COLLECTIVE EXPRESSIONS:
THE BARNES FOUNDATION AND PHILADELPHIA

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ABSTRACT

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In three chapters I propose to show that the American art collector Dr. Albert Coombs Barnes simultaneously amassed a major collection of modern European and ancient African art during the first half of the twentieth-century and worked consistently as an advocate for racial, social and educational reform in the United States. In conjunction with this collection and advocacy Barnes also originated a characteristic method for the analysis and understanding of painting that was dedicated to the service of these egalitarian social ideals. Now that the Barnes Foundation, the institution dedicated to preserving this collection and the social mission behind it has been relocated from Merion, Pennsylvania to Philadelphia and opened to the public, I argue that it is essential the Foundation continue to document and teach Barnes’ original theories concerning art and social action to visitors from around the world.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: THE LEGACY OF DR. ALBERT COOMBS BARNES

When an oncoming truck collided fatally with Dr. Albert C. Barnes’ Packard convertible on July 24, 1951 at a stop sign in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania the future of one of the most distinctive and renowned art collections in the United States was left open to uncertainty and controversy. The Barnes Foundation, established in December 1922, is one of the most significant collections of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early modern European painting assembled in the twentieth-century. In addition to its European pieces, the collection holds a wide variety of African sculpture. This fascinating element of Barnes’ collection evokes his enduring commitment to social equality for African-Americans. The collection is thus in many ways more than the sum of its parts. Mixing pieces from different cultural origins into one collection, Barnes constructed a remarkable educational philosophy that drew on his philosophical pragmatism and his desire to foster the social equality of all peoples. Sadly, following his death this pedagogical legacy and the collection itself immediately entered an era of contestation as to its guidance and ownership.

Shortly before his accident, Barnes had given control of the Barnes Foundation, situated in Merion, Pennsylvania, to the nation’s first historically black college, Lincoln University, located just outside Philadelphia. According to letters Barnes exchanged at that time with Dr. Horace Mann Bond, President of Lincoln in 1951, Barnes wanted the Foundation and the University to partner in an “educational enterprise that has no
counterpart elsewhere.”¹ This would seem a worthy ideal. Yet, in part because of his fascination with, and commitment to, African-American culture, Barnes was perceived as a problematic and disruptive social and artistic force by many in the art and educational establishments of his time. Almost immediately after his death, the will in which Barnes stipulated that Lincoln be given control of the Foundation was contested in court. Yet, despite the legal wrangling, control remained in Lincoln’s hands, and it was not until 2012 that Lincoln and the Foundation parted ways and the Foundation moved from its original location in the reclusive suburb of Merion, to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in downtown Philadelphia. The official reasoning behind this move was concern for the maintenance of the Foundation’s original physical structures, which were eroding over time. Today, the original structure that housed the collection in Merion has been re-dedicated as a memorial to the horticultural pursuits of Barnes’ wife, Laura. The Foundation is now overseen by a board drawn from some of the most prominent and prestigious – and by and large white – art professionals in the country. Largely because of its former relative seclusion, the Barnes collection has been an underappreciated national treasure. In Philadelphia the museum is now seeking the public presence that eluded it in Merion.

Like the institution that bears his name, this thesis argues that Barnes’ educational legacy as well is in the process of evolving towards greater public access as a new phase in the history of the Foundation begins. To argue this, it is necessary first to understand the initial elements of Barnes’ legacy. Chapter one examines Barnes’ life and actions with this goal in mind, paying attention to the use of the collection to counter stereotypes

of African-Americans. The chapter then highlights contemporary challenges faced by the Foundation in balancing this promise of Barnes’ legacy with the wider popular appeal the museum has been seeking since its move to Philadelphia. Chapter two offers close readings of artwork from the collection, attempting to determine what made the collection and its use for educational purposes so idiosyncratic and controversial. Chapter three explores Barnes’ role in the Harlem Renaissance, as the framework for his agreement with Lincoln. In the epilogue, I argue that, despite criticism and legitimate risks, and though the partnership with Lincoln is no longer intact, the Foundation has succeeded in preserving Barnes’ original vision for the uses of his collection as an educational vehicle. However, I maintain that the struggle to interpret and carry out Barnes’ legacy is ongoing, and the degree to which the Foundation manages to remain loyal to the precepts that guided Barnes’ original vision of using art to advocate for the social dignity of African Americans as well as other oppressed people will determine its future success as an institution.

I will offer, initially, an interpretation of Barnes’ philosophy within the context of his life experience. I submit that the collector was a significant American pragmatist philosopher who belonged to a school of thought initiated by William James and developed by John Dewey. I will then argue that the dominant trend in Barnes’ aesthetic philosophy was a desire to show the innate similarity of art drawn from many different cultures. I will argue throughout that Barnes used pragmatism and his theories of aesthetic commonality to combat stereotypes of African-Americans by educating the American public about the influence of African art on European painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally I will detail the resistance Barnes
received from the art and educational establishments of his time in response to this project, and I will suggest that certain fundamental difficulties persist for the art and educational establishments in interpreting and applying Barnes’ original vision today.

II. BARNES’ LIFE AND PHILOSOPHIES:
CHILDHOOD, PRAGMATISM, AND THE WORKING-CLASS SOCIAL CAUSE

In the rough, working-class Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington, where Barnes grew up, he was frequently bullied by neighborhood boys and was forced to buy boxing gloves and practice fighting in order to learn how to defend himself. Perhaps, as we investigate the key elements of Barnes’ legacy, we might consider that the necessity of self-defense and the training and skill he learned on the streets may have been Barnes’ first intellectual lesson. As will become clear from elements later in Barnes’ life, he demonstrated over and over again a critical insight that problem solving is a practical skill and that meeting challenges requires that one recognize and combat one’s problems with the most realistic designs.

Indeed, Barnes excelled at solving problems. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in 1892, Barnes turned his attention to what had perhaps been the most persistent problem in his life – poverty. He entered the burgeoning pharmaceutical industry with a partner, Hermann Hille, whom he met studying chemistry at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and the two subsequently made a massive

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fortune from a silver nitrate compound they marketed as the drug Argyrol.³ Argyrol cured a number of ailments related to sight in newborns, and soon its prescription became legally mandated, making it a hugely popular and profitable drug.

The profits from this business enabled Barnes to begin his art collection. Yet even more important, if less obvious, is the fact that Barnes’ foray into chemistry actually initiated his interest in philosophy. Although Barnes’ ostensible subject of study at the University of Heidelberg was chemistry, he claimed later in life that what he had really been studying there was philosophy, as he understood the term, which was as practical thinking. He had never been simply a chemist, he claimed, but a “philosophical chemist.”⁴ This marriage of a practical solution with a philosophical spin would become a hallmark of Barnes’ thought and practice. The fundamental quality of Barnes’ philosophy was a drive to remove the elitist presumptions surrounding intellectual debate, making philosophy applicable to the challenges faced by regular people, living their everyday lives. Barnes wanted to guide philosophy towards solving the problems affecting the masses of people in modern society. This willingness to apply intellectual ideas to the “real world” and to address contemporary problems distinguished the Barnes Foundation from the theoretical emphasis of academic art history. It also raised implicit questions about the academic discipline’s relevance to modern society at the time.

With his fortune assured, Barnes resumed his education in his own self-styled manner, reading especially the works of William James. He developed an abiding interest in psychology and became staunchly committed to pragmatism as a school of thought. Barnes remained most passionate about the application of what he considered to

³ Greenfeld, 17.
be intelligent ideas to actual situations in life. In *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*, the book accompanying the Foundation’s first international exhibit in 1993, Richard J. Wattenmaker, then Director of the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian, articulated Barnes’ respect for the essential principles of James’ thought as: “intelligence applied to the conduct of everyday life.”

