 2018, a commemorative mural appeared in the streets of Manhattan (fig 19). Nearly six years after the death of Trayvon Martin, a guerrilla memorial depicting his likeness wearing a light grey hoodie emerged in New York's Lower East Side. On the night of Martin's death he was deemed "real suspicious" by his killer, George Zimmerman, for wearing "a dark hoodie, like a gray hoodie" Zimmerman told the 911 operator before he shot Martin.[62] A few days later, Fox News commentator Geraldo Rivera ignited widespread criticism when he lambasted the victim: "The hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin's death as George Zimmerman was."[63] In the weeks and months following Martin's death, a litany of activists

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[62] Katherine Boyle, "Trayvon Martin's death has put spotlight on perceptions about hoodies," The Washington Post, March 25, 2012, accessed February 28, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/trayvon-martins-death-has-put-spotlight-on-perceptions-about-hoodies/2012/03/24/gIQAwQ6gaS_story.html?utm_term=.7efb5fcd22ef.
[63] Ibid.

turned their attention to debunking the stereotypical potency of hoodies. Daniel Maree, organiser of the "Million Hoodie March" in New York in honour of Trayvon Martin, created the March to reclaim the stigma of hoodies in today's society:

> I've had experiences where I've been walking down the street in New York, and as an African American man in a hoodie, I can tell you it's seen as incredibly suspicious…some people hold their purses a little tighter. When I heard Trayvon was wearing a hoodie, I thought, I've felt this before.[64]

Similarly, US Representative for Illinois's first congressional district, Bobby Rush (former SNCC and Black Panther Party member) staged his own form of protest in the House of Representatives when he stated:

> I applaud the people all across the land who are making a statement about hoodies, about the real hoodlums in this nation, particularly those who tread on our laws wearing official or quasi-official clothes. Racial profiling has to stop Mr. Speaker, just because someone wears a hoodie does not make them a hoodlum.[65]

Whilst making such a profound statement, Rush simultaneously removed his jacket to reveal a grey hoodie and shortly after, put the hood up. He was immediately interrupted by Representative Gregg Harper and was forced off the House Floor for disobeying a rule that stipulates no hats or covering of the head in the chamber.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] PBS News Hour, "Rep. Bobby Rush Kicked Off House Floor for Wearing Hoodie in Support of Trayvon Martin," YouTube Video, 02:27, March 28, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrMb-ZbngsY.

Fig. 19. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, *Untitled,* 2018, New York City, New York.

Whilst Trayvon Martin's character was assassinated in the immediate aftermath of his death for wearing a hoodie, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh created a guerrilla memorial in New York City that reclaims the obscured, forgotten elements of Martin's personality—that he was a harmless seventeen-year-old teenager who happened to wear a sweatshirt with a hood. At around twenty-foot-tall, a simple portrait of Trayvon Martin from the waist up stands as a poignant work of art in the streets of Manhattan. A peaceful, mournful aesthetic laces the mural as petals and flower buds rain from the sky in full bloom. Debunking the "suspicious" hoodie that was deemed "as much responsible for Trayvon Martin's death as George Zimmerman," Fazlalizadeh uses an almost white shade of grey to extract any remaining connotations of dark, ominous or threatening intent inferred from the garment. The hood, enveloping the back of Martin's head is depicted as perfectly open at the front to ensure his young face is fully visible

because he has nothing to hide. He is no threat, as the viewers can see. He remains calm with no hint of fear on his face, and his gaze breaks the fourth wall as stares intimately into the heart, mind and soul of the viewer, tapping into their emotions with his innocent expression. As the viewer breaks gaze with the victim, their eyes drift down to the writing on his hoodie—"Trayvon" it reads. In an act of reclamation, Fazlalizadeh uses the hoodie, not as an accomplice that led to the death of Martin, but instead now as a politically charged item of clothing forever imbued with the innocent memory of Trayvon. As the commemorative flowers fall from the sky, they ornament his frame, with only one small bud caressing his cheek where his tears of anguish, pain and sorrow should be. Instead, a red flower head kisses his cheek. His life may have ended but his memory is now immortalised.

