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# Aesthetic Antecedents: Visual imagery in the Harlem Renaissance and Black Lives Matter Movement

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# Aesthetic Antecedents: Visual imagery in the Harlem Renaissance and Black Lives Matter Movement.

Left Image: Malvina Hoffman, *Mangbetu Woman*, 1930, Chicago, Field Museum. Digital image, available from: https://poetryandocean.wordpress.com/2016/02/27/lets-clear-the-air-about-malvina-hoffman/ [Accessed 10/11/20].

Right Image: Unknown, *You Can't Separate Peace from Freedom* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1017 [Accessed 04/01/21].

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## Introduction

As Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests emerged in response to the murder of George Floyd last year, I became immersed in trying to understand the BLM movement. Limited to online research during the pandemic, I stumbled upon an article in *The Verge* documenting mural and street art production during the protests.[1] I found myself confronted by my brief knowledge of Harlem Renaissance visual art. As I scrolled through the murals, I came to realise that imagery in BLM murals reflected elements of the African American experience as expressed within visual art's symbolism during the Harlem Renaissance.

Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes were the architects of the Harlem Renaissance, inspiring expression within their writings.[2] The overarching principle of the Harlem Renaissance, as articulated by Locke, Du Bois and Hughes, was that it should creatively express 'the African American experience'.[3] Locke proselytised African American creative expression of the African American experience within his 1925 book *The New Negro*.[4] He argued that African Americans should use uniquely African American expression to enter a 'new phase of group development' and create a modern, sophisticated and urbane image of themselves - what he described as 'the new negro'.[5] Both Du Bois and Hughes developed Locke's arguments. Du Bois set criteria for depicting the African American experience, emphasising that African Americans must express their distinct African heritage and African American history to construct a 'black aesthetic'.[6] Hughes compelled African American artists to regard themselves not as artists but as black artists expressing their unique beauty 'without fear or shame'.[7] Within Harlem Renaissance visual art, creative expression of 'the African American experience' ultimately emphasised two ideas: expression of the African American racial experience and expression of the African American ethnic experience.[8]

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[1] Justine Calma, 'Protest Art Leaves the Streets', https://www.theverge.com/21509952/street-art-murals-black-lives-matter-blm-protests-new-york-city-artists [Accessed 02/07/20].
[2] Cary Wintz, 'The Harlem Renaissance: What was it and why does it matter?', https://www.humanitiestexas.org/news/articles/harlem-renaissance-what-was-it-and-why-does-it-matter [Accessed 05/02/21].
[3] Wintz, 'The Harlem Renaissance'.
[4] Lisa Mintz Messinger, 'Cultural Heritage and Identity', in *African-American Artists 1929-1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Lisa Mintz Messinger, Lisa Gail Collins, Rachel Mustalish, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 19.
[5] Alain Locke, *Enter the New Negro by Alain Locke (1925)*, National Humanities Centre, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/migrations/text8/text8read.htm [Accessed 15/11/20].
[6] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Criteria of Negro Art by W. E. B. Du Bois (1926)*, WEBDuBois.org, http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html [Accessed 03/12/20].
[7] Langston Hughes, 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56.
[8] Wintz, 'The Harlem Renaissance'.

Building upon my initial realisation, this dissertation will explore whether 2020's BLM protest murals reflect the expression of the African American experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art and how their nature as murals impacted this expression.

My study is interdisciplinary. It will draw from history, art history and semiotics to develop the academic study of Harlem Renaissance visual culture's continued significance. Despite a downturn in academic interest in Harlem Renaissance visual culture after the 1940s, scholars revived the study of this multifaceted field in the late 1990s.[9] Art historian Richard Powell initially focused on visual expression, suggesting that the Harlem Renaissance began a new age of African American cultural development. Reviewing an eclectic group of artists' work, he identified the Harlem Renaissance as the modern emergence of distinctly African American visual culture.[10] Sharon Patton developed Powell's argument. She suggested that the Harlem Renaissance established African American identity within American art, reforming notions of race, equality and social acceptance.[11] Cary Wintz meanwhile perceived shortcomings in Harlem Renaissance visual art, identifying its lack of common political ideology and failure to create meaningful social change.[12] However, Wintz also maintained that the Harlem Renaissance was paramount in determining modern African American cultural expression. Most recently, Cheryl Wall and Phoebe Wolfskill separately examined the longevity of the Harlem Renaissance's influence. Wall affirmed that the 1970s Black Arts Movement built upon Harlem Renaissance African American expression whilst Wolfskill specifically examined visual art, highlighting the continued prevalence of Harlem Renaissance ideas and imagery within the creative expression of contemporary artists Kara Walker and Kehinde Wiley.[13]

Within this context, this dissertation undertakes the first of two investigations, to explore change and continuity in Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals' compositional expressions of the African American experience. In considering BLM murals,

[9] Allen Dunn, George Hutchinson, 'The Future of the Harlem Renaissance', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 80:4, (1997), 447.
[10] Richard Powell, 'Re/Birth of a Nation' in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. David Baily, Richard Powell, (California: University of California Press, 1997), 16.
[11] Sharon Patton, *African-American Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 107-128.
[12] Wintz, 'The Harlem Renaissance'.
[13] Cheryl Wall, 'Epilogue: Beyond Harlem' in *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, ed. Cheryl Wall, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 117-118; Phoebe Wolfskill, 'The Enduring Relevance of the Harlem Renaissance', in *The Routledge Companion to African American Art History*, ed. Eddie Chambers, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 35-36.

this is a novel comparative investigation using an unexplored source base that will develop Wall and Wolfskill's scholarship. This inquiry will be twofold. It will first analyse how Harlem Renaissance visual art expressed the African American racial and ethnic experience, as advocated by Locke, Du Bois and Hughes, and whether 2020's BLM murals continued to express the same notions of the African American experience. This study will further identify African American women's complete omission from Locke, Du Bois and Hughes' formative Harlem Renaissance texts. As seminal examples of Harlem Renaissance literature that inspired the expression of the African American experience, my exploration will additionally consider the impact of the absence of African American women from those texts on BLM murals and visual art and further investigate change and continuity in creative expression.

However, the nature of BLM murals differentiates them from Harlem Renaissance visual art. Murals, pioneered by Mexican artists including Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siquieros in the 1920s, publicly express social, political and cultural ideas.[14] Historians, political scientists and sociologists suggest that non-compositional features of murals significantly impact their ultimate expression. Neil Jarman affirms the importance of a mural's location to enhancing its expression of ideas.[15] Bill Rolston and Amaia Alvarez-Berastegi additionally suggest that the visual nature of the mural allows condensed expression of multifaceted social movements.[16] Josh MacPhee further argues that murals are firmly democratic expressions, allowing the visual expression of personal opinions.[17]

This dissertation will therefore undertake a second exploration of BLM murals both in their own right and beyond their composition. It will investigate how the inherent features of murals impacted BLM murals' expression of the African American experience.

To investigate these two research questions, this dissertation will firstly draw upon United States BLM murals in the George Floyd Anti-Racist Street Art (GFARSA) database. The GFASRA database is the most comprehensive digital archive of BLM murals created

[14] Amaia, Alvarez-Berastegi, Bill Rolston, 'Taking murals Seriously: Basque Murals and Mobilisation', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Sociology*, 29, (2016), 36.
[15] Neil Jarman, 'Painting Landscapes: the place of murals in the symbolic construction of urban space', in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony Buckley, (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1998), 81-97.
[16] Alvarez-Berastegi, Rolston, 33-36.
[17] Josh MacPhee, 'Street Art and Social Movements', https://justseeds.org/street-art-and-social-movements/ [Accessed 12/12/20].

during the 2020 BLM protests. It includes 1,700 photographs of street art, comprising 568 BLM murals created in the United States and defined by their public exhibition of painted visual symbols, not exclusively words.[18] After independent submission, academics Todd Lawrence, Paul Lorah and Heather Shirey from the University of St Thomas in Minnesota analyse the content and themes of these murals. The database's meticulous attention to detail and individual interrogation of murals allows for the examination of BLM murals using multiple images and for filtered searches of BLM murals' themes, phrases and symbolism to determine their overall frequency of depiction. Additional BLM murals originate from the online articles that prompted my initial investigation. Together, the database and articles create an eclectic and extensive source base, varied by geographic location, artistic style, date of creation, final composition and creator(s).

Secondly, the discussion will use visual art produced by African Americans between the beginning of the Great Migration in the 1910s until African American visual expression declined as a result of limited government support in the early 1940s. Due to the dissertation's aim to further existing historiography, these boundaries draw upon Wolfskill's framework.[19] The source base ultimately collates a vast and diverse body of material for comparative analysis, including paintings, sculptures and illustrations.

The examination of these visual sources requires an appropriate methodology. Although historians have supported their arguments using visual sources since the 17th century, only since the 1980s have scholars explored critical visual methodologies.[20] Due to its twofold nature, this dissertation will draw upon the perspective of Ludmilla Jordanova who suggests that historians must use tailored approaches, not formulaic methodologies.[21] She argues that historians must explore sources individually and adapt their interpretative methods to suit their investigations.

[18] GFARSA, 'About', https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net [Accessed 10/02/21].
[19] Wolfskill, 27.
[20] See: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 1972), 47-51; John Fiske, 'Audiencing', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, (London: Sage, 1994); Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'What is Visual Culture?', in *The Visual Cultural Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London: Routledge, 1998), 3-13; Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 4th edn, (London: Sage, 2016), 2; Peter Burke, *The Use of Images as Historical Evidence*, (London: Reaktion Books Limited, 2014), 41-55.
[21] Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Approaching Visual Material', in *Research Methods for History*, ed. Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 44-48.