Barnes’ interests in psychology and applied philosophy were foundational to the unique perspective he brought to the field of visual arts, and they clearly influenced him from the very beginning of his collecting days. We see that influence, for example, in Barnes’ choice of where and how to hang his first paintings. Art began to interest him after 1910 when he started purchasing paintings from New York dealers. Despite the conventional nature of these paintings, Barnes gave an early indication of his pragmatist bent by installing his fledgling collection in the A.C. Barnes Company factory, for his workers to enjoy. We can see from this act that Barnes was already exploring the educational potential of artwork and its interaction with the problems of everyday life, including the problem of restricted access to information, education, and knowledge faced by confined factory workers like his own, and the working classes more broadly. We can never know exactly what went through Barnes’ head when he chose to hang his first paintings in the factory. Perhaps he felt close to the working-class backgrounds of his employees, given his own experience growing up as a working-class child in Kensington. What we do know is that in this choice of the ideal setting for his paintings, Barnes took a step towards putting art into the service of distributive justice. Throughout

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6 Greenfeld, 32.
the rest of his life he would continue to search for ways to apply his great collection to the problem of how to further social equality. And indeed, where and how his paintings hung would become a pivotal and controversial aspect of this use of his art collection.

Barnes took a major step forward in his own education as an art collector in 1912 when he showed the collection to a friend and former classmate from Philadelphia’s famous Central High School – the painter William J. Glackens. “Glack,” or “Butts,” as he was affectionately called by his peers, offered generous criticism. He explained to Barnes that Paris, not New York, was the center of innovation in modern art and introduced him to the work of Monet, Renoir, and Cezanne. Interested, Barnes asked the artist to travel to Paris and purchase works for him that would instruct him in the direction art was taking on the European continent. When Glackens returned with several paintings by Monet, Renoir, Cezanne and Degas, he taught Barnes to see art in a completely different, and, in Barnes’ own words, more “discriminating” way. Barnes credited his early association with Glackens and the artist’s “big man’s mind,” as the “single most important educational factor” in his life. As a result of consulting with his friend, he now knew of, and was beginning to more deeply understand the advances of the European avant-garde in modern painting. Modern art, from Manet to Picasso, would become his obsession, and would factor in as a core element in his pragmatist philosophy.

Eventually, Barnes traveled to Paris on his own in 1912, collecting widely and adventurously, and he continued his practice of displaying these acquisitions in his factory. He also began to hold seminars in art appreciation for his workers, which is

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7 Ibid, 32.
8 Ibid, 34.
9 Ibid, 36.
10 Ibid, 39.
further evidence of his focus on the educational mission of his work.\textsuperscript{11} He also continued studying himself, enrolling in John Dewey’s seminars at Columbia University and becoming close friends with the famous philosopher.\textsuperscript{12} Based on his readings of William James and his friendship with Dewey, Barnes began to build an educational philosophy around his bold, increasingly cutting-edge collection. He was aiming to introduce working-class Americans to the appreciation of modern art. Central to this developing philosophy was Barnes’ interpretation of Dewey’s \textit{Art and Education}. This book stressed the fundamental action of learning by doing, breaking down the rarified intellectual zone of America’s elite universities and opening it, if only slightly, to the experience of workers and the American underclass. Those who worked with their hands performed supposedly more mundane tasks than white-collar workers, but Barnes wanted to erase illusory distinctions between intellectual performance and the intellectual demands of other forms of work. Influenced by Dewey, Barnes developed a conception of art appreciation as a practical skill that could be learned and performed by almost anyone with the requisite training.

Barnes also held a longstanding interest in African-American culture. This interest eventually developed into a determined commitment to racial equality complimenting his desire to culturally enfranchise the working classes.\textsuperscript{13} In fact, Barnes’ interest in African-American culture predated his factory seminars and these seminars bore the influence of that interest. As a child his mother Lydia Schaefer Barnes took him by train to Methodist revival meetings where he was enchanted by the singing of the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 55.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{13} Sudarkasa, xi.
participants. This experience cued his interest, not only in African-American culture, but in painting as well. He asserted later that, “these experiences influenced me toward learning about aesthetics in all its phases, particularly the art of painting.” In Collecting As Modernist Practice, Jeremy Braddock quotes an autobiographical passage from Barnes’ personal memoirs, revealing parallels between the type of aesthetic experience Barnes witnessed at the Methodist revival meetings he attended, and the practical implementation of the aesthetic theories he attempted to provide to his workers. Barnes recalled, of his experiences at the revivals:

The Negro rhythm is not only more fundamental and all pervasive than in European music, but it is more intricate, because every Negro, as he sings, improvises his own rhythm, one which is different from that of the rest of the chorus. However individual and varied those rhythms are, they merge into the common unity which we term harmony, a fact proved by the absence of jarring elements in the singing of the group as a whole.

Braddock offers another telling reading of Barnes’ practical, pragmatist vision of the potential functionality of such unity and transcendence.

Barnes here admires both the aesthetic composition of the spiritual and the social organization from which it emerges; both are composed of free individual expressions cooperatively organized to create a harmonious unity. It is no accident that these lines could, with very slight adaptation, apply equally well to the ideal functioning of a place of work: Barnes had elsewhere described how the A.C. Barnes Company “never had a boss and has never needed one, for each participant ha(s) evolved his or her own method of doing a particular job in a way that fitted into the common needs.” To champion a “work” highly organized and spontaneous, collective and individual, was to give voice to desires that were both aesthetic and social.

14 Ibid, xi.
15 Barnes quoted in Wattenmaker, Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation, 3.
17 Ibid, 122.
Braddock’s analysis is revealing. We should understand Barnes’ own experience of the transcendence of Methodist revival meetings as a gateway into the philosophy behind the uses of his collection. It helped him understand the diversity within modernism and also its African influences, and it was a metaphor for the educational project that lay at the heart of the foundation since its earliest days. Art, and the art of painting, like spiritual singing, could be understood as a practical model for the ideal functioning of society’s institutions. As a pragmatist philosophy, this idea of diversity and inclusion encapsulates Barnes’ collecting practices and his self-styled character as an educator. In keeping with the way he attempted to introduce his workers to art, he would later attempt on a massive scale to institutionalize lessons for the public in general, about the practical value of the aesthetic experience. This was to involve revision of longstanding educational practices by major universities throughout the United States.

III. HETEROGENEITY, CULTURAL UNITY, AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN EQUALITY:

The intellectual terrain in which Barnes situated his growing art collection combined many of the most significant movements and figures in American and European thought of the first-half of the twentieth century – from chemistry and medicine, Pragmatism to political science – and placed them next to European artists at the forefront of modern expression. The theoretical writings of William James, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell and Leo Stein formed the underpinnings in Barnes’ intellectual
framework, and he called on them for guidance in appreciating the works of Renoir, Monet, Cezanne, Picasso, Modigliani, and Matisse, among other artists.

The heterogeneity of these intellectual influences was mirrored in the multiculturalism of Barnes’s collection itself. “Very personal” to the Barnes mission, wrote Richard H. Glanton, then President of the Foundation, in 1993, “was a recognition of the unifying form of all art and an understanding of the concept of multiculturalism, before the word – so much in vogue today – was invented.”\(^\text{18}\) Eventually, Barnes would apply the cross-cultural emphasis of his collection to suggest the possibility of cultural unity through art and to attempt to support the African-American struggle for equality. He was passionate about the ways he believed great art bridged cultural differences. “A person who professes to understand and appreciate Titian and Michel Angelo,” he wrote, “and who fails to recognize the same traditions in the moderns, Renoir and Cezanne, is practicing self-deception. Similarly, an understanding of early Oriental art and of El Greco carries with it an appreciation of the contemporary work of Matisse and Picasso.” \(^\text{19}\) When Barnes designed his galleries in Merion, Pennsylvania, he wanted to emphasize similarities among the diverse elements of the collection, and he foregrounded the types of overarching unity in aesthetic expression he saw regardless of great artwork’s historical period or country of origin. Barnes wrote:

> Exclusive interest in the art of our own time and civilization is itself a form of parochialism. The stimulus and illumination which European artists received a few years ago from the work of African sculptures long unknown, widened their horizons and brought them new insight and a new access of energy. The great wealth of resources in oriental art…is still a sealed book to most observers…The paintings exhibited here provide a striking demonstration of what ought to be…a

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\(^{18}\) Richard H. Glanton, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*, viii.

commonplace of aesthetic criticism – the continuity of great art throughout the ages.\textsuperscript{20}

Barnes’ condemnation of the “parochialism” of exclusive interest in European contemporary art and his emphasis on the “continuity of great art throughout the ages,” both point to a universalizing, egalitarian force in his ideology. This force remained crucial to his social ambitions during his lifetime, and became a key to understanding his philosophy. It is essential also to preserving his legacy.