As the mural wallpapers the streets of the Lower East Side, the omission of a complex narrative—akin to those of the 1970s—in tandem with the stoic presence of Martin, makes the mural a visual gravestone. The mural does not seek to directly teach about black history or use an encoded language of resistance to circumvent white patronage. Instead, the purpose of the untitled mural is to stand as an unofficial guerrilla memorial in the streets of New York City to counter the media's manipulation of Martin's visual afterlife. Fazlalizadeh uses the mural to challenge one of the unfortunately dominant narratives in circulation after Martin's death, thus re-writing an unacknowledged narrative in a grassroots way. The mural's purpose is to show how Trayvon Martin was not a threatening figure who looked suspicious. Rather, he was a seventeen-year-old African American walking around the streets of his Twin Lakes Housing Community with a bottle of iced tea and a packet of skittles, unaware that it was the last night of his life.

When Oscar Grant was shot and killed in 2009, the narrative of Black Lives Matter was not yet written. The slogan was still waiting to line newsfeeds, newspapers and all forms of social media, and the number of high-profile police brutality cases was yet to spike. Unpacking a contemporary movement that unravels on an almost daily basis is a difficult and complex task to undertake, and valuating murals is fundamental in understanding the ways in which protest iconography shapes and conveys the movement's direction, tone and message. As the genesis of Black Lives Matter bubbled under the surface, waiting to erupt, the aesthetics of the movement were already emerging, providing early incantations of what the movement would look like. The movement would usher in a watershed moment of black muralism, catalysing a stream of murals that would both build upon and diverge from their Black Power predecessors. Continuing the radical artistic tradition, Black Lives Matter murals interact with space in similar ways to their 1960s counterparts by transforming walls of black communities into interactive

sites of commemoration for recent victims of police brutality. However, the earlier function of the mural as a locus of black history would give way to the mural as a visual gravestones marking the physical sites of death and injustice to honour those who are killed in the streets by the forces designed to protect them. Thus, black murals now focus on the present, responding with a sense of immediacy to the latest fatality in the black community. The inflammatory, radical aesthetics of Black Power murals have given way to a more commemorative, spiritual aesthetic that seeks to immortalise the memories of police brutality victims into the streets of black America. Black Lives Matter murals are unofficial urban memorials that transform walls of black communities into interactive sites of commemoration. When the media attempted to warp the memories of Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant and Alton Sterling murals saved their memory from distortion and obscurity at the very sites where they died. Murals gave them a visual afterlife that proved how their black lives did, of course, matter.

Conclusion
"From struggle comes beauty":
Murals and the Black Freedom Struggle

> The past, rather than constituting a burden on our backs or a stone around our necks, can become, when properly understood, the hard inner core of life giving bound and resilience to our efforts, which would be otherwise flat and uninteresting.
>
> Aaron Douglas, *artist.*[1]

> This was our gallery, this was our museum. You could take pictures of graffiti, you could take pictures of street art and put them in a gallery but it immediately loses its context so there is an opportunity for us to really let people see what it's like when we paint in these environments, when we paint in these spaces.
>
> Brandan Odums, *muralist.*[2]

Against the backdrop of World War II, Jim Crow and economic bondage in the 1940s, Charles White exclaimed: "Paint is the only weapon (that) [sic] I have with which to fight what I resent. If I could write, I would write about it. If I could talk, I would talk about it. Since I paint, I must paint about it."[3] Today, seventy-five years on and at a time of entrenched racial inequality in the era of Black Lives Matter, Brandan Odums declared, "no matter what you do, whether you've got the power to flex your pencil, flex your mind, your body, your paintbrush, you've got a responsibility with that to make the world a better place."[4] Although decades apart, the desire to create black murals from the early twentieth to the twenty-first century has not changed in these statements. In 2005 when Hurricane Katrina stormed through New Orleans, it left rubble in its wake. Black neighbourhoods such as the Ninth Ward suffered extreme losses when entire areas were decimated. Fourteen years later, African American communities are still waiting for reconstruction, haunted by skeletal housing frames, boarded up windows, and caved in roofs. But "from the struggle comes beauty", Odums believes.[5] In 2014, when wandering around his home community of Algiers in the Ninth Ward, the muralist saw constant reminders of neglect. Lots that had been vacant for ten years had fallen into disrepair, including a 360-unit apartment complex ironically named DeGaulle Manor. Residents of the 'manor' had been forcefully evicted following the hurricane, rendering the 360 apartments lifeless and empty for almost eight years. But blight is connected to powerful stories, Odums insisted, since "it's connected