Thus, the dissertation will use two separate methodologies. The dissertation's comparative investigation into expressions of the African American experience and the role of African American women in expression will begin with Harlem Renaissance literature. Here, the dissertation will highlight how architects of the Harlem Renaissance articulated the necessity for the creative expression of the African American racial and ethnic experience and omitted reference to African American women. Subsequently, the discussion will take an iconographic approach to explore the expression of the African American experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals.[22] This will investigate both BLM murals' composition and use the GFARSA database's analysis to determine the significance of themes and phrases to BLM murals. Although an iconographic approach fails to consider production and audience circumstances, it will maintain focus on visual symbolism and imagery, thus suiting this dissertation's purpose.

However, the latter discussion will use Jarman, Rolston, Alvarez-Berastegi and MacPhee's analysis of the inherent characteristics of murals that uniquely change their expression. Their scholarship will comprise a springboard for the investigation of BLM murals. This will explore three features of murals: their visuality, site-specificity and genre as street art.[23] The discussion will interrogate how these features of BLM murals impacted their expression of the African American experience. By considering intrinsic elements of BLM murals, the investigation will further compensate for iconography's limitations.

The dissertation will adopt a tripartite structure. The first chapter will explore whether BLM murals reflected Harlem Renaissance visual art's expression of the African American racial and ethnic experience, ultimately establishing some continuity between the two periods. Both BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art captured Africanism and African American contemporary and historical experience. However, there were also changes in expression. BLM murals contained fundamentally different notions of the African American racial experience and did not portray notions of 'the new negro'.

The second chapter will investigate African American women's omission from formative Harlem Renaissance texts to explore their roles as artists and BLM muralists and their representation within art and BLM murals. It will establish that African American women

[22] Rose, 198.
[23] Jarman, 81; MacPhee, 'Street Art'; Sofia Ospina, Bill Rolston, 'Picturing Peace: Murals and Memory in Colombia', *Race and Glass*, 58:3, (2017), 28.

expressed the African American experience as both visual artists and BLM muralists and were portrayed in varied depictions within the creative expression of both periods.

The third chapter will investigate how the nature of BLM murals impacted their expression of the African American experience. It will highlight that the visuality, geographic location, genre, and online circulation of BLM murals contributed individual qualities to the expression of the African American experience.

Together, these discussions identify 2020's BLM murals as multifaceted, diverse and distinctive sources warranting further investigation both comparatively and in their own right.

## Chapter One

## Comparing Expression

*'It is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realisation of Beauty'.*[24]

As was the aspiration of W. E. B. Du Bois in 1926, the Harlem Renaissance comprised an artistic movement that shaped modern African American culture.[25] This chapter will highlight change and continuity in Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals' expression of the African American experience. It will initially demonstrate that BLM murals communicate Africanism and the historical and contemporary African American experience, thus reflecting visual art's expression of African American racial and ethnic experience during the Harlem Renaissance. However, it will also highlight that, contrasting with Harlem Renaissance visual art, African American contemporary experience dominated BLM murals, not Africanism or notions of 'the new negro', whilst BLM murals additionally expressed other notions of race to Africanism.

Lisa Mintz Messinger argues that Africanism was preeminent to Harlem Renaissance visual art, manifesting the African American racial experience and dominating creative expression.[26] During the Harlem Renaissance, notions of Africa as a component of the African American racial identity drew primarily from Du Bois' 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk* where Du Bois described African American 'double-consciousness' or 'twoness', thus identifying their self-perception as racially both 'negro' (or African) and American.[27] However, Locke most fervently supported the expression of Africa as a racially distinct African American characteristic within Harlem Renaissance visual art.[28] In *The African Legacy and the Negro*

[24] Du Bois, *Criteria.*
[25] Wall, 117-118; Wolfskill, 35-36.
[26] Mintz Messinger, 19.
[27] Mintz Messinger, 19; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903)*, The Gutenberg Project, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm [Accessed 15/11/20]; Mintz Messinger, 19.
[28] Alain Locke, 'The African Legacy and the Negro Artist,' in *Exhibition of the Work of Negro Artists*, ed. William Burke Harmon, (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1931), 12.

*Artist* (1931), Locke suggested that artists must use African art and their African heritage to inspire creative expression. Locke argued that:

> African art presents to the Negro artist in the New World a challenge to recapture their heritage of creative originality, and to carry it to distinctive new achievement in a vital, new and racially expressive art.[29]

Sharon Patton supports Mintz Messinger's perspective. She argues that Locke's writing inspired visual artists to express Africanism in their work using African symbolism.[30] Often artists only referenced Africa, for example, Palmer Hayden's 1932 *Fetiche et Fleurs* (Figure 1). In a realist portrayal of a banal living room scene, Hayden assembles a vase of flowers, a Fang reliquary statue and a piece of Kuba cloth on a coffee table. The statue and cloth originate from central Africa.[31] As Locke intended, the artefacts add a uniquely African element to a painting of an otherwise mundane setting. However, Africanism additionally became a central and dominant component of visual art. Hayden's 1932 paintings *African Dancer* and *African Dancers*, for example, vividly depict traditional African tribal scenes, highlighting Africanism within art's visual expression. (Figures 2 and 3). Meta Warrick Fuller's *Ethiopia Awakening* (1921) perhaps best highlights the significance of racially expressive Africanism during the Harlem Renaissance (Figure 4). The sculpture depicts an elegant and revitalised ancient Egyptian woman emerging from cloth wrappings. A portrayal of Africanism pre-dating Locke's writing, *Ethiopia Awakening* was the harbinger of artists rediscovering Africa to express the African American racial experience.[32] Subsequently, Harlem Renaissance visual artists imbued Africanism as the dominant theme of their work's content and stylistic form, building upon *The African Legacy and the Negro Artist* and expressing the African American racial experience.[33]

As in Harlem Renaissance visual art, the composition of BLM murals continued to reflect Africanism. *Somali Hut*, for example, is avowedly Africanist (Figure 5). The mural

[29] Locke, 'The African Legacy', 12.
[30] Patton, 107.
[31] Patton, 121.
[32] Patton, 121.
[33] Patton, 121.

depicts a traditional Somali hut featuring the words 'Black Lives Matter' and a quote from Assata Shakur advocating African American liberation. Its portrayal of an African tribal home places Africa at the centre of its composition, celebrating the racial identity of its Somali creator Ifrah Mansour.[34] *You Can't Separate Peace from Freedom* also highlights Africanist expression. The mural depicts a bare-breasted African American woman in profile with her eyes closed and lips pursed, bearing a red, green and black tattoo of Africa on her arm (Figure 6). As Richard Powell affirms, the depiction of the subject in profile reflects Africanism in a hallmark trait of African, specifically Egyptian, art, whilst the shape of the tattoo directly connects the woman to the African continent.[35] The tattoo also reflects pan-Africanism in its red, green and black colour scheme. The pan-Africanist colours express unity amongst individuals of African descent and feature throughout BLM murals, most significantly in road murals as in Florida and New York (Figures 7, 8 and 9). Africanism was thus a feature of BLM murals, reflecting expressions of the African American racial experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art.

However, BLM murals further contradicted Harlem Renaissance expressions of Africanism. Firstly, BLM murals also rejected Locke's appeals for racially expressive art, aligning with Harlem Renaissance art historian James A. Porter's conflicting perspective. Porter was unsympathetic to notions of Africanism in art.[36] He instead argued that creative expression should accommodate American art and express the African American experience as, simply, American. However, visual artists favoured racial art, discounting Porter's perspective during the Harlem Renaissance.[37]

Conversely, BLM murals highlighted the American aspect of the African American experience. Primarily by featuring the United States flag, BLM murals tied the African American experience to the United States. *Demilitarise the Police*, for example, depicts multiple images of President Donald Trump equipped in police riot gear and wielding the United States flag as a weapon (Figure 10). The mural connects George Floyd's contemporary persecution by the police force to the United States. The substitution of a police baton for the star-spangled banner and the incumbent President for police officers metaphorically characterises the United States as an agent of police violence and oppression. Amir Diop's *400 Years* similarly ties the historical African American experience to the United States (Figure

[34] GFARSA, 'Somali Hut', https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/254 [Accessed 04/01/21].
[35] Powell, 29.
[36] Mary Ann Calo, 'Art', in *The Routledge Companion*, ed. Eddie Chambers, 16-17.
[37] Calo, 16-17.

11). By depicting an enslaved African American against the background of the United States flag and stating that it took 400 years of bondage for America to recognise the position of African Americans, *400 Years* portrays African American slavery and discrimination as entrenched in United States history. It thus links African Americans' experience to their American nationality, highlighting that BLM murals also rejected Locke's notions of racial expression.

Moreover, BLM murals used multiracial iconography, an alternative notion of race to Africanism, to express the contemporary African American experience. *Together We Will Defeat Racism*, for example, expresses anger towards racism and protests George Floyd's murder using multiracial imagery (Figure 12). The mural affirms 'Together We Will Defeat Racism' above an image of six multiracial individuals embracing Floyd. It contrasts the expression of racial Africanism, not drawing upon African American racial distinctiveness but highlighting a multiracial community. *Unity – Justice For George; Three Fists* and *Reconciliation* further support this idea (Figures 13, 14 and 15). *Unity – Justice For George* and *Three Fists* each depict multiracial individuals and raised fists united in solidarity with the BLM movement against African American discrimination.[38] *Reconciliation* alternatively captures the physical boundary between protestors and the police force. It depicts an African American protestor and a white police officer embracing one another, portraying interracial unity and harmony. The three murals do not convey racial Africanism but instead use multiracial imagery to depict contemporary African American protest.