The diversity of Barnes’ tangible collections manifested this universalizing egalitarianism. According to Howard Greenfeld in his book \textit{The Devil and Dr. Barnes}, even a brief overview of the collection’s contents comprises remarkable variation in styles, cultures and historical eras:

There are more than thirty rare, early Picassos as well as countless masterpieces by Seurat, Daumier, Manet, Monet, the Douanier Rousseau, Utrillo, Modigliani, and Soutine (whom Barnes discovered). American art is represented by a large number of works by Glackens, Prendergast, and Demuth, and old masters by paintings of Tintoretto, El Greco, Titian and Rubens. Included, too, are examples of ancient Egyptian, African, Persian, and Chinese art, as well as an important sampling of African sculpture. It is a remarkable collection, all the more so because it is the result of one man’s taste, passions and eccentricities.\textsuperscript{21}

Given this broad diversity, it is striking that rather than emphasize how different or foreign the works in his collection were from each other, Barnes emphasized the great characteristics of art that remained common throughout the ages and across the cultures, from which he collected. Further, in his display of these works he used proximity and

\textsuperscript{20} Barnes quoted in Richard J. Wattenmaker, “Dr. Albert C. Barnes and the Barnes Foundation,” \textit{Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation}, 16.
\textsuperscript{21} Greenfeld, 3.
juxtaposition to highlight the commonalities of works of diverse origin. As the artist Henri Matisse effused:

…One of the most striking things in America is the Barnes collection, which is exhibited in a spirit very beneficial for the formation of American artists. There the old master paintings are put beside the modern ones, a Douanier Rousseau next to a Primitive, and this bringing together helps students understand a lot of things that the academics don’t teach.”

According to Wattenmaker, Barnes frequently declined to purchase important works because, Barnes wrote, they would “break up…ensembles that are necessary for teaching purposes. The way we hang pictures is not the ordinary way: each picture on a wall has not only to fit in a definite unity but it has to be adapted to our purpose of teaching the traditions.” This passage shows how deliberate Barnes was about the link between the organization of his wall hangings and his teaching method. Barnes’ unique method of hanging his collection was instruction aimed to “replace the sentimentalism, the antiquarianism, sheltered under the cloak of academic prestige, which make futile…courses in art in universities and colleges generally.”

Barnes made his beliefs about the unity behind the diversity of painting clear in the first book he published, *The Art In Painting*. He wrote that the book was “an effort…to trace in the history of painting the essential continuity of the great traditions and to show that the best of the modern painters use the same means, to the same general ends, as did the great Florentines, Venetians, Dutchmen and Spaniards.” To illustrate this aesthetic continuity, Barnes analyzed “the plastic forms of the principal painters from the

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22 Barnes quoted in Wattenmaker, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*, 17.
23 Wattenmaker, 15.
dawn of the Italian Renaissance down to the present day.”25 Barnes argued that the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists and Early Moderns embodied the logical extension of techniques practiced by European painters since the Renaissance. He wrote that modern art provided the “next step” in the European tradition, although it looked very different from what had come before. According to Barnes, the pure form of these well-established techniques, when separated from the cliché’s of academic subject matter, liberated painting, allowing it to participate in exchange with the art of other cultures, such as those of Africa, revealing deep and surprising similarities.

In addition to articulating these theories about the relationship between different art traditions, Barnes also sought to develop a method to prove his theories. Thus, in The Art In Painting, Barnes offered a reliable scientific method for the appreciation of painting from all periods of time, uncovering the inherent similarities and resemblances that underlay the broad heterogeneity in European and non-Western artistic traditions. The method consisted of looking for similarities in technique and aesthetic effect throughout the different phases of European art history and between the art of Europe and that of other continents such as Africa, Asia, and South America. As his familiarity with African sculpture grew during the 1920s, Barnes installed reliefs by Jacques Lipchitz around the Foundation’s entrance that, in the words of Richard J. Wattenmaker, “underscored the debt owed by modern Western art to the art of black Africa.”26

Eventually, Barnes commissioned Paul Guillaume, his dealer in Paris, and Thomas Munro, a teacher at the Foundation, to write an entire book, entitled Primitive Negro Sculpture, highlighting the value of such sculpture.

25 Ibid, 11.
26 Wattenmaker, Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation, 11.
This passion for “Negro” artistic expression interacted with Barnes’ theories of education to further define his mission. As he traveled back and forth between the United States and Europe to build his art collection, he carried this dual focus on the essence of form and the unity in diversity with him. It was a time when Europeans were involved in new encounters with African cultures, and questioning their own practices of colonialism and legacy of participation in the transatlantic slave trade. In Europe, Barnes witnessed many early modern painters looking to African art for inspiration, especially in the circle of his primary dealer, Paul Guillaume. He became passionate about tracing the influence of ancient African sculptures on the work of Picasso, Matisse, and Modigliani, purchasing paintings by each artist that were influenced by the African masks that peopled Guillaume’s gallery – Cubist heads by Picasso, portraits and architecturally influenced figural explorations by Modigliani among them. Barnes viewed the aesthetic exchange between African and European art as a testimony to the cultural potential of African-Americans in the United States as well. He argued that African art represented “a stage in advance of European evolution,” at a time when the majority of white America dismissed such ideas or had never heard of them. As Barnes wrote, in a moving contribution to Alain Locke’s New Negro anthology in 1925, despite Emancipation “the relationship between master and slave has changed but little in the sixty years of freedom. He [the Negro] is still a slave to the ignorance, the prejudice, the cruelty which were the fate of his forefathers…. He has not yet found a place of equality in the social, educational or industrial world of the white man.”

African art as part of the heritage of African-Americans and he hoped that American artists and the American public would embrace it the way that European artists had embraced it in Europe.\textsuperscript{29} His radical vision was that the Negro would “consent to form a working alliance with (the white man) for the development of a richer American civilization,” based on his own gifts and advanced capacities.\textsuperscript{30}

Barnes was certainly not alone in positing similarities and the fruitfulness of exchange between African and European traditions, as the success of Guillaume’s gallery and of masterpieces like Matisse’s \textit{Joy of Life} and Picasso’s \textit{Les Demoiselles d’Avignon}, both influenced by the African figural tradition, attest. The idea of these similarities was a major current of thought in the art world of Barnes’ time. He was more radical than most, however, in his conviction that the study of the sharing of these tendencies in art could have a practical effect on the consciousness and lives of ordinary people, and that it could change popular opinion of the supposedly lowly status of African-Americans intellectually and culturally.\textsuperscript{31}

Barnes thought that the respect European artists and art dealers had for African art could be fashioned into a message of social uplift for African-Americans. In fact, there was a long and continued history of Europe’s colonial oppression of the African continent. The afterlife of European participation in the transatlantic slave trade still manifested itself as significant restrictions placed on persons of African descent in European civic and social life. Insidious branches of pseudo-science seeking to “factually” establish the inferiority of peoples of African descent had been luridly profuse