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[1] Aaron Douglas, "Development of Negro Art," unpublished manuscript, Aaron Douglas Papers, owned by Fisk University Special Collections, microfilmed by Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, reel 4520.
[2] Brandan Odums, "Exhibit Be," BMike Brandan Odums, accessed June 11, 2019, http://bmike.com/project/exhibit-be/.
[3] Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, "Contribution of the American Negro to Democracy: A History Painting by Charles White," *International Review of African American Art* 12, 4 (1995): 39.
[4] Brandan Odums quotation in Tedx Talks, "Art to inspire | Brandan Odums | TEDxNewOrleans," YouTube Video, 10:57, June 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGz8BSVuZZQ.
[5] Brandan Odums, "Exhibit Be".

to a community."[6] Seeking to heal the wounded landscape of New Orleans and redefine its narrative in the public eye, Odums flexed his pencil, his mind, his body and his paintbrush to transform the space of DeGaulle Manor; to not only paint beauty in the struggle, but to also reconnect the derelict building with its community roots (fig.1).

Fig. 1. Brandan Odums creating *EXHIBIT BE,* (2014), New Orleans, Louisiana.

In November of the same year, Odums began painting the building both inside and out. Covering the 360-unit complex with memories of black history and the present day, he was "trying to create something that would boost [the community's] sense of morale, inspire them, and hopefully see themselves reflected in the things I was creating" (fig. 2).[7] In similar fashion to the street murals of the Black Power Movement, the murals were created to uplift black community members and reflect their history back to them. The faces of H. Rap Brown, Harriet Tubman, Muhammad Ali, Fred Hampton, Amiri Baraka, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Gordon Parks, Angela Davis, James Baldwin, Assata Shakur, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X lined the walls. But given that Odums's project was created almost 50 years on since the *Wall of Respect,* new faces appear in the roster of black heroes. Likenesses of people such as

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[6] Brandan Odums quotation in Tedx Talks, "Art to inspire."
[7] Ibid.

Radio Raheem from Spike Lee's 1989 classic film, *Do the Right Thing*; hip hop legends Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G and Mos Def, and tributes to victims of police brutality which read 'SAY HER NAME' and 'AM I NEXT?' stood proudly in the visual continuum of black history.

Fig. 2. Brandan Odums, *EXHIBIT BE,* (2014), New Orleans, Louisiana.

Painting in what he describes as a "legal grey area," Odums was confronted one day by the building manager, who granted him full permission to paint throughout the derelict structure.[8] The manager's approval gave Odums an idea—"what if we invite the public to come in and experience it?" he asked.[9] Calling on other muralists working in New Orleans, Odums and a host of painters set to cover every inch of the building with inspirational art that would be available for public viewing for one day only. *EXHIBIT BE* opened in November 2014 to 2,500 people. The popularity of the show amongst local residents was unexpected, but given the feedback, Odums managed to secure weekly openings of the show for another three months, closing finally on Martin Luther King Day in 2015, where Erykah Badu and Dead Prez performed to 10,000 people (fig. 3). Every weekend from November to January, around 3,000 people would descend upon DeGaulle Manor to give meaning and purpose back to a building in a community long ignored by the government authorities.

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Fig. 3. Erykah Badu performs at *EXHIBIT BE* closing ceremony on Martin Luther King Day 2015.