Contrasting Mintz Messinger and Patton's argument that Africanism dominated Harlem Renaissance visual art, Africanism was also not the preeminent theme of BLM murals. The GFARSA database reveals that the expression of the contemporary African American experience, specifically the BLM movement and Floyd's murder that triggered expression, held paramount significance to BLM murals. 179 BLM murals in the GFARSA database (32%) focus on the BLM movement, expressing 'Black Lives Matter' or its abbreviation 'BLM'.[39] These BLM murals included *Unity – Justice for George*, depicting a BLM protest demanding Floyd's murder not go unrecognised, and *Say Their Names – I Can't*, drawing attention to the names of contemporary African American victims of police brutality (Figures 13 and 16). However, the most significant theme expressed within 40% of BLM murals was Floyd's

[38] James Stout, 'The history of the raised fist, a global symbol of Fighting oppression', https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/history-of-raised-fist-global-symbol-fighting-oppression [Accessed 13/03/21].
[39] GFARSA, 'Black Lives Matter, BLM', https://bit.ly/3vm4svZ [Accessed 25/04/21].

murder. 229 BLM murals in the GFARSA database contain Floyd's name, portrait or final words 'I Can't Breathe' (Figures 12, 13, 16, 17 and 18).[40] These BLM murals commemorated Floyd's life and called attention to his public suffocation. The statistical significance of these expressions reveals that contemporary African American experience dominated creative expression. Using imagery of George Floyd's death and the BLM protests, BLM murals remained firmly tied to the contemporary African American experience, with no other phrase, symbol or theme holding comparable significance.

BLM murals did, therefore, express the African American racial experience using Africanism. However, unlike contemporary African American experience, Africanism did not dominate expression. BLM murals additionally rejected Africanism, connecting the African American experience to the United States and further expressing contemporary African American experience using multiracialism. Thus, there were fundamental differences between Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals in their expressions of the African American racial experience.

BLM murals' dominant portrayals of the contemporary African American experience additionally comprises African American ethnic experience - the second component of the African American experience expressed within visual art during the Harlem Renaissance. Here, shared African American experiences of history, culture and tradition featured in expression, not notions of race.[41] Du Bois staunchly supported the expression of the African American ethnic experience. He argued that it was the duty of black America to creatively realise, create, preserve and restore African American's shared past.[42] Hughes' *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926) best defines this philosophy. Hughes focused on his inspirations of blues and jazz music to argue that African American history, folk song, literature and tradition should inspire Harlem Renaissance art.[43] He reasoned that the Harlem Renaissance should express the African American ethnic experience to allow African Americans to 'catch a glimmer of their own beauty' and 'express [themselves] without fear or shame'.[44]

As was the case in BLM murals, Powell suggests that the expression of African American contemporary Harlem Renaissance experience held significance in portraying ethnic

[40] GFARSA, 'George Floyd, I Can't Breath', https://bit.ly/3sVJ3IH [Accessed 25/04/21].
[41] Wintz, 'The Harlem Renaissance'.
[42] Du Bois, *Criteria.*
[43] Hughes, 56-57.
[44] Hughes, 57.

experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art. He argues that the expression of contemporary experience comprised novel representations of Locke's 'new negro'.[45] Jacob Lawrence's 60 part *Great Migration Series* (1941) highlights this perspective.[46] The final 15 panels of the Series capture an emergent bourgeois class of African Americans, distinctly modern in appearance and enjoying education, healthcare and employment opportunities during the Harlem Renaissance.[47] James Van der Zee's photography also documents the contemporary African American experience. *Couple in Racoon Coats* (1932) captures two modern and urbane African Americans with affluence and independence – the epitome of 'the new negro' (Figure 19).[48] *My Corsage* (1931) further depicts a modern, glamorous African American flapper (Figure 20). She defines contemporary fashion, sporting cropped hair and wearing a short fur-trimmed dress.[49] Van der Zee's photography ultimately extensively documents varied portrayals of modern African Americans, ranging from Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanist processions to additional portraits of African American flappers (Figures 21 and 22).

Notions of 'the new negro' ultimately became paramount to visual art's expression of the African American ethnic experience. James Lesesne Wells produced greyscale linocuts of the Great Migration and African American urban construction, whilst Hayden, Aaron Douglas and Archibald Motley created cubist and realist portrayals of African American metropolitan life in Harlem.[50] The significant difference between BLM murals and visual art's expressions of their respective contemporary African American experiences is that notions of 'the new negro' and novel, distinctly modern African American representation did not dominate BLM murals. Contemporary experience in BLM murals resolutely depicted Floyd and protest, centring expression of African American shared experience on contemporary events. Therefore, both Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals portrayed respective contemporary African American experiences but in nuanced representations.

Powell's perspective is, however, too narrow. As an art historian, Powell focuses on distinguishing the stylistic elements of art from its forerunners. He concentrates on different

[45] Powell, 18-29.
[46] Jacob Lawrence, *Great Migration Series Panels 45-60*, 1940, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
[47] Beth Harris, Steven Zucker, 'Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series', https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/later-europe-and-americas/modernity-ap/v/lawrence-migration-series [Accessed 10/11/20].
[48] Miriam Thaggert, *Images of Black Modernism: Verbal and Visual Strategies of the Harlem Renaissance*, (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 155-157.
[49] Thaggert, 161.
[50] Powell, 21-25; Patton, 121-128.

artists' use of Cubism, silhouetting and Orphism to create novel representations of African Americans. He does not acknowledge the historical African American experience as a component of the African American shared ethnic experience.

Cary Wintz affirms that Harlem Renaissance visual art additionally captured the antecedents of African American ethnic experience, portraying its historical rural roots and African heritage.[51] Renée Ater reinforces Wintz's argument, outlining Aaron Douglas' significance to depicting the historical African American ethnic experience.[52] Douglas' 1934 *Aspects of Negro Life* series attests to Wintz's argument (Figures 23, 24, 25 and 26). Beginning with a depiction of tribal Africa and illustrating the history of African Americans through slavery, emancipation and Reconstruction, whilst simultaneously portraying the origins and emergence of African American folk song and dance, the cubist series chronologically and viscerally charts over 300 years of shared African American history. It is the epitome of expression of the historical African American experience, celebrating African American heritage. Douglas' *Congo* (1928) and *Into Bondage* (1936) further express the historical African American experience (Figures 27 and 28). Both works use Douglas' unique cubist style to depict a tribal African scene in *Congo* and the beginning of African American transatlantic slavery in *Into Bondage*. Douglas presented the historical African American experience as Du Bois and Hughes intended. His work highlights the historical African American experience as a component of expressions of the African American ethnic experience during the Harlem Renaissance.

The expression of the historical African American shared experience reveals further continuity with BLM murals, which depicted both historical experiences portrayed within Harlem Renaissance visual art and highlighted the 80 years of African American experience following the Harlem Renaissance. *400 Years*, for example, captures slavery in the United States (Figure 11). It depicts a chained, enslaved African American, stating '400 years of bondage; it takes a disease to make us think'. The mural recognises African American history, concentrating on slavery, discrimination and persecution - as in Douglas' *Aspects of Negro Life*. Maeve Cahill's *Ida B. Wells* alternatively depicts anti-lynching activist and early leader of the

[51] Cary Wintz, 'Harlem and the Renaissance: 1920-1940' in *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Amy Kirschke, (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 16-18.
[52] Renée Ater, 'Creating a "usable past" and a "future perfect society" Aaron Douglas's Murals for the 1936 Texas Centennial Exhibition', in *Aaron Douglas African American Modernist*, ed. Susan Earle, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 95-98.

civil rights movement during the 20th-century Ida B. Wells (Figure 29). The mural focuses on Wells' journalistic search for the truth. It emphasises the historical significance of the African American press and anti-lynching groups in combatting racial discrimination, drawing attention to the early 20th-century civil rights movement.[53]

Imagery of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement, however, most significantly featured within BLM murals' expression of the historical African American experience. BLM murals frequently quoted and depicted civil rights activists and leaders. Lisa Baur's work, for example, quotes Martin Luther King Jr. stating 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere', whilst *You Can't Separate Peace From Freedom* cites Malcolm X stating 'you can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom' (Figures 6 and 30). Katharen Weise's *When the Sunrise and the Sunset look the Same* and the *BLM Minnesota AAHM* mural further depict James Baldwin, feature the names of Rosa Parks and Maya Angelou and capture Martin Luther King Jr. in portrait (Figures 31, 32 and 33). As in Harlem Renaissance visual art, BLM murals expressed the African American ethnic experience using depictions of the historical African American experience.

This chapter identified both change and continuity between Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals in their expression of the African American experience. It firstly highlighted that both visual art and BLM murals expressed the African American racial experience using Africa as inspiration. Moreover, murals and visual art used historical and contemporary African American experience to portray African American ethnic experience.

However, there were nuances between these expressions. Unlike in Harlem Renaissance visual art, Africanism did not dominate BLM murals. Instead, African American contemporary experience was preeminent within BLM murals' expressions. Other BLM murals also rejected notions of Africanism entirely, tying African American experience to the United States and using multiracialism to illustrate the contemporary African American experience. Moreover, BLM murals did not create a novel image of African Americans using contemporary experience. Instead, they remained tied to Floyd's murder and the BLM movement.

[53] Holowaty Krales, Amelia, Vjeran, Pavic, '33 Powerful Black Lives Matter Murals', https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/5/21304985/black-lives-matter-murals-round-up-artists [Accessed 19/10/21].

## Chapter Two

## The Omission Of Women

*'The negro taking his place in American art'.*[54]

This chapter will continue to explore continuity in creative expression, investigating how visual art and BLM murals afforded women agency as artists and whether visual art and murals portrayed African American women. The chapter will affirm that, despite Du Bois, Locke and Hughes failing to acknowledge female creative expression, African American women were significant to visual expression during the Harlem Renaissance. It will further highlight the continued significance of African American women as BLM muralists and their varied compositional representations within both visual art and BLM murals. It will thus establish further continuity in the creative expression of the African American experience between the two periods.