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{29} Guillaume, Munro, 1.
\textsuperscript{30} Locke, 25.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 21.
\end{flushright}
since the Enlightenment, and they had been imported throughout the US during the nineteenth and first-half of the twentieth-centuries. Given this background, European artists who embraced African art formed a kind of underground cognoscenti, in which Barnes played a major role and which he sought to import to the United States.\textsuperscript{32} As part of the egalitarian message of his Foundation and his involvement in the New Negro movement, Barnes sought to use modern art to reclaim American culture from its own racist articulations that permeated working people’s popular culture and mass entertainment, and that exerted a crude and strong ideological influence on the audiences who consumed them, both white and black. He also sought to combat the institutional complicity of, particularly, museums and universities in limiting access to authentic artistic expressions.\textsuperscript{33} New Negro activists, Barnes included, rejected the minstrel tradition in popular entertainment and literature, an art form based on the popularity of racist pseudo-science, choosing instead to focus on authentic African traditions and African-American spiritual values to define their cause. Some of Barnes’ contemporaries did follow his example of using art for social uplift and racial equality. John Dewey, inspired by Barnes, made the following statement at the opening of the Barnes Foundation’s main gallery:

\begin{quote}
We may well rejoice at every demonstration of the artistic capacity of any race which has been in any way repressed or looked upon as inferior. It is the demonstration of this capacity for doing beautiful and significant work which gives the best proof of the fundamental quality, and equality, of all people. It serves…the cause of bringing all people from all over the world together in greater harmony.”\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{32} Guillaume and Munro, 1.
\textsuperscript{33} Greenfeld, 117.
\textsuperscript{34} Dewey quoted in Wattenmaker, \textit{Great French Paintings from The Barnes Foundation}, 12.
\end{flushleft}
By and large, however, the cultural arbiters of the art establishment did not. Barnes admired activists like Paul Laurence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington, but the opposing attitudes of many in the art establishment made it difficult not to recognize that change and the assimilation of African-Americans into mainstream American life would come slowly and painfully. Despite the fervor and improvements of the New Negro movement, the entrenched racism of American society would be hard to alter. Barnes pointed the way through art and education, but was seen as dangerous and controversial for that very reason.

IV. BARNES’ EDUCATIONAL MISSION:

William Schack, Howard Greenfeld, and Mary Ann Meyers, Barnes’ major biographers, all trace the collector’s grand passion for art education throughout his adult years. The publications issued by the Foundation itself bear this out; they emphasize that Barnes wanted his collection to serve an educational purpose different from that of a typical gallery or museum. His mission was closer to that of a university, though again different. As Greenfeld observes, the Barnes Foundation was founded in 1922 as “an educational experiment under the principles of psychology as applied to education.” Greenfeld calls attention to Barnes’ future plans for the Foundation, as outlined in the charter: “It is Donor’s desire during his lifetime and that of his wife, to perfect the plan so that it shall be operative for the spread of the principles of democracy and education after the death of Donor and his wife.”

35 Greenfeld, 74.
the Foundation’s legacy requires Barnes’ educational frame. He wanted the Foundation to spread the “principles of democracy and education” after his death.

Barnes sought especially to provide access to the collection for working-class people. The Foundation’s charter stipulated that, “it is the plain people, that is men and women who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories, schools, stores and similar places, who shall have free access to the art gallery.”36 Moreover, in 1923 Barnes, in taking stock, observed:

We do not [want to] convey the impression that we have developed a crowd of savants, or art connoisseurs, but we are sure we have stirred an intelligent interest in spiritual things created by living people…which has been the means of stimulating business life and affording a sensible use of leisure in a class of people to whom such doors are usually locked.37

For Barnes, the aesthetic education of the working class provided a central component of a politics of democracy that found, in the multicultural aesthetic appreciation of artwork, a broad challenge to economic, class and racial inequalities in the United States. The Foundation was established to challenge the social and cultural roles played by American museums and universities, institutions that restricted the means of art appreciation to the elite, and made the understanding of fine art a vehicle of privilege. The Barnes Foundation was meant to be a new model for egalitarian cultural and institutional practices symbolized and inspired by modernist innovation in the fine arts.

Barnes’ first book, The Art In Painting (1925), set down the methodology and criteria for judging art he wished to impart to his students. The method was rigorously scientific and sought to establish facts about works of art, based on understanding the

36 Braddock, 109.
37 Barnes quoted in Wattenmaker, 6.
artist’s experiences and intentions. The artist communicated his intentions through
“plastic,” means, by which Barnes meant “color, line and space.”\(^{38}\) The viewer likewise
brought his or her history of “funded experience” to bear when interpreting the artwork.
“Funded experience” referred to a specific kind of accumulation of cultural capital. It
was Barnes’ thesis that:

> The aesthetic experience…is possible only by virtue of a certain background and
> training. Appreciation depends partly upon natural aptitude and partly upon
> previous experience….\([I]\)t is obvious that he who would appreciate and judge of
> art must provide himself with a first-hand acquaintance with what the artist seeks
> to show him, that is, the visible aspects of real things. His training in art must
> include a study of nature as it reveals itself to the eye….\([T]\)he artist is interested
> in seeing the essential visible reality of things and in showing them in new forms
> that move us emotionally. Unless the interest in seeing is shared by the observer
> of a work of art, he cannot share the artist’s experience.\(^{39}\)

If this definition seems restrictive, it was Barnes’ intention to provide his students
with a basis for gaining the practical aptitude he described. Although the appreciation of
fine art was possible only through perceptual accuracy, and a proper background of
funded experience, anybody could learn how to “see” art correctly.\(^{40}\) The work of art did
not occupy a separate domain from experiences such as work, or labor, which formed the
background of funded experience for most Americans. Each form of activity and
creation was aesthetic. Barnes sought to integrate the aesthetics of artwork with the
experience of daily life – its toils, trials, tribulations, problems and successes. He saw
modernism in particular as a movement with profound social implications. “It was of a
piece,” Braddock writes Barnes believed, “with progressive movements elsewhere,” and

\(^{38}\) Barnes, *The Art in Painting*, 22.
\(^{39}\) Braddock, 116.
\(^{40}\) Greenfeld, 114.
could guide their implementation.\textsuperscript{41} The kinds of experience needed to appreciate the modernist work of art also had the potential to shape the integration of society’s institutions, creating more perfect systems of work, leisure and education. The greatest potential of modernism’s “new conception of art,” Barnes thought, was its ability to instigate and also direct “institutional reform.”\textsuperscript{42} For this reason, the appreciation of fine art must not be restricted to the privileged classes. Barnes wrote that art, “is no trivial matter, \textit{no device for the entertaining of dilettantes, or upholstery for the houses of the wealthy}, but a source of insight into the world, for which there is and can be no substitute, and in which all persons who have the necessary insight may share.”\textsuperscript{43} The Barnes method sought to democratize the rarified atmosphere of the art world’s galleries and museums as a means to reforming society.

The galleries, or “ensembles,” on view at the Barnes Foundation are still today practical instantiations of the theories of cross-cultural unity and historical continuity of great art that was at the heart of Barnes’ pragmatism. Howard Greenfeld writes:

The gallery’s twenty-three rooms, their walls literally covered with works of art – often several tiers high and sometimes far above eye-level...[were comprised of]...seemingly haphazard arrangements whereby paintings...[were]...grouped neither by period nor country... {But they were in fact} meticulously planned by the doctor...to fortify his aesthetic judgments.\textsuperscript{44}

For Barnes, the successful artist “saw” nature and the world “more perfectly.”