"It was a living space," Odums told an audience during a TED talk in June 2015, a living space that was knowingly, or perhaps unknowingly, created in the image of its muralistic predecessors from the 1960s and 1970s.[10] When Odums transformed the space of DeGaulle Manor into a modern-day touchstone of black consciousness, he was initially unaware of the effect it would have on the community, but as more local members and former residents returned to the building, they began bringing DeGaulle Manor back to life. Like the *Wall of Truth* (1968) in Chicago, the walls of *EXHIBIT BE* became ever-evolving palimpsests of black memories, layering local stories specific to the building and community upon the larger narratives of black history. "Every weekend, people who used to live there would come in with stories and say 'my grandmother lived here, can you paint something about that?' and we said 'yes,'" Odums explained and "'this happened here and can you paint something about that?' and we said 'yes,'" he continued.[11] Like Walker's panels depicting neighbourhood residents on the *Wall of Truth*, *EXHIBIT BE* told the stories of tenants of DeGaulle Manor, becoming a touchstone of pride for the Algiers community.

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

But the parallels between the 1960s and 2015 do not end there. During the week, Odums opened up the exhibition to local schools who gave tours to over 3,000 young students. Resurrecting the educational purpose of Dewey Crumpler's murals in the 1970s, which transformed the streets of Bayview Hunters Point into unofficial textbooks, students of Algiers and the Ninth Ward "were able to get lessons through the narratives of history that was painted on the wall."[12] Seeking to "activate" the community during the weekends, *EXHIBIT BE* invoked the memories of *Universal Alley/Rip-Off* (1968-75) and the *Wall of Respect* (1967) by hosting "poetry readings, we had DJ battles, we had a car show where we transformed the parking lot and brought the parking lot back to life."[13] Much like the murals of the Black Power Movement, the New Orleans project curated a space where local residents could become extensions of the murals through their own personal performances. And by beautifying the neighbourhood and restoring a site of dereliction, abandonment and pain into a site of community love and uplift, Brandan Odums healed a wounded landscape in similar fashion to the *Wall of Dignity, Wall of Pride* and *Harriet Tubman Memorial Wall* by Bill Walker and Eugene Eda Wade in Detroit, following the city's rebellion in 1967. Knowing that DeGaulle Manor was more than just a previously evicted building site, Odums transformed the space and its narrative by commemorating—in one of the biggest mural series in US history—black life from slavery to the present day, to show that "even from struggle comes beauty" (fig. 4, 5 and 6).[14]

Fig. 4. Brandan Odums, *EXHIBIT BE,* 2014.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Brandan Odums, "Exhibit Be".

Fig. 5. Brandan Odums, *EXHIBIT BE,* 2014.

Fig. 6. Brandan Odums, *EXHIBIT BE,* 2014.

At the centre of black life in New Orleans, *EXHIBIT BE* stood as a monument to blackness in 2015, conceptually borrowing from its artistic predecessors by transforming the walls and space of DeGaulle Manor into sites of black community interaction and empowerment. In 1930 when Aaron Douglas painted an unprecedented image of a "black [wo]man winning" in *Harriet Tubman,* he began a visual theme in black muralism that saw longevity throughout the black freedom struggle of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Images of African Americans winning—not only through radical acts of self-emancipation but also through their work in the struggle for black liberation—were visually documented on walls throughout the country in order to reclaim "the dark ghetto's invisible walls" used to contain black communities.[15] These images of African Americans winning turned community walls into sites of empowerment to contest geographical confinement, commemorate black heroes, uplift members of the community and protest against the social, racial and political backdrop at moments of racial intensity. "We were people's artists," Eugene Eda Wade said of his role as a muralist during the 1960s and 1970s, and "[w]e want to make art so that the masses of people can understand."[16] Although Wade was speaking specifically of his time spent painting during the Black Power Movement, his motivation for creating art for a community—whether small and localised, or big and dispersed—has echoed throughout the decades from the 1930s through to Odums' work in the present day. Interior murals emerged at a time when "blacks seldom appeared on television or in advertisements other than as Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, or Cream of Wheat's Rastus," and their exterior successors lined the streets at a time when black art, history and culture were still conveniently omitted from a white mainstream imagination.[17] Oppression had "a visual component that had operated effectively since the 1830s in art, minstrelsy, and eventually in popular media," and murals emerged on both the inside and outside of buildings to challenge this narrative and beautify communities, continuing to do so today.[18]