The examination of how the Harlem Renaissance's architects supported creative expression reveals gender inequality. Formative Harlem Renaissance literature overlooked the contributions of African American women to expression, exclusively discussing creative expression of the African American experience in male terms.[55] Locke consistently referred to 'the negro taking his place in American art' whilst only referencing male artists such as Douglas, Richmond Barthe and Sargent Johnson when championing Africanism. [56] Furthermore, Hughes solely described 'the new negro' and 'his fears,' 'his art,' 'his features,' and 'his race'.[57] With regards to the 'new negro', Du Bois additionally affirmed:

> Free he is but his freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognise an ideal of Justice.[58]

[54] Locke, *Enter the New Negro.*
[55] Emily Orlando, '"Feminine Calibans" and "Dark Madonnas of the Grave": The Imaging of Black Women in the New Negro Renaissance', in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver, Paula Barnes, (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 63.
[56] Locke, *Enter the New Negro*; Locke, 'The African Legacy', 11.
[57] Hughes, 55-57.
[58] Du Bois, *Criteria.*

These texts inspired creative expression but crucially denied African American women both representation within art and expression as artists.[59]

Amy Kirschke affirms that African American women experienced marginalisation as visual artists during the Harlem Renaissance relative to African American men. Kirschke attests that women's discrimination stemmed from misogyny limiting their access to art training.[60] There is merit to Kirschke's argument. Foundations and art schools considered African American women to be second-tier talents.[61] Male teachers and students regarded African American women as 'women artists' or 'girl art students', treating them with hostility, limiting their access to advanced classes and restricting their training to the 'decorative arts'.[62] Gwendolyn Bennet, for example, left her art studies at Columbia University due to male hostility.[63] Renée Ater suggests that, due to men dominating the visual arts world, Meta Warrick Fuller, Mae Howard Jackson and Lois Mailou Jones were exceptional to have obtained formal art education.[64]

Prejudice further resulted in African American women financially struggling to work as visual artists. As two 'second-tier talents' Howard Jackson never received full payment for her portrait-bust collection whilst lack of buyer interest forced Nancy Elizabeth Prophet to destroy many of her works.[65] Discrimination compelled African American women to depend on external funds to continue their careers. Jones relied on Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's patronage to study abroad whilst Augusta Savage simultaneously needed financial support from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, black women's groups and teachers at her former arts college to train in Paris.[66] Ultimately, African American women's perception as inferior to their male counterparts meant that they existed in a marginalised position as visual artists during the Harlem Renaissance.

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[59] Orlando, 63.
[60] Amy Kirschke, 'Foreword', in *Women Artists*, ed. Kirschke, xi.
[61] Wintz, 'Harlem and the Renaissance', 4.
[62] Renée Ater, 'Meta Warrick Fuller's Ethiopia and the America's Making Exposition of 1921', in *Women Artists*, ed. Kirschke, 56.
[63] Rebecca Dixon, 'Gwendolyn Bennet', in *Black Women of the Harlem Renaissance Era*, ed. Lean'tin L. Bracks, Jessie Carney Smith, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 35.
[64] Ater, 'Meta Warrick Fuller's Ethiopia', 56.
[65] Amy Kirschke, 'Laura Wheeler Waring and the Woman Illustrators of the Harlem Renaissance', in *Women Artists*, ed. Kirschke, 90; Lean'tin Bracks, 'Nancy Elizabeth Prophet' in *Black Women*, ed. Bracks, Carney Smith,179.
[66] Robert Hall, 'Augusta Savage', in *Black Women*, ed. Bracks, Carney Smith, 192; Robert Hall, 'Lois Mailou Jones', in *Black Women*, ed. Bracks, Carney Smith, 145.

However, despite inherent challenges stemming from their gender, African American women still, in fact, visually expressed the African American experience during the Harlem Renaissance. Susan Earle, Lean'tin Bracks, Rebecca Dixon and Gladys Knight highlight African American women's extensive achievements within and contributions to Harlem Renaissance visual art. They identify acclaimed painters, sculptors and illustrators as influential African American women within Harlem Renaissance visual expression.[67] They individually suggest that women maintained an undeterred commitment to visually expressing the African American racial and ethnic experience.

They are correct in this assessment. Artists such as Fuller and Jones obtained artistic training and produced expressive visual art.[68] As aforementioned, Fuller's *Ethiopia Awakening* (1921) was the harbinger of African American racially expressive art, a precursor to what Locke would establish as Africanism (Figure 4). Jones' *The Ascent of Ethiopia* (1932) further presented Africanism (Figure 34). In its foreground depiction of an Egyptian Pharaoh and the pyramids of Giza, Jones places Africa at the centre of the painting's composition, a clear reflection of Locke's ambition for African Americans to create racially expressive art. Within its background, *The Ascent of Ethiopia* additionally expresses the contemporary African American experience, portraying the African American Great Migration to urban cities and using concentric circles and silhouetting to highlight African American participation in music and theatre. Moreover, illustrators such Celeste Smith and Laura Wheeler Waring expressed the African American experience in editorials such as *The Crisis*. Wheeler Waring's 1924 cover of *The Crisis* highlights African American ethnic experience (Figure 35). It depicts Abraham Lincoln intervening in the Ku Klux Klan's persecution of an African American, a reference to Lincoln's protection and emancipation of African Americans from enslavement and persecution during the American civil war. Smith's *Excelsior* (1929) further expresses Africanism (Figure 36). It depicts an African American dancer delicately balanced on the African landmass. The image portrays Africa as the very foundation upon which the dancer expresses herself, tying her and her dance intrinsically to the African continent. Therefore, despite misogynistic male perceptions, African American women, as Earle, Bracks, Dixon and Knight suggest, did express the African American experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art.

[67] Susan Earle, 'The Wide-ranging Significance of Lois Mailou Jones', in *Women Artists*, ed. Kirschke, 175; Bracks, 'Nancy Elizabeth Prophet', 179*;* Dixon, 36; Gladys Knight, 'Laura Wheeler Waring', in *Black Women*, ed. Bracks, Carney Smith, 233-234.
[68] Ater, 'Meta Warrick Fuller's Ethiopia', 56; Hall, 'Lois Mailou Jones', 145.

Emily Orlando additionally affirms that visual artists depicted African American women during the Harlem Renaissance. She suggests that visual artists subverted women's lack of inclusion in literature by featuring active and dynamic African American women in their work.[69] *Ethiopia Awakening* attests to Orlando's argument (Figure 4). The sculpted noblewoman is not idle or stationary but lively and energized, breaking from her cloth restraints to emerge into her surroundings. Smith's *Excelsior* further portrays an active African American woman (Figure 36). The illustration uses concentric imagery to depict its subject dancing. She is elegant and dynamic, an animated artist and performer. As Orlando suggests, visual art did portray African American women as active.

However, Orlando's perspective is short-sighted. Visual art further depicted a complex variety of African American women – modern, accomplished, educated and resilient. James Van der Zee's portraits *My Corsage* (1931) and *Lady with Fur Jacket* (1935) depict contemporary African American flappers – independent, affluent and sophisticated (Figures 20 and 22). These portraits do not present their subjects as active. Instead, the women's short hair, shimmering jewellery and fashionable clothing portray them as refined, glamorous and modern.[70] Aaron Douglas' *Building More Stately Mansions* (1944) additionally portrays an accomplished African American woman (Figure 37). Within the image, Douglas depicts an African American women next to a group of children and a globe. This setting portrays her as an intelligent and educated teacher - a positive influence upon the next generation and an accomplished African American woman.[71] *The Burden of Black Womanhood* (1927) alternatively portrays a resilient African American woman in Douglas' paintings (Figure 38). Douglas depicts an African American woman in profile engaged in a superhuman, herculean effort to hold up the earth itself. She is not just active or dynamic but strong, persevering and determined - bearing the burden of the world on her shoulders.[72] Expressions of the African American experience in visual art did, therefore, depict African American women. Moreover, visual art depicted active African American women and varied examples of African American women, subverting their omission from Locke, Du Bois and Hughes' writing.

[69] Orlando, 87.
[70] Thaggert, 161.
[71] Ater, 'Creating a "usable past"', 107.
[72] Amy Kirschke, 'The Burden of Black Womanhood: Aaron Douglas and the "Apogée of Beauty"', American Studies, 49:1, (2008), 104.

Analysis of African American women's role in BLM murals' creative expression reveals additional continuity between the two eras. Firstly, African American women also held significance in expressing the African American experience. The GFARSA database confirms women's production of the aforementioned *Somali Hut* and *When the Sunrise and the Sunset look the Same* - Ifrah Mansour and Katharen Wiese respectively (Figures 5 and 31). As previously argued, these works express Africanism and the historical African American experience, highlighting individual female muralist's expression of the African American experience. Konstance Patton's *Goddess Series* was an additional series of BLM murals created by a single woman (Figures 39 and 40). Here, Patton expresses Africanism. The series presents three distinctly African goddesses, bare-breasted and adorned with golden earrings and neck bands, typifying Locke's idealised racially expressive art.[73] Furthermore, African American women featured as contributors to collaborative murals. The *Laughing Factory* mural, for example, included the work of Alexandra Belisle and Amanda Hale (Figure 41). Belisle and Hale's contributions to the mural depict African American contemporary experience. Their works portray scenes of African American protest and highlight African American discrimination and persecution using the image of George Floyd whose death was the reason for BLM protests global emergence in 2020. Photographs of the creation of road murals, such as the *BLM Minnesota AAHM* mural and the *BLM Trump Tower* mural, also highlight African American women's significant involvement as artists and volunteers producing community BLM murals. Photographs depict African American women working on their hands and knees, contributing anonymously to vast, public affirmations of 'Black Lives Matter'.[74] In response to Floyd's death, these BLM murals reject both racial injustice and police brutality's persecution of Floyd and other African Americans.[75] Thus, as in Harlem Renaissance visual art, African American women expressed the African American experience within BLM murals.