The artist recreated reality “stripped” of its inessential detail, and reorganized it according to principles of design by which visual meaning is communicated.\textsuperscript{45} The

\textsuperscript{41} Braddock, 125.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 112.
\textsuperscript{43} Barnes, 21.
\textsuperscript{44} Greenfeld, 2.
\textsuperscript{45} Wattenmaker, 13.
viewer performed “work” of his own in learning to see as the artist saw. Appreciating the artist’s interpretation of the subject brought the viewer nearer to spiritual, natural and philosophical truths, which could be applied in the conduct of everyday life. Barnes took this type of “work,” performed by the artist and viewer extremely seriously, and hoped to upset the kind of consumption of art and art education in privileged social circles that cultivated the experience of beauty and pleasure separately from the problems and struggles of the classes of people, who were often excluded from these circles of pleasure.

Barnes’ students attended lectures and studied his unique wall “ensembles,” learning how to perform the work of appreciation for art from different cultures and historical eras. From the earliest days of the Foundation, Barnes hoped universities and museums across the United States would adopt his methods and egalitarian principles, creating a revolution in education and a cultural renaissance. He first reached out to the University of Pennsylvania, and attempted to install instructors from the Foundation on the university’s faculty, but he was rebuffed. The rough reception Barnes received from the educational establishment was due in part to his brash proposals and his outspoken criticism of the education industry. At the same time that he was proposing to install his own instructors onto Penn’s faculty, he published an essay, “The Shame in the Public Schools of Philadelphia,” which argued that the “state of art education” in Philadelphia, including at the University of Pennsylvania, was indicative of a vast social failure to appreciate the significance of modernism and its progressive potential. Given his most cherished hopes for his educational mission at the Foundation – a massive reassessment

46 Greenfeld, 139.
of the cultural heritage and potential of African-Americans based on teaching scores of ordinary people to understand the formative influence of African art on the development of European modernism as well as on indigenous African-American musical and poetic art forms, and his participation in the New Negro movement and the National Urban League, organizations which fought to improve race-relations, I would suggest that his essay was also a thinly veiled polemic against segregation in American schools. Barnes’ dual focus on working class and African-American cultural enfranchisement was too controversial for the University of Pennsylvania as well as for most of the civic institutions he sought to engage and reform. At its heart, Barnes’ theoretical position was a challenge to his contemporaries’ practice of democracy. It provoked a vehement response on the part of mainstream America.

V. BARNES’ CONTROVERSIAL RECEPTION:

Unlike his efforts at educational activism, Barnes earned widespread praise for his collection itself. According to the influential Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard, there were more masterpieces in the Barnes Foundation galleries by “the two greatest painters of the nineteenth-century, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cezanne,” than in any other American private collection. (This might still be true today.) The French government awarded Dr. Barnes “the highest accolade given to civilians by the French republic,” – the medal, and title, of Knight of the Legion of Honor. When Barnes died, in 1951, the

47 Greenfeld, 2.
New York Herald Tribune obituary stated that, “behind him he left what is regarded by connoisseurs as the finest privately owned art collection in America.”49

However, even that great appreciation also coincided with criticism. The writer for the New York Herald obituary continued on to observe that Barnes had also earned “more ill will than any other single figure in American art.”50 For Barnes, there was no shortage of opposition. Although he was respected for his achievements as a collector he was simultaneously frustrated in his attempts to use his extraordinary collection to implement his educational program and institutionalize his pragmatic understanding of modern art. Undoubtedly some of the impediments placed before him truly were due to his temperament and widely noted lack of social graces. I would like to suggest, however, that the principle reasons Barnes received such a hostile reception reflected less a specific dislike for his personality than a general suspicion widely diffused throughout American culture of the most radical implications of modern art’s social values and especially a profound social resistance to Barnes’ own stance on racial equality. Barnes challenged social conventions on race and was outspoken and combative in defending his aesthetic precepts against what he considered his primary enemies – dilettantism and elite social privilege in the art world. This led to near constant bickering with institutions like The Philadelphia Museum of Art and the University of Pennsylvania.

The incorporation of modern art in general, and of the Barnes Foundation’s collection in particular, into the fabric of Pennsylvania’s art and educational establishments was hotly debated. According to Howard Greenfeld:

49 Greenfeld, 1.
50 Ibid, 1.
Barnes’ alma mater had always been part of his plans for the Foundation.... An alliance with Penn, Barnes believed, would be advantageous to both institutions.... By making use of the peerless resources of the Foundation, the university’s school of fine arts could develop into the country’s leading center of art instruction. For Barnes, Penn would be the ideal testing ground for his own theories....

As early as 1924, an arrangement was in place whereby students from the University of Pennsylvania could attend classes at the Barnes Foundation, taught by instructors trained in Barnes’ methods, including Thomas Munro, author of *Primitive Negro Sculpture*. However, the plan to partner with the Foundation sparked violent outrage among the University’s elite sponsors in Philadelphia society, who condemned modern art in general and Barnes’ lesson plans in particular. As Greenfeld writes:

The most infuriating criticism was delivered by Charles Grafly, professor at the Pennsylvania Academy, a sculptor and brother of the critic Dorothy Grafly. Angered that the arrangement with the university would legitimize the Foundation as a serious institution of learning, on a par with the Academy itself, he wrote: “If the exhibition of modernist art held at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1923 as a part of the Barnes collection is representative of the type of rot students in the department of fine arts at the university will be transported to the Merion gallery to study, I cannot imagine a greater calamity, either in the world of art or of education.”

Similarly, Greenfeld recounts another aghast patron: “I have always been open to new ideas,” commented Harriet Sartain, Dean of the School of Design for Women, “but...I cannot appreciate the stand of the university in instituting a course with such art as source material. It is a bad thing to put any such ideas before susceptible minds.”

Much has been made of Barnes’ hostility towards opposing viewpoints and the lack of respect he exhibited towards those who did not share his views. It is indeed

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51 Ibid, 115.
52 Ibid, 116.
possible, even likely, that his temperament and working class background were responsible for some of the difficulty he had in blending the Foundation with other civic and educational institutions in Philadelphia. However, I suggest that it was more substantially Barnes’ intentions to introduce the appreciation of modern art, working-class students, African art and African-American culture to universities across the country that provoked the response he received from the more traditional forces in Philadelphia society. The truly fundamental reasons Barnes received such a hostile reception were the general suspicion of modern European art values throughout the United States in the 1920s and profound social resistance to the collector’s own stance on social empowerment and racial equality. The university, cowed by the outrage in polite society, and thus amongst its trustees and donors, eventually abandoned its agreement with the Foundation.⁵⁴ Although Barnes tried, on repeated occasions to reignite the partnership, his views on art, education, race and class were to remain topics of derision and suspicion throughout his life.

Today, as the Foundation finally incorporates itself among the civic institutions of Philadelphia society, it is crucial that it not abandon the fervor with which Barnes argued for the fundamental value of art as a guide to social reform in democratic society, or the value of multiculturalism to institutions in twenty-first century America.

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⁵⁴ Ibid, 141.
CHAPTER TWO

RELEASED REPRESENTATION: BARNES’ METHOD OF PLASTIC ANALYSIS

The original context for viewing the Barnes collection was a series of wall displays that were elaborately and painstakingly constructed in a building and a set of galleries designed by Barnes especially for that purpose. (see appendix, figure 2). The exact construction of the displays, and the experience they offered to viewers, were integral to Barnes’s hopes and visions for his foundation. These displays are a key arena within which to understand his legacy, evaluate the bumpy path of its transmission, and appreciate how fully the Philadelphia Foundation has succeeded in preserving it today.

The focus of the presentation of Barnes’ collection was on disrupting the assumed superiority of the great art of Europe’s past to the art of his contemporaries. The method of presentation was an attempt at providing Barnes’ uniquely formulated aesthetic experience to viewers both with and without advanced educational backgrounds. By highlighting surprising juxtapositions between fine art and “artisanal” products, as well as between Western and non-Western art, and by showing significant Renaissance-era works next to cutting-edge modernist statements, Barnes encouraged a wide array of viewers to see the similarities in art from many different cultures and historical eras.