In telling this near hundred-year story from the 1930s to the present day, this thesis has built upon the seminal work of Alan Barnett, James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz, Eva and John Cockroft and John Pitman Weber, Jane Weissman and Janet-Braun Reinitz, Jeff Huebner, and Rebecca Zorach. The mural as a cultural form defies simple categorisation, but this thesis has mapped out a new framework for understanding the role of black muralism in the black

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[15] Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1965), 11.

[16] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

[17] Michael D. Harris "Urban Totems: The Communal Spirit of Black Murals" in *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals,* ed. James Prigoff and Robin Dunitz, (San Francisco: Pomegranate Press, 2000), 27.

[18] Ibid.

freedom struggle at heightened moments of racial protest. By adopting a spatial lens, this thesis has argued for the spatial significance of murals, giving an answer to Rashad Shabazz's question in *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (2015): "what happens when people are raised in environments built to contain them?"[19] Born from containment, murals gave the streets a way to speak by establishing a black presence and shaping black space. Murals "spatialised" blackness through depicting black history, memory and culture on the walls of black communities. Transforming physical boundaries into sites of imagination, expansion, and community conviviality, they were and are a radical art form that create(d) new arenas of interactive space to "envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling."[20]

This thesis has enhanced our understanding of black muralism and has specifically illuminated some of the new and unacknowledged dimensions of black mural art at moments of heightened racial tension as it draws upon multiple case studies of mural art from across the country. As a contextualising chapter, Chapter 1 analysed how muralists during the 1930s and 1940s navigated the constraints of patronage, location and audience to create early black protest murals based on new languages of resistance. Chapter 2 documented the shift from interior to exterior murals in black communities at the height of Black Power when murals were no longer bound by patronage or confined to the insides of buildings behind a paywall. Instead they evolved into a guerrilla artform on the walls and streets of black communities, "spatialising blackness" by displaying radical black memory on the walls of black communities and becoming became tangible manifestations of a new black consciousness. Chapters 3 and 4 built upon this conceptualisation by arguing how murals became interactive sites of education, literacy, ritual healing and performance during the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 3 revealed how murals transformed walls into sites of education in black enclaves working to circumvent the politics of white institutional spaces and operate as alternate forms of literacy—as both ever-evolving newspapers and school textbooks—to teach community members local news and black history omitted from official modes of communication. But at the height of Black Power, murals also used walls as spaces of ritual healing and performance, as shown in Chapter 4. Following the aftermath of racial rebellions, murals emerged in northern and west coast cities to heal the physical, social and emotional wounds of a fractured landscape through diasporic memory and black history. At the same time, the creation of a mural frequently inspired performative acts of ritual at its location. Daily, weekly and monthly, street parties, spoken word poetry, dance, jazz

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[19] Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.
[20] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 10.

festivals and music battles would all commence at the sites of murals, ritualising the space. This thesis ended with an examination of muralism in the era of Black Lives Matter, showing how contemporary murals borrow from their historic counterparts by transforming walls into sites of interaction, and spaces of commemoration. As visual gravestones, Black Lives Matter murals commonly mark the sites of death, while countering racist stereotypes of police brutality victims in the mainstream media.