Moreover, BLM murals portrayed varied examples of African American women as in Harlem Renaissance visual art. Reflecting *The Burden of Black Womanhood's* depiction of a resilient woman, The *Joyce Beatty Tribute* mural and *Confident and Strong* mural each depict an African American women pulling back a rolled-up sleeve to reveal a flexed bicep (Figures

[73] Calma, 'Protest Art'.
[74] MPR News Staff, 'Artists paint Black Lives Matter mural on Minneapolis street', https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/07/18/photos-artists-paint-black-lives-matter-mural-on-minneapolis-street [Accessed 27/12/20]; Michael Gold, Daniel Slotnik, 'N.Y.C. Paints 'Black Lives Matter' in Front of Trump Tower', https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/nyregion/blm-trump-tower.html [Accessed 27/12/20].
[75] Shantay Robinson, 'The Significance of the Black Lives Matter Mural', https://www.blackartinamerica.com/index.php/2020/06/21/the-significance-of-the-black-lives-matter-mural/ [Accessed 04/02/2021].

42 and 43). The action highlights the women's physical strength, suggesting they are powerful, persevering and determined. BLM murals also portrayed accomplished African American women. However, this was not in generalised anonymous images but used specific examples of accomplished historical or contemporary African American politicians and activists. The *Joyce Beatty Tribute, Angela Davis* mural and the *BLM Minnesota AAHM* mural each feature the names or portraits of important African American women such as Ohio's State Representative Joyce Beatty, civil rights activists Angela Davis, Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks and abolitionist Sojourner Truth (Figures 33, 42, 44). The murals individually highlight accomplished and politically significant African American women, another distinct portrayal. Finally, *Black Girl Magic* and *BIPOC Women* depict refined and sophisticated African American women (Figures 45 and 46). The subjects are well-dressed in formal, urbane and fashionable clothes in *BIPOC Women* and wear makeup in *Black Girl Magic*, adorned with golden jewellery and polished in appearance in both murals. They are not plain or mundane but genteel and respectable, two novel striking portrayals. As during the Harlem Renaissance, BLM murals, therefore, portrayed African American women within creative expression and exhibited varied depictions of African American women. There is, thus, additional continuity between BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art. Contrary to Locke, Du Bois and Hughes' writing, African American women expressed the African American experience in BLM murals and BLM murals included African American women in their composition.

This chapter examined African American women's significance within the creative expression of BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art, establishing continuity between the two source bases. African American women were fundamental to expressing the African American racial and ethnic experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals, portraying notions of Africanism and the contemporary and historical African American experience. Moreover, Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals expressed varied examples of African American women. Within both eras, creative expressions depicted African American women as strong, refined and accomplished. Despite Locke, Du Bois and Hughes' texts, African American women were thus significant to BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art's creative expression.

## Chapter Three

## The Exceptionalism of Murals

*'Street art has the potential to foster a sustained political dialogue, reaching a wide audience and making change possible'.*[76]

As the GFARSA database suggests, the unique nature of street art changes its expressive potential. Street art is a visual and public expression of a particular ideology, social movement or message in a site-specific location. This chapter will engage with BLM murals separately from Harlem Renaissance visual art. It will use other academics' critical analysis of murals' visuality, site-specificity and genre - three inherent features of murals identified within scholarship that uniquely affect murals' expression - to examine how these characteristics of BLM murals impacted their expression of the African American experience.[77] It will firstly highlight that BLM murals' visuality and location contributed conciseness and local pertinence to their expression of the African American experience. Secondly, it will demonstrate that BLM murals' genre democratised the production of expressions but that their online circulation additionally democratised access to these expressions. The chapter will demonstrate that the nature of murals contributed additional qualities to BLM murals final expression of the African American experience.

Visuality is fundamental to murals' expression. Gillian Rose affirms that a source's visuality comprises its content, use of colour and spatial organisation.[78] Combined, these aspects determine its material qualities and iconographical meaning.[79] Bill Rolston and Amaia Alvarez-Berategi highlight the importance of visuality to murals' expression. Rolston and Alvarez-Berategi argue that where textual or verbal communication requires extensive explanation, a mural's visuality facilitates the transmission of multifaceted concepts. They

[76] GFARSA, 'Mapping George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art', https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net [Accessed10/12/20].
[77] Jarman, 81; MacPhee, 'Street Art'; Ospina, Rolston, 28.
[78] Rose, 62-75.
[79] Rose, 25.

suggest that murals condense complex ideas into simplistic content - often comprising repeated imagery or messages.[80]

Rolston and Alvarez-Berategi's analysis applies to BLM murals. The visuality of BLM murals contributed to their expression of the African American experience by condensing complex historical and contemporary ideas. Preeminent in compacting African American experience was BLM murals' depiction of a closed fist. The fist has historical significance for African Americans. African American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists at the Mexico City Olympics in 1968, expressing black power, solidarity with the civil rights movement and Black Panther Party and opposition to racism. Since 1968, the fist has represented staunch anti-racism.[81] More recently, African Americans raised their fists during the 1995 Million Man march on Washington D.C., supporting African American racial unity.[82] Featured 77 times in the GFARSA database murals, the fist captured these historical themes of African American protest and unity.[83] Its depiction within BLM murals prevented the expression of these themes individually, condensing historical African American unity and protest into a single image. The phrases 'say their names', 'say his name' and 'say her name' further facilitated the expression of the contemporary African American experience. The simple expressions demanded audience recognition of individual African American victims of racial inequality and distinct cases of police brutality, such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Without requiring extensive explanation, they raised awareness of systemic racism in the United States and condensed individual African American experiences of inequality into single repeated phrases.[84] Together, the phrases succinctly expressed contemporary African American experience 33 times within BLM murals in the GFARSA database.[85] BLM murals' visuality thus firstly contributed conciseness to expression by condensing complex African American experiences into simple imagery.

Rose additionally argues that the composition of a visual source does not solely determine its meaning. According to Rose, both a visual source's site(s) of production (where it was created) and site(s) of audience (where it was viewed) additionally contribute to its

[80] Alvarez-Berastegi, Rolston, 34.
[81] Stout, 'The history of the raised fist'.
[82] Stout, 'The history of the raised fist'.
[83] GFARSA, 'Fist', https://bit.ly/3gM7Jkf [Accessed 25/04/21]; Stout, 'The history of the raised fist'.
[84] Say Their Names, 'About', https://saytheirnames.io/about [Accessed 12/04/21].
[85] GFARSA, 'Say Their Names, Say His Name, Say her Name', https://bit.ly/3u8vUNT [Accessed 25/04/21]

ultimate meaning.[86] Murals are unique in this regard. Murals exist in one site-specific public location encompassing both their site of audience and site of production. Neil Jarman argues that a mural's specific site can alter its expression or enhance its message politically, socially or for the local community.[87] Since every BLM mural existed in a unique location, this chapter cannot universally affirm how the location of BLM murals contributed to or changed their expression of the African American experience. The location of BLM murals requires analysis on an individual basis.

However, using the work of Rolston and Sofia Ospina, this chapter can point toward two examples of BLM murals' locations significantly impacting their expression of the African American experience. Rolston and Sofia Ospina argue that the creation of a mural in a site of injustice or historical significance transforms its expression. They maintain that site-specific commemorative murals exist in powerful symbolic areas instilled with important sentiments that commemorate the site's history.[88] *The Cup Foods Memorial* falls within Rolston and Ospina's analysis (Figure 18). Still displayed at the time of writing, *The Cup Foods Memorial* uses Floyd's image and his final words in its composition. It is a monument to contemporary African American experience, depicting Floyd and remembering his death by asphyxiation with the phrase 'I Can't Breathe'. However, the mural's unique location contributes local significance to its expression. *The Cup Foods Memorial* is also the site marker of Floyd's death. The mural's specific location transforms it, as Rolston and Ospina suggest, into a commemoration of the site's history of racial injustice. It is thus also a geographically pertinent expression of African American experience.

*Reconciliation* and *Together We Will Defeat Racism* additionally highlight that a BLM mural's site could add local significance to the expression of the African American experience (Figures 12 and 15). Muralists created *Reconciliation* and *Together We Will Defeat Racism* on Lake Street in Minneapolis following protests against Floyd's murder in the city.[89] As aforementioned in chapter one, the murals promote communal harmony, depicting multiracial solidarity with the African American experience and a peaceful relationship between an African American protestor and a white police officer. However, their locations reveal that these expressions were geographically significant. Lake Street was one of the most severely

[86] Rose, 27-32, 38-47.
[87] Jarman, 82.
[88]Ospina, Rolston, 28.
[89] GFARSA, 'Together We Still Defeat Racism', https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/796 [Accessed 03/01/21]; GFARSA, 'Reconciliation', https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/732 [Accessed 11/01/21].

damaged areas of Minneapolis during BLM protests. Between Floyd's murder on the 25th of May and the 29th of May, protestors burnt down the 3rd Precinct police department where the officers arresting Floyd worked, committed further arson and destruction in the local neighbourhood and pillaged Lake Street's local businesses.[90] Artists thus created the murals' expressions of solidarity within a fraught community impacted by intense violence and unrest. Their expressions of community cohesion, harmony and unity juxtaposed and subverted the contemporary severity of recent violence at their sites. As in *The Cup Foods Memorial*, the geographic context of these BLM murals added a significant local pertinence to the murals' expression of the African American experience. BLM murals' locations could, therefore, contribute geographic importance to their expression of the African American experience.