Barnes often placed seemingly historically or culturally unrelated works in close proximity in his displays. This strategy applied methods he had painstakingly cultivated over the course of his experiments in education and criticism in order to reveal the aesthetic sophistication of works that were regarded by many of his contemporaries as strange and primitive. While Barnes wanted to justify the experimentation of modern art,
he also wanted to show the essential continuity of great art throughout the ages and across cultures. He saw his displays as a means to communicating this fundamental principle of his theoretical framework.

The question of how to read Barnes’ displays is now being vigorously debated. In an attempt to secure a wider audience for the collection, and seek academic approval, instructors at the Philadelphia Foundation are combining Barnes’ own methods of art historical interpretation with more traditional art historical methodologies and more accessible interpretations. In classes at the Foundation and in publications that have been released since its relocation, curators are advancing different meanings for the wall displays than the imposing expositions Barnes originally expounded. While these re-interpretations may represent the intent to increase the clarity and accessibility of Barnes’ displays, they indicate a trend towards supplying narrative continuities between works within the wall displays based on each artwork’s representational content and thus they stray from Barnes’ original intentions in creating and arranging the collection.

It is admittedly difficult to understand Barnes’ intentions in forming his wall displays. For instance, Braddock has offered a fascinating interpretation, suggesting that each display is an “authored composition,” which, like any masterful piece of writing, reveals a multitude of meanings.\(^{55}\) Yet, while it is certainly important to credit Barnes as a conscious “orchestrator” of the overall unity and intent of his wall “ensembles,” this model of interpretation does not fully embrace the implications of a Barnesean method of “seeing.” Braddock’s reading of the wall displays as “authored” compositions ultimately attempts to imply that literary, or scholarly concepts unite the artworks. Barnes’ interest

\(^{55}\) Braddock, 111.
in psychology, and Braddock’s own interest in sexual politics, support this insight because both foreground storytelling in the making of meaning among the paintings. The literary analogy is at odds with Barnes’s own commitment to the purely visual aesthetic experience. For Barnes, art did not communicate ideas in a story-telling manner, but rather in making a visual impact by means of its command of plastic elements. The impact of this plastic order sparked the viewer’s intellect by appealing to the faculties of the viewer’s eye; hence the primacy of aesthetics – the study of sense perception – to Barnes’ method. In Barnes’ view, visual impact triggered, but did not explicitly state, narrative concepts, be they psychological, gendered or otherwise. The story told by a work of art was of a different nature than verbal or literary narrative. It was a narrative about the artist’s use of materials and techniques, inherited and original, learned and spontaneous, to manipulate the plastic elements of composition in order to elicit a response from the viewer’s senses, stirring his or her emotion. This impact contained its own psychological truths and remained distinct as an artistic practice from the intellectual continuity of narrative as found in literature or academic art historical theory. The power of aesthetics to provoke and harness action rested on the creativity, and originality of visual effect, rather than on the power of subject matter to comprise narrative messages.

Let us see what difference it makes to approach a Barnesian display from these different directions. Braddock, in 2012, provides a reading of the south wall in Room XXII of the Foundation, in which he cites the wall’s “impressive collection of West African masks and figures,” and notes “the relationship of the African work to two female portraits by Modigliani and two smaller studies made by Picasso in 1907, the year of Les Demoiselles d’Avignon.” Wattenmaker also noted this relationship amongst the
African works and the works of Modigliani and Picasso when a reproduction of this wall was released in the book *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*, accompanying the Foundation’s first traveling show in 1993. In that volume, Wattenmaker quotes Barnes’ colleagues Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, the authors of *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, recommending that: “the interspersion of elegant and rugged, both African and European, obliges us to examine our preconceptions about the traditions of sculpture.” Braddock cites this fundamental point in his own interpretation, but he also supplies a narrative superimposition on the display, offering an involved description of the gendered iconography in the paintings. In effect, Braddock gives in to contemporary pressures to revise the Barnes method based on theory which gained currency years after the wall displays were formed – in this case ideas about the interplay of psychology and gender. Ironically, Braddock’s personal theoretical framework performs a similar kind of imposition as the sentimentally historicized readings and religious, iconographic methods of interpretation he works so hard to unseat.

Braddock suggests that the “room’s design contains another … semantic dimension” beyond the aesthetic interaction between African and European art that Wattenmaker regarded as worthy of attention. Braddock writes of Barnes’ design:

> As if slyly joking about the symmetrical balance achieved on the south wall (and throughout the galleries), a dominant counter theme of Room XXII is that of imbalance. In the northwest corner, facing the Kota reliquary in the opposite corner, stands a small New Mexican *santo* figure – an adolescent boy winged like an angel, holding the scales of justice in one hand and a large screw in the other. Immediately above this figure on the wall is a small oil painting by de Chirico, *Mysterious Bathers* (1930), which depicts two bathing tents on a beach (presumably one for each sex). The tents and their shadows echo the halves of the scale beneath the painting, implying that gender and (because of the anomalous screw) sexual power are subject to a measurement of balance, or may be put out

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56 Ibid, 21.
of balance.\footnote{Ibid, 149.}

I believe Barnes would not have endorsed this interpretation of Room XXII due to its implication of a narrative gloss based on the subject matter, the “screw,” in what is otherwise a purely aesthetic relationship between the artworks. Moreover, this is an interpretation that is not necessarily compatible with respect to the generally non-ironic, religious history of iconography of s\textit{antos} figures in former Spanish colonies in the Americas. In the aesthetic relationship Barnes designed, the winged boy is a sculptural intermediary between the Kota reliquary and DeChirico, who often employed shadow in his painting not only to create a sense of perspective and “mystery,” but also to reference European and African traditions of sculpture and their interrelationships. The juxtapositions communicate a resonance between the reliquary, as a cultural statement that shows a level of sophistication comparable to surrealism, and paintings produced in metropolitan Europe from which the surrealist movement arose. The fact that the works are displayed according to a subtle principle of balance, with each artwork contributing to the unity of the whole display, argues for the primacy of an appreciation of aesthetic common ground between the artworks of different cultures. Braddock, however, as quoted above, reads the display according to what he presents as an equally dominant theme of “imbalance.” I believe this reverses exactly the structure of meaning Barnes worked so hard to create. Additionally, to revise Barnes’ aesthetic theories by introducing cultural or art historical theory developed after his lifetime, even if it does not always lead to erroneous conclusions, represents a serious revision of the collector’s methods and teachings. Barnes worked hard to counter the likelihood of such future
theoretical elaborations of his wall displays and to preserve the original ideas behind his method of “seeing,” which he believed would be relevant far into the future, in its original form.

In order to describe how Barnes tried to do this, I will offer first my own understanding of Barnes’s method for viewing art, focusing on his method of “plastic analysis” and then I will offer an alternative close reading of Room XXII. My reading is meant to contribute insight to the work that Braddock has begun, but without Braddock’s supplementary focus on de- or re-contextualized sexual symbolism. I want to offer a reading of the wall that illustrates Barnes’ emphasis on cross-cultural aesthetic similarities between the art of early twentieth-century Europe and the art of ancient Africa. My point is that Barnes sought to uncover these similarities by letting artwork move beyond narrative based on its representational content. I will then examine some of the broader currents of influence of African sculpture on European modernism, in order to contextualize the significance of this display.