Whilst this thesis has uncovered the significant interactive role played by murals in black communities across the country, it has also furthered our understanding of black historical memory and the Black Power Movement. Antislavery and abolitionist memory has been one of the most frequently resurrected themes in black muralism over the last hundred years, with the figures of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Nathaniel Turner and unknown enslaved heroes lining the walls of black communities at the height of the Black Power Movement. They stood shoulder to shoulder with black heroes from the twentieth century, such as Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Martin Luther King Jr., Huey P. Newton, and Mary McLeod Bethune, to empower and educate black community members, and represent black history—not as isolated moments of historical protest—but as one continuous lineage of heroes working across the centuries to achieve black liberation. Studying the resurrection of these radical black heroes in murals at the height of Black Power has added a new grassroots perspective to the fight for black liberation in the 1960s, showing the ways in which local communities created and interacted with murals to learn black history, empower themselves, construct educated black identities, commemorate black heroes, and find pride in their *de facto* segregated neighbourhoods. Taking forward Peniel E. Joseph's attempt to debunk the common misconception of the Black Power Movement as the Civil Right Movement's 'evil twin,' this thesis has shown how visual protest in the urban north during the 1960s was not just about advocating armed self-defence, but also about loving oneself, knowing one's history, and elevating a sense of blackness through remembering a radical black past.

Murals recuperate black memories, resurrect black bodies, reinstate black narratives, and recover black histories, and I have used this thesis to pinpoint pivotal moments in the last hundred years when black muralism has uniquely offered a form of "ocular therapy" in the struggle against racism and social inequality.[21] As an ephemeral and malleable cultural form, murals require extensive documentation and analysis in order to understand their role as monuments of blackness in communities across the United States. My thesis has built upon the excavation work of *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (2000) by Prigoff and

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[21] Harris "Urban Totems," 26.

Dunitz, *Community Murals: A People's Art* (1984) by Alan Barnett, and *Art for the People's Sake: Artists and Community in Black Chicago, 1965-1975* (2019) by Rebecca Zorach, to ensure our understanding and preservation of black muralism "becomes more complete."[22] I acknowledge that it is an impossible task to capture and record every interior and exterior black mural throughout history, from 1930 to 2019, and this thesis does not seek to offer such a complete and finished account. However, considering the field of mural studies is in need of development, this thesis stands as the fullest examination to date that documents the role of muralism in the black freedom struggle over the last hundred years. In the following appendix I have grouped together, by time period and geographical location, every mural that I have located throughout my research and use this extensive appendix to broaden our understanding of the geographical and chronological scope of black mural art throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In a phone call with Eugene Eda Wade in the early stages of writing this thesis, he told me that he hoped to read my finished thesis before he passes away—at 81 years old, he wasn't getting any younger, he joked. To Wade, the thought of someone telling his story by asking him about his life was, sadly, quite novel. His emotional words have stayed with me throughout this process, inspiring me to place the testimonies of each artist I write about at the front and centre of my analysis. These muralists were and are brave, bold and creative, and sometimes placed their lives on the line to create artworks that inspire, empower, and uplift people. "We figure that well, if we have to go out being shot or whatever, then okay," Wade told me of his time working on the *Wall of Truth* under the surveillance of the FBI. "We are committed to this, we aren't getting any money from it, but this is what we are committed to, so we are going to go ahead and do it. And if we have to go out whatever kind of way, okay, at least we got to do what we want to do."[23] Inspired by the need to empower communities against the backdrop of Jim Crow, European fascism, World War II, the Black Power Movement, Black Lives Matter— and in Odums' case, Hurricane Katrina—muralists have created subversive, empowering, potent, heroic, historic, commemorative, revolutionary, ground-breaking, educational, challenging, poetic, and performative murals. These murals stood proudly on the walls of buildings to prove the sheer existence of black life in America, and they were murals that

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[22] Prigoff and Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride,* 8.
[23] Author's phone call with Eugene Eda Wade, June 1, 2017.

expanded the imaginations of black community members by transforming "[t]he dark ghetto's invisible walls…erected by the white society" unquestionably into monuments to blackness.[24]

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[24] Clark, *Dark Ghetto,* 11. East Side Voices of Independent Detroit, "ESVID Builds a New Wall: Detroit's Wall of Dignity," *The Ghetto Speaks,* April 22, 1968. Copy courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

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Appendix