BLM murals' genre additionally democratised their expression of the African American experience. Besides centrally organised BLM road murals that were public art installations, BLM murals were examples of street art - independent, site-specific creative expressions evoking political or social messages.[91] Josh MacPhee argues that, when hundreds or thousands of people produce decentralised street art, expression is wholly democratic. He suggests that street art communicates an individual's emotions, feelings and frustrations.[92] Individuals and collaborative groups independently created the 568 murals in the GFARSA database, retaining sole agency in determining each mural's ultimate composition. All compositional expressions of the African American experience in the GFARSA database were thus democratically produced. Although the database does not account for all BLM murals, it highlights the genre of BLM murals contributing a democratic aspect to their expression of the African American experience.

However, MacPhee narrowly focuses on the individuality of street art's democratic expression. Anahi Alviso-Marino agrees with MacPhee but additionally examines murals as a collective. He suggests that the prolific and democratic creation of street art generates sites of uninhibited visual democratic discussion.[93] Alviso-Marino's perspective is apparent to BLM

[90] Angelo Caputo, Will Craft, Curtis Gilbert, 'The precinct is on fire': What happened at Minneapolis' 3rd Precinct — and what it means', https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/06/30/the-precinct-is-on-fire-what-happened-at-minneapolis-3rd-precinct-and-what-it-means [Accessed 01/04/21].
[91] Carmen Cowick, 'Preserving Street Art: Uncovering the Challenges and Obstacles', *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 34:1, (2015), 30.
[92] MacPhee, 'Street Art'.
[93] Anahi Alviso-Marino, 'The politics of street art in Yemen (2012–2017)', Communication and the Public, 2:2, (2017), 121.

murals. His argument also highlights the democratic nature of commissioned BLM road murals. BLM road murals in Seattle (Washington) and St Petersburg (Florida) highlight the genre of street art facilitating site-specific democratic discussion of the African American experience in BLM murals (Figures 47, and 48). Although central committees orchestrated the creation of these road murals and their statements of 'Black Lives Matter', planners delegated control of the composition of each letter in 'Black Lives Matter' to individual muralists. Consequently, distinct letters express varied interpretations of the African American experience. The 'M' of 'Matter' in the Seattle mural, for example, depicts Martin Luther King Jr., highlighting African American historical experience, whilst the two subsequent 'T's consecutively portray a raised fist, expressing the BLM movement and African American history, and the image of George Floyd, illustrating contemporary African American experience. In the St Petersburg mural, the 'V' of 'Lives' depicts chains, representing historical African American enslavement, whilst the two 'T's capture the pan-Africanist colour scheme. Individually, the letters of BLM road murals communicated personal expressions of the African American experience. Viewed in combination, these murals, as Alviso-Marino argues, formed a democratically conceived discourse of individuals' interpretations of the African American experience. Examined as both individual sources and in collective groups, the genre of BLM murals, therefore, contributed democratic qualities to their expression of the African American experience.

Although MacPhee and Alviso-Marino's studies highlight the genre of murals democratizing the production of murals' expression, they do not, however, acknowledge the democratic nature of BLM murals' online circulation. Due to their site-specific location restricting their audience to passers-by, and local businesses rapidly removing BLM murals after the George Floyd protests, BLM murals only received limited viewership at their sites.[94] However, individuals and groups used online circulation to archive BLM murals' composition. For example, the University of St Thomas created the GFARSA database, a collection comprising 568 photographs of BLM murals.[95] The Save The Boards Minneapolis Campaign completed the same function on a smaller scale. The campaign digitised local murals in

[94] Jarman, 81; Calma, 'Protest Art'.
[95] Amy Carlson Gustafson, 'St. Thomas Documents George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art From Across the Globe', https://news.stthomas.edu/st-thomas-documents-george-floyd-and-anti-racist-street-art-from-across-the-globe/ [Accessed 10/04/21].

Minneapolis, posting them online with unrestricted access.[96] By storing murals online, the nature of these databases contributed to the expression of the African American experience within BLM murals.

Firstly, online circulation further democratised access to compositional expressions of the African American experience, not BLM murals' initial production. Both the GFARSA database and Save the Boards Minneapolis Campaign created extensive and accessible collections of BLM murals' expressions of the African American experience. Most significantly, these archives were (and still are) free, unrestricted and globally accessible for anyone connected to the internet. These features of the databases bypassed the limits of BLM murals' site-specific expression. Databases democratically expressed African American experience in BLM murals to a broader audience, contributing a secondary democratic aspect to the expression of the African American experience.

However, in existing databases, BLM murals' online circulation creates a further consequence for BLM murals' expression of the African American experience. As previously affirmed, a BLM mural's location could add local pertinence to the expression of the African American experience. Changing the site of a BLM mural's composition without highlighting its geographic context prevents its specific location from adding local significance to its ultimate expression. Understanding *The Cup Foods* Memorial using solely online circulation does not convey that the mural commemorates site-specific African American injustice. An uncontextualized examination of *Reconciliation* and *Together We Will Defeat Racism* does not reveal that they contrasted local community violence and unrest. Thus online circulation can additionally detract from a BLM mural's expression of the African American experience by limiting expression to solely iconography. Although online circulation may allow democratic interaction with BLM murals, it can further impair their expression of the African American experience.

This chapter has examined murals in their own right. It has revealed that BLM murals' inherent characteristics contributed additional qualities to their expression of the African American experience. The visuality of murals contributed conciseness to expression, condensing complex African American experience into imagery, whilst a mural's site-specific

[96] Leah Feiger, 'Pain, Power, Healing: One Woman's Quest to Keep Protest Art in Minneapolis', https://www.thelily.com/pain-power-healing-one-womans-quest-to-keep-protest-art-in-minneapolis/ [Accessed 10/04/21].

nature could further add local pertinence to expression. BLM murals' street art genre democratised the expression of the African American experience and created site-specific visual discussion of individuals' interpretations of the African American experience. Moreover, the online circulation of BLM murals further democratised access to these expressions. However, online circulation can prevent BLM murals' locations from contributing local pertinence to their expression of the African American experience. Ultimately, this chapter has revealed that the nature of BLM murals was complex, comprising multifaceted features each contributing to BLM murals' ultimate expression.

## Conclusion

BLM murals publicly, visually and creatively responded to the murder of George Floyd in 2020. However, BLM murals are more complex than they may appear at first glance. This dissertation has explored expressions of the African American experience within BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art.

Chapter one highlighted both change and continuity between BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art's expression of the African American experience. It demonstrated that both BLM murals and Harlem Renaissance visual art portrayed African American racial experience and ethnic experience. However, it additionally highlighted that contemporary African American experience dominated BLM murals, not Africanism, and murals did not depict Locke's notion of 'the new negro'.

Chapter two highlighted additional continuity between the two periods' expression of the African American experience. It demonstrated that, despite the omission of African American women in seminal Harlem Renaissance literature, African American women both expressed the African American experience within Harlem Renaissance visual art and as BLM muralists and featured in murals and visual art.

Chapter three examined scholars' analysis of inherent features of murals to consider how the nature of BLM murals impacted their expression of the African American experience. The chapter highlighted that BLM murals' visuality, genre, location and circulation contributed conciseness, site-specificity and democratic elements to their expression of the African American experience, but that circulation could further impair site-specific expression.

This investigation provides a pathway into further studies of BLM murals' visual expression. Harlem Renaissance visual art and BLM murals undoubtedly require greater comparative investigation. Exploration of sexuality would be a valuable investigation. As Claudia Hill affirms, LGBTQ+ artists such as Richmond Barthe, Charles Demuth and Paul Cadmus held significance within Harlem Renaissance visual expression.[97] Research could orientate towards expressions of sexuality in BLM murals or the comparable significance of the LGBTQ+ community to expression during the two periods. Additionally, research could engage with the Black Arts Movement. This could compare expressions of the African

[97] Hill, Claudia, 'Richmond Barthe', in *Encyclopaedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Cary Wintz, Paul Finkelman, (London: Routledge, 2004).

American experience in BLM murals and the Black Arts Movement or again investigate the Harlem Renaissance to better understand the evolution of African American expression.

There would also be value in investigating BLM murals alone, for example, exploring their creation during the pandemic or global BLM mural production. Analysis could alternatively employ Bill Rolston and Sofia Ospina's framework to better understand the impact of BLM murals on the BLM movement or use Josh MacPhee's analysis to comparatively dissect the nature and themes of BLM murals within the framework of other mural art and expression in Northern Ireland or Nicaragua.[98] This dissertation leaves extensive uncharted territory for investigation.

20-year-old Daunte Wright's murder on the 11th of April 2021 highlights that police brutality remains a social issue within the United States. Since Wright's murder, the GFARSA database received ten novel submissions of street art containing Wright's name.[99] As this dissertation highlights, these expressions add to a rich, multi-faceted and diverse archive with broad scope for research into both their composition and nature.

[98] Ospina, Rolston, 23-45; MacPhee, 'Street Art'.
[99] GFARSA, 'Daunte Wright', https://bit.ly/3aIousQ [Accessed 24/04/21].

**Appendix**

Figure 1: Palmer Hayden, *Fetiche et Fleurs*, 1932, Los Angeles, California, Museum of African American Art. Digital image, available from: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/fétiche-et-fleurs-palmer-c-hayden/zQGh9ItkxaXEfQ?hl=en [Accessed 10/12/20].

Figure 2: Palmer Hayden, *African Dancer*, 1932, Los Angeles, California, Museum of African American Art. Digital image, available from: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/african-dancer-palmer-c-hayden/ywG3-Iwz2v4m4g [Accessed 10/12/20].

Figure 3: Palmer Hayden, *African Dancers*, 1932, Los Angeles, California, Museum of African American Art. Digital image, available from: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/african-dancers-palmer-c-hayden/fAGuwpOgu4rMYA [Accessed 10/12/20].