Next, I will explore the truly prescient, socially forward-thinking nature of Barnes’ insights based on the reactions of the broader American public to the same currents. I hope to show that a core element of Barnes’s intentions for his displays was the ways in which they confront the viewer with the undeniable similarities of art between cultures, despite the likelihood of visitors’ resistance to this concept during his lifetime. Barnes’ method and wall displays were specifically designed to train viewers to look for aesthetic commonalities in the art of different cultures, even if this art appeared foreign and primitive at first and thereby triggered a reversion to the automatic belief in the superiority of Western art and culture.
As Chapter one established, we know from Barnes’s life and philosophy that he was keenly interested in the similarity of art from different cultures, and that he attempted to highlight that aspect of his collection and in the educational work conducted through the Barnes Foundation. Therefore, to consider whether and how the educational program has survived, and if the Philadelphia Foundation has maintained Barnes’ intent and method of analyzing art through display, we must first understand the ways in which his displays made visible and emphasized the similarity of art from different cultures. As we will see from the following close readings in this chapter, Barnes’s displays emphasized particular similarities between the European moderns and the art of ancient Africa. In a way, the Barnes collection is simply broadly multicultural. However, at the same time as the primary points of cultural symbiosis that Barnes emphasized were between European and African art, the collection raised particularly sensitive matters for Americans. I believe that the comparison between modern European and ancient African art is what generated the most resistance on the part of the general public and the academic community of Barnes’ time.

II. BARNES’ METHOD OF PLASTIC ANALYSIS FOR READING WALL DISPLAYS:

Barnes designed a unique method of looking at paintings. This method was scientific, pragmatic, and anything but sentimental. It offered itself as an alternative to the character of academic art history as practiced by the educational establishment, and to the prevalent trends in art appreciation of his time in American culture. In large part,
Barnes’ voice comes most clearly to the fore as an explicator of trends in modern art. That is, his identity and relevance as a critic is intimately bound up with the revolutions that were taking place in painting on the European continent during his lifetime. He was part of a context, a moment, when certain themes rose to prominence in the work of important and radical artists, and these are the things he understood, and attempted to explain. These themes included rebellion against academic models of artistic production and criticism, and the desirability of an embrace and exploration of non-Western, supposedly primitive, forms of expression as metaphors for the dawn of a new, modern, culture.

One of the best ways to understand Barnes’ philosophy of art is to look at the aspects of traditional academic art history that he abandoned in developing his own method. Barnes effectively “stripped” much of the subject matter historically associated with the study of iconography in the discipline of art history and focused instead nearly exclusively on appreciation of the “plastic achievements” of great paintings, which meant: the way great artists used their materials and techniques to create visual effects. This emphasis moved the cultural knowledge needed to appreciate painting out of the sole possession of academic cultural elites and into the realm of personally verifiable visual experience. In *The Art In Painting*, Barnes observed:

> All we can ask of a painter is whether, for example, in a landscape, he has caught the spirit of the scene; in a portrait, if he has discovered what is essential or characteristic of the sitter. And these are obviously matters for judgment, not for photographic reproduction or documentary cataloguing.\(^{58}\)

And, he continued:

\(^{58}\) Barnes, 21.
Another popular misconception is that a painter is expected to tell a story and is to be judged by his ability to make the story edifying or entertaining. This is not unnatural, since we are interested in real things because they play a part in the story which is life. A real work of art may, incidentally, tell a story, but error arises when we try to judge it by the narrative, or the moral pointed, instead of by the manner in which the artist has used his materials – color, line, space – to produce a work of plastic art; when, in other words, a literary or moral value has been mistaken for a plastic value.  

In his account of Modigliani’s portraits, for instance, Barnes seems to suggest that the painter’s accomplishment rests in the human presence of the subjects as communicated and explored in depth in the material of paint, apart from social status or restrictive definitions of beauty or class. Notably, the act of portrayal appears to Barnes to be independent from a concerted intent to convey unnecessary details of personal or social narrative. Great paintings are great then, Barnes argues, in ways that are akin neither to “photographic reproduction or documentary cataloguing.” Nor should one interpret them for literary or narrative content. These two principles strike from consideration much of what made for interpretation of paintings, especially portraiture, by the lay public and many art historians of his time.

Reading historical information, or social meaning, through the transmission of a genre narrative was secondary to Barnes’ appreciation of the value of an artwork, if it was even applicable at all. The “deeper truths” that a painting had to reveal were revealed by the success of the “plastic elements” exclusively, which elevated the subject beyond notions of historical, literary, storytelling or moralizing of the kind that Braddock advances. When we are free of this legacy of contingent information, which often posits

59 Ibid, 22.
the value of an artwork as dependent on its social message or historical context, we can begin to sense a common heritage among works of diverse historical and cultural origin.

Barnes was also forward thinking in indicting leading academic lights for holding back the advancement of modern art in the United States based on its disregard for what he considered vapid and outdated standards of technical accomplishment. The empty signaling of technical virtuosity was the opposite of innovation and originality in art.

Barnes declared that:

Another error scarcely less destructive to genuine aesthetic appreciation is that which mistakes technical proficiency for artistic significance. Art is not only an expression of the artist’s creative spirit, but also a kind of handicraft, a skill in employing a special technique. … As in other handicrafts, some natural ability combined with instruction and practice may enable a person to handle a paint-brush; but it is certain that there are hundreds of capable craftsman in paint for one real artist…. It is not especially difficult to learn to recognize the devices, “the tricks of the trade,” by which great painters secured their effects; but it is difficult to recognize greatness in these effects, to distinguish between professional competence and artistic genius.  

Here, Barnes attacks those who would show off their own supposed erudition by extolling the technical achievement of a painter while being blind to the creative spirit.

Barnes believed that extolling “technical proficiency” eventually led to the institutionalization of repetitive academic cliché. Barnes’ heroes, the Impressionists and the early moderns, broke decisively from such cliché. In his displays, Barnes delighted in contrasting apparently “primitive” modern paintings with academic examples in order to illustrate how these radically innovative works actually surpassed the technical sophistication and originality of their academic predecessors:

“To look merely for professional competence in painting…,” Barnes wrote, “is to mistake…the shadow for the substance. This error is really more serious than that of confusing photographic likeness or story-telling with art values…the most

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60 Ibid, 22.
formidable enemy of new movements in art has always been, not the indifferent public, but the hostile academician.\textsuperscript{61}

This critique of the heart of academic prejudice is close to the heart of Barnes’ lessons about appreciating both the “old” and the “new” in painting, and helps to explain his hopeful courting of a working class American people’s culture for whom such standards were not the only currency of appreciation. He hoped to help comprise a new kind of elite that would replace the "hostile academician." Ultimately, Barnes was so convinced that the plastic elements of painting could be analyzed separately from iconography, narrative content and the mechanical performance of technical virtuosity, that he displayed his collection according to principles that have confounded scholars and the general public for nearly a century. Barnes created displays that emphasized similarities in plastic expression of artists from vastly different time periods and cultures, at different levels of supposed technical “accomplishment.” He felt viewers could learn more about what made paintings great by studying the material innovations of great painters across time and space rather than by restricting the understanding of the meanings of an artwork to its historical context, its representational messages, or its supposed technical complexity.

Barnes’ colleagues Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro understood the innovation of Barnes’ method of contrasting aspects of “plastic analysis” with established Western art historical practice. They respected his premise that this new way of looking facilitated both appreciation and cultural exchange. Their deep interest is evident all through what they write about him in \textit{Primitive Negro Sculpture}, but perhaps especially

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 22.
in the references they make to the origins of his method. “Around 1907,” wrote Guillaume and Munro:

A few people in Paris, interested in contemporary art movements, began talking of negro sculpture. Painters who were trying to produce certain new effects on canvas … suddenly found that similar effects had been achieved with remarkable success in primitive African art. They declared that the small, wooden figures, carved centuries ago by unknown artists of the jungle, were superior in many ways to the finished products of the academies.\(^{62}\)

The authors of *Primitive Negro Sculpture* thanked Barnes for providing an “impetus for the book” and a “method of plastic analysis” used in its investigations that would correspond so fruitfully with this important movement in Paris.\(^{63}\) In the book, the authors recite a number of common reasons why the sculpture of the African continent seemed displeasing to Western eyes not trained in Barnes’ methods of plastic analysis, which freed artistic production from extraneous historical, literary and academic theory. For example, African sculpture generally does not fulfill the Classical, Greek standard of beauty prevalent in the Western world, and privileged in academic art criticism for centuries. But unlike classical Greek sculpture, African sculpture of the early twentieth century did not require accurate, anatomical portrayal of the human form or emphasize narrative subject matter -- precisely the features of the sculptural tradition contemporary Western viewers expected. Western standards of physical beauty and its representation were different from African traditions.