Figure 4: Meta Warrick Fuller, *Ethiopia Awakening*, 1921, Washington, Washington D.C. National Museum of African American History and Culture. Digital image, available from: https://nmaahc.si.edu/meta-vaux-warrick-fuller-ethiopia-1921 [Accessed 10/12/20].


Figure 5: Ifrah Mansour, *Somali Hut* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/254 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 6: Unknown, *You Can't Separate Peace from Freedom* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1017 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 7: Multiple contributors, *BLM Centre Street* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.insider.com/black-lives-matter-street-murals-painted-across-us-photos-2020-7 [Accessed 03/01/21].


Figure 8: Multiple contributors, *BLM Lake Eola Park* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/foot-long-black-lives-matter-street-mural-is-seen-across-news-photo/1223314133 [Accessed 03/01/21].


Figure 9: Multiple contributors, *BLM Frederick Douglas Boulevard* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/foot-long-black-lives-matter-street-mural-is-seen-across-news-photo/1223314133 [Accessed 03/01/21].


Figure 10: Unknown, *Demilitarize the Police* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/5/21304985/black-lives-matter-murals-round-up-artists [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 11: Amir Diop, *400 Years* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/5/21304985/black-lives-matter-murals-round-up-artists [Accessed 03/01/21].


Figure 12: Unknown, *Together We Will Defeat Racism* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/309 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 13: Unknown, *Unity - Justice For George* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1311 [Accessed 04/01/21].

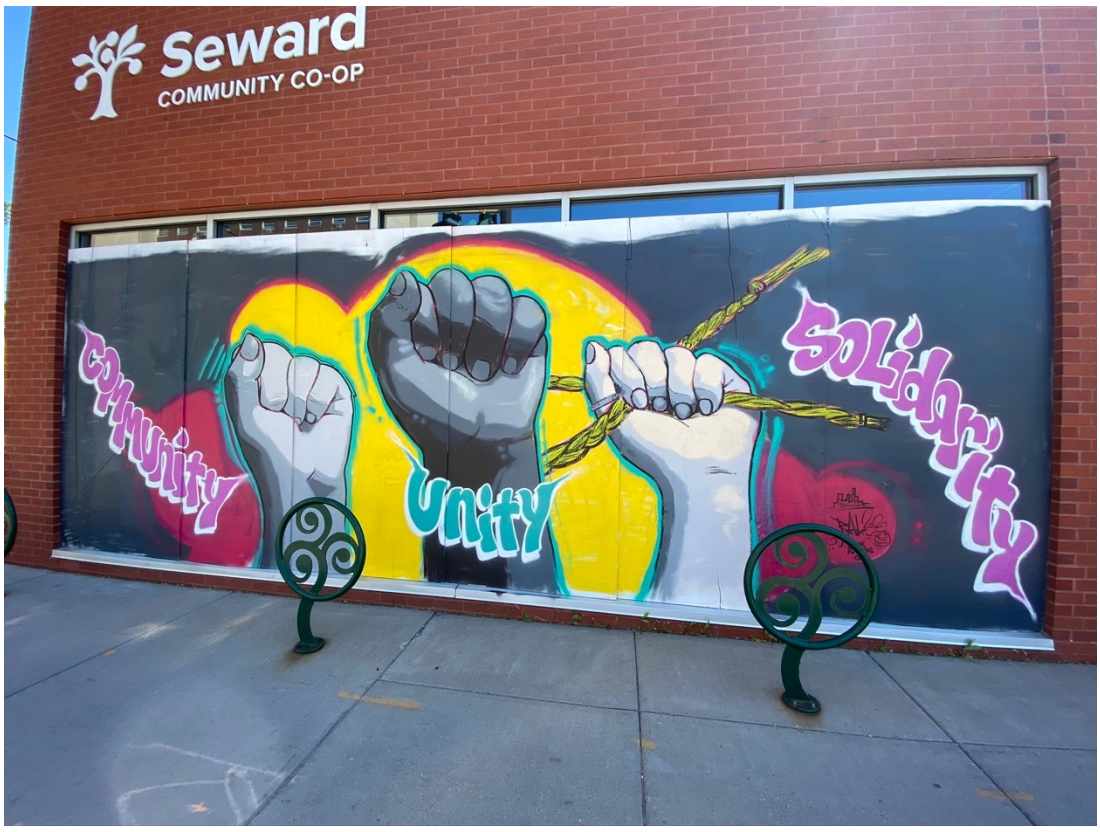


Figure 14: Multiple contributors, *Three Fists Mural*, 2020. Digital Image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/583 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 15: Christina Maria, *Reconciliation* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/732 [Accessed 04/01/21].

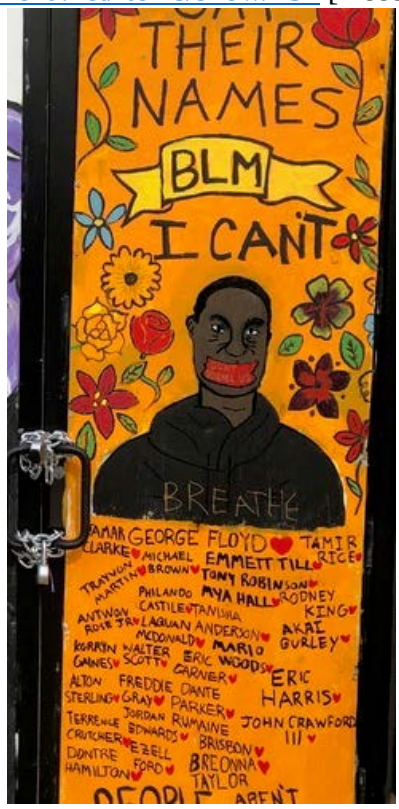


Figure 16: Unknown, *Say their Names - I Can't* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1295 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 17: Unknown, *Blues for George* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1839 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 18: Multiple contributors, *The Cup Foods Memorial* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/woman-walks-past-a-mural-of-george-floyd-defaced-recently-news-photo/1228946743 [Accessed 04/01/21].

Figure 19: James Van der Zee, *Couple in Racoon Coats*, 1931, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/180240 [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 20: James Van der Zee, *My Corsage*, 1931, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://sites.google.com/site/voicesoftheharlemrenaissance/harlem-renaissance/artists/james-van-der-zee [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 21: James Van der Zee, *Marcus Garvey*, 1924, unknown. Digital image, available from: http://coreybarksdale.com/harlem-renaissance/marcus-garvey.html [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 22: James Van der Zee, *Lady with Fur Jacket*, 1935, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://www.howardgreenberg.com/artists/james-van-der-zee?view=slider [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 23: Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro In the African Setting*, 1934, New York Public Library, New York. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/the-negro-in-african-setting-1934 [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 24: Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: An Idyll of the Deep South*, 1934, New York Public Library, New York. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/an-idyll-of-the-deep-south-1934 [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 25: Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction*, 1934, New York Public Library, New York. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/from-slavery-through-reconstruction-1934 [Accessed 13/02/21].

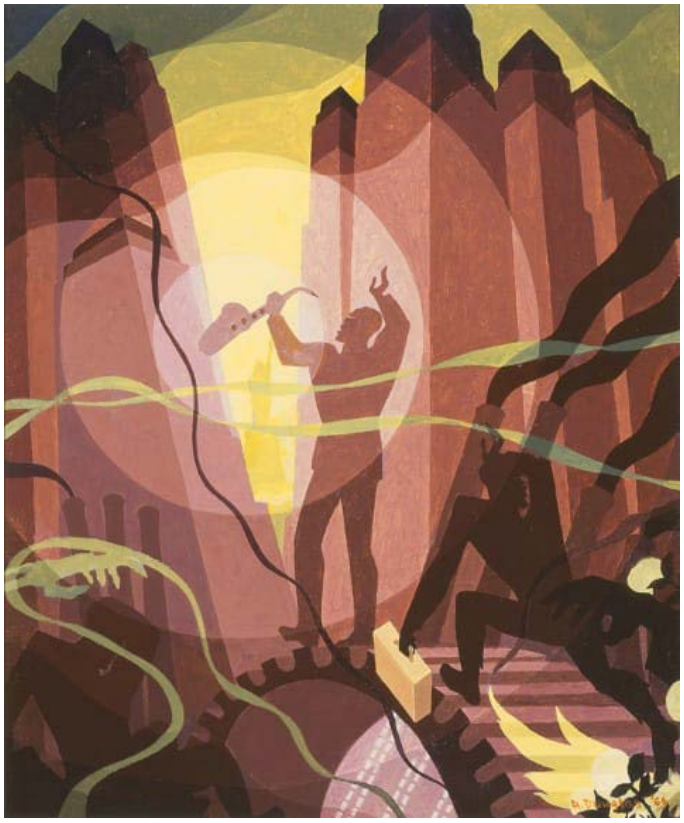

Figure 26: Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of Towers*, 1934, New York Public Library, New York. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/song-of-the-towers-1934 [Accessed 13/02/21].

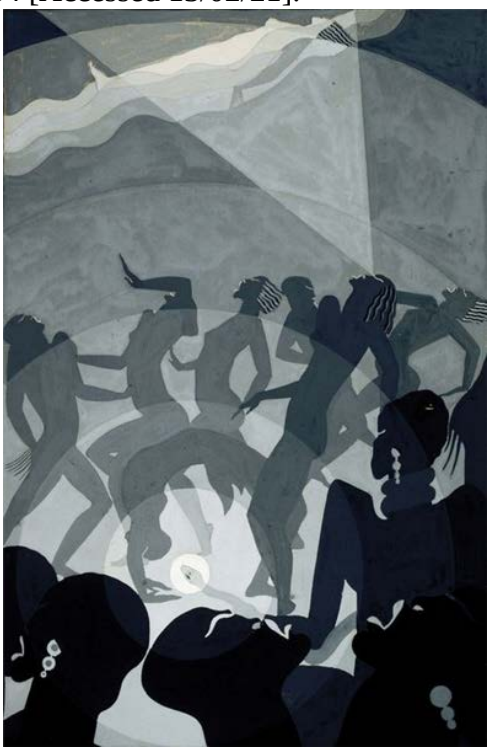

Figure 27: Aaron Douglas, *Congo*, 1928, Raleigh, North Carolina, North Carolina Museum of Art. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/congo-1928 [Accessed 13/02/21].

Figure 28: Aaron Douglas, *Into Bondage*, 1936, Dallas, Texas, Walls of Slavery. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/into-bondage-1936 [Accessed 13/02/21].


Figure 29: Maeve Cahill, *Ida B. Well*s Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/5/21304985/black-lives-matter-murals-round-up-artists [Accessed 03/01/21].


Figure 30: Lisa Baur, *Injustice Anywhere Is A Threat To Justice Everywhere* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1633 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 31: Katharen Weise, *When Sunrise and Sunset look the Same* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/264 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 32: Unknown, *BLM AAHM Mural 'S'*, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://unicornriot.ninja/2020/historic-black-lives-matter-mural-painted-in-minneapolis/ [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 33: Unknown, *BLM AAHM Mural 'S'*, 2020. Digital image, available from https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/875 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 34: Lois Mailou Jones, *The Ascent of Ethiopia*, 1932, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Milwaukee Art Museum. Digital image, available from: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-ascent-of-ethiopia-lois-mailou-jones/XwHAiPWqQyqi6g [Accessed 13/03/21].

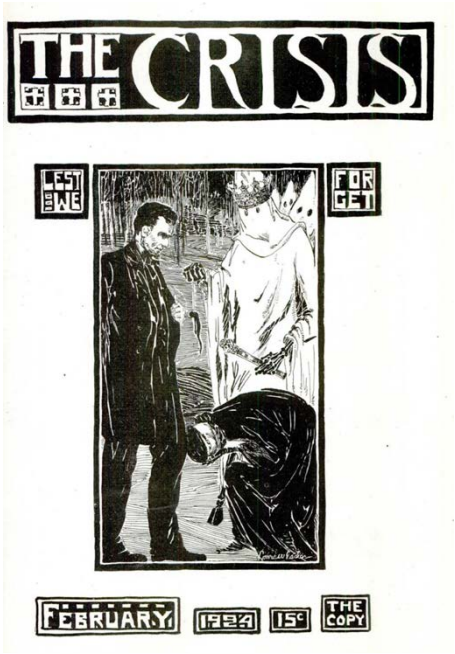


Figure 35: Laura Wheeler Waring, *The Crisis February 1924 Cover*, 1924, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=vVkEAAAAMBAJ&source=gbs_all_issues_r&cad=1 [Accessed 13/03/21].

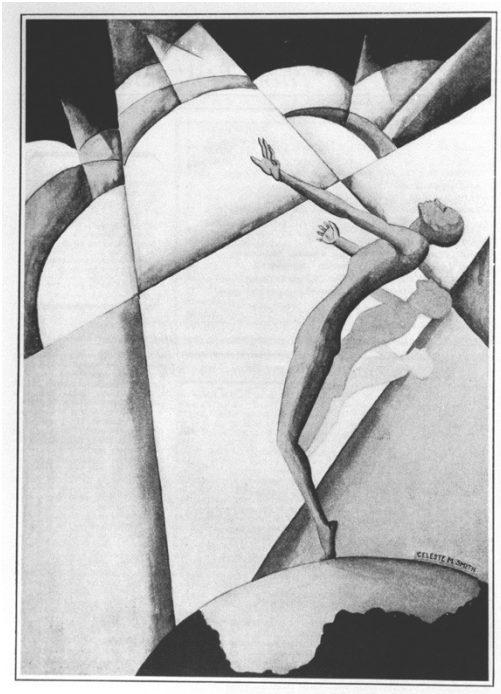

Figure 36: Celeste Smith, *Excelsior*, 1929, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fjournals.ku.edu%2Famsj%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F3945%2F3758%2F5222&psig=AOvVaw2bxB7bMQWmXyUyHxop-SWj&ust=1617446375260000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAkQjhxqFwoTCJDeybev3-8CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAP [Accessed 13/03/21].

Figure 37: Aaron Douglas, *Building More Stately Mansions*, 1944, Providence Rhode Island, RISD Museum. Digital image, available from: https://www.wikiart.org/en/aaron-douglas/building-more-stately-mansions-1944 [Accessed 11/03/21].

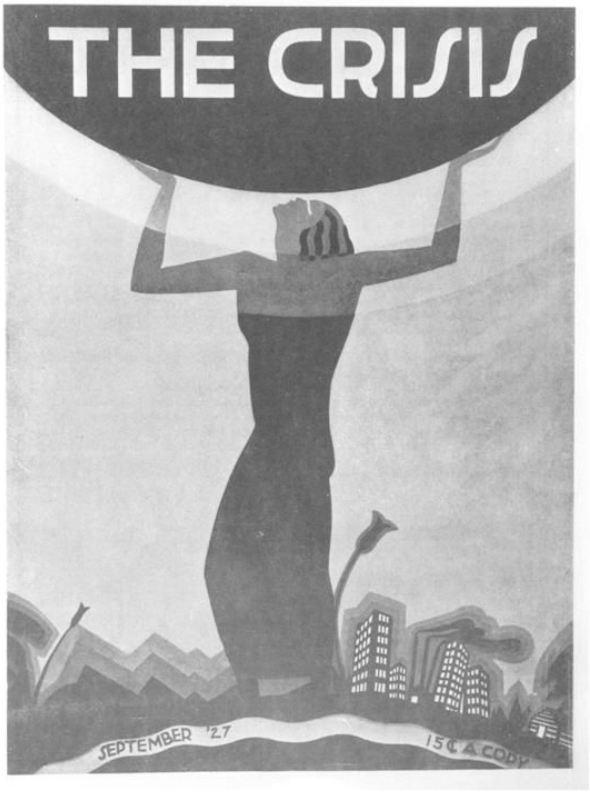


Figure 38: Aaron Douglas, *Burden of Black Womanhood: The Crisis September 1927 Cover*, 1927, unknown. Digital image, available from: https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/850476710850723974/ [Accessed 11/03/21].


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Figure 41: Multiple contributors inc. Alexandra Belisle and Amanda Hale, *Laughing Factory* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/review/black-lives-matter-in-augmented-reality-from-la-times [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 42: Unknown, *Joyce Beatty Tribute* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1450 [Accessed 04/01/21].

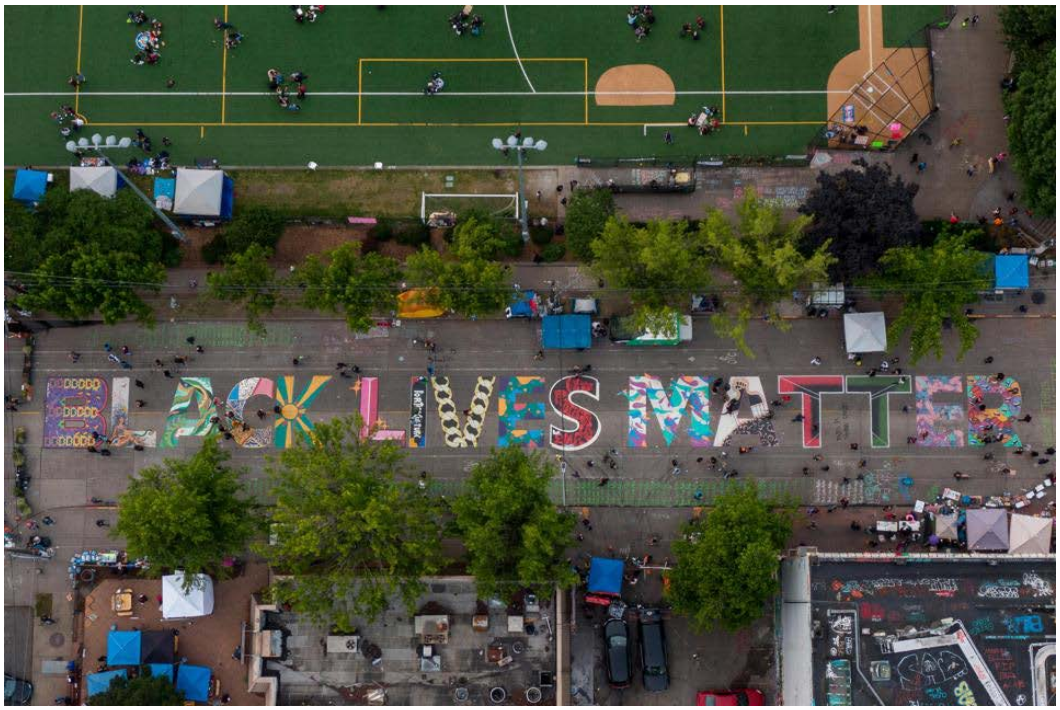

Figure 43: Jamari Taylor, *Confident and Strong* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://eu.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/news/nation/2020/06/06/murals-honor-george-floyd-and-black-lives-matter-movement/3164531001/ [Accessed 13/10/20].


Figure 44: Unknown, *Angela Davis* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/5/21304985/black-lives-matter-murals-round-up-artists [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 45: Serena Salcido, *Black Girl Magic* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://eu.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/news/nation/2020/06/06/murals-honor-george-floyd-and-black-lives-matter-movement/3164531001/ [Accessed 04/01/21].

Figure 46: Unknown, *BIPOC Women* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net/items/show/1541 [Accessed 04/01/21].


Figure 47: Multiple contributors, *BLM Seattle* Mural, 2020. Digital image, available from: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/an-aerial-view-of-a-black-lives-matter-mural-on-east-pine-news-photo/1219991162 [14/11/20].

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