Guillaume and Munro, in their celebration of African sculpture, also index some of the stereotypes that were present at this time in the United States about African culture -- that it was “backward” and “childlike,” had failed to produce sophisticated statements,

\(^{62}\) Guillaume, Munro, 1.

\(^{63}\) Ibid, “Acknowledgement.”
was “passive” and “lazy”, and didn’t reach the same levels of achievement as the West. In countering these stereotypes the authors describe the value of African sculpture to modern European art in a way that resonates deeply with Barnes’ essential aesthetic insights. The convergence of these arguments helps to explain their admiration of the interspersion of African and European art on the walls of the Barnes Foundation.

The ways in which the anonymous African sculptors created harmony out of “plastic form” excited Barnes. “Plastic Form” in a sculpture referred to the planes, lines, and formal curves of an object. These elements were increasingly attractive to avant-garde Western artists who were deciding that painting could stand on its own apart from the laws of academic representation. The independence of the “plastic” elements of painting and sculpture from academic standards of technique and beauty was Barnes’ essential insight into what united traditions as visually different as the European and the African. This perspective also reassessed African art as not a “primitive” art but actually an art in advance of modern European painters such as Picasso and Modigliani. “It is just this compromise between representation and design which Negro sculpture offers, and which has made it interesting at the present time,” write Guillaume and Munro, also hitting upon the very center of Barnes’ aesthetic philosophy, as expressed in The Art in Painting. This “compromise,” originating in the re-evaluation of African art that Barnes both admired and advocated, was also a major aspect of the style and technique of modern European painters such as the Cubists, the Fauves, Picasso, Matisse and Modigliani. This had begun before Barnes started collecting, and it was a major source of his interest in their work. Eventually, Barnes collected sculpture from a variety of

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid, 133.
different regions in Africa, becoming an authority on the various traditions that informed African sculptural production as a whole.

Now prepared by this knowledge, we can begin our close reading of some of these sculptures from his collection, which will show how important African art was to Barnes’ display methodology and his critical intentions. Applying Barnes’ insights to the wall display photographed in Figure 2 will enable viewers to process the kinds of similarities between European and African Art that he foregrounded. The wall display consists of several heads by Picasso, Portrait of Jeanne Hobuterne Seated in Profile (1918) and Woman in White (1919) by Modigliani, Seated Odalisque (1922) by Matisse, two watercolors by Charles Demuth, an early Picasso pen and ink drawing, and eighteen African sculptures—Bamana masks and Kota figures that are displayed in the case in the front and center of the wall. Two additional African sculptures were also hung on the wall itself. Interspersed on the wall were wrought iron decorations. Barnes displayed all the items in front of a yellow painted wall, and the entire ensemble functions in a particular way.

To understand this function, using Barnes’ method, I believe the first step is to read a wall display as a whole entity, in effect a plastic assembly. When we read this wall in this way as a whole, certain elements stand out. The Picasso, Modigliani, and other paintings, which are all Western in origin, by and large feature lighter colors than the African sculptures. This tonal contrast serves to balance energetic and somber impulses that exist throughout the wall display. Barnes’ juxtaposition of these two elements in one unit suggests that both the energetic and the somber are elements of art worthy of attention. The case in the center of the wall, filled with eighteen African
sculptures is topped by a medieval triptych and a Matisse interior. This arrangement creates a vertical thrust pointing upwards to a piece of ironwork hanging above the Matisse. Here, the juxtaposition and the fact that the ironwork is at the very top of the items suggests that artisanal labor and fine art share aesthetic properties, existing in harmony. The wall is essentially symmetrical, balanced by the groupings of Modiglianis and Picassos on the right and the left, which mimic each other in organization. The Modiglianis repeat the conical shapes and elongation of the heads and torsos in the African sculptures. This symmetry and the repetition of shapes from one object to the next send the message right away that viewers should start looking for such similarities between each object displayed on the wall, whether Western paintings, ironwork, or African sculpture.

Once we begin looking for repeating forms between objects, there is much to see. The distortion practiced by Modigliani and Picasso in depicting the human form is also present, and was in fact influenced by, the distortions in the African sculpture. The elongation of the necks of the women Modigliani depicts, and the complex angularity of the facial features in Picasso’s mask-like heads, replace realistic depictions of human form with abstract experimentation. Together the sculptures and the paintings suggest properties of movement and design that are experiential, and not obligated to existing academic modes of representation that emphasized exact geometric proportions. Similarly, the African sculptures also practice distortion that emphasizes some experiential aspects of the human experience over more mathematically proportional depictions of the physical form.
Just as Barnes does not privilege fine art over artisanal works, he does not privilege one artist over another. Rather, he creates a harmonious composition that unites the traditions of different cultures and the personal characteristics of individual expressions in resonant gestures and impulses. Each of the artists featured on the wall, whether Western or African, practice different forms of abstraction, but all replace standard, academic modes of representation with freer forms of abstraction. The display also presents a visual argument of the similarity of art across time periods. The medieval triptych, which Barnes provocatively included, exhibits aesthetic similarities to the surrounding objects as well. This juxtaposition suggests that modernism both re-articulates and continues those principles of aesthetic design within the European tradition that have always characterized great art. It is an indigenous impulse as well as an African import.

The quotations above, taken from Barnes’ own writings illustrate his intentions in arranging these juxtapositions. Barnes strongly believed that departures of painters such as Picasso, Matisse and Modigliani from realistic representation under the influence of African art was a logical furthering of the great art of Europe’s past, and that the influence of African art was responsible for a modern “renaissance,” which also connected within the same traditions that inspired European artists during the Italian Renaissance. The experiments of these French painters in re-envisioning how to depict the human form represent a different set of intentions but are not unrelated to the languorous, flowing, elongated forms of the Italian Mannerists. It is clear that Barnes intended his wall displays to show both the departure and continuation of tradition in European painting under the influence of the arts of Africa.
Barnes and his colleagues Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, authors of the book *Primitive African Sculpture* (1926), were at the forefront of the avant-garde artistically and socially in terms of crediting African sculpture with the conscious impulse to abstract the human form, rather than alleging that it exhibited the faults of primitive misrepresentations. The latter interpretation remained the prevailing academic and public opinion of the day. In the very first chapter of *Primitive African Sculpture*, Guillaume and Munro point out:

> Scarcely twenty years ago, negro sculpture was known only to an occasional missionary, who would write home with horror of the “hideous little idols” of the savages, and to a few explorers and ethnologists, who collected it among other phenomena of African life, without suspecting that it might ever be taken seriously as art. If any artist happened to notice one of the figures, it was no doubt with a feeling of complacency, that civilized art had gone so far ahead of these clumsy, misshapen attempts at reproducing the human form.  

Barnes and his colleagues approached African sculpture in such a way as to begin to break down the barriers of cultural prejudice that blocked “Western eyes,” European and American, from appreciating this art to the fullest extent. Barnes displayed European painting next to African sculpture in order to emphasize his method of looking, which intended to leave cultural stereotypes behind in its embrace of the “plastic” traditions and qualities of the art of vastly different cultures. At the time of the authorship of *The Art in Painting* and *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, in 1926, these stereotypes still carried great weight for the broad base of European as well as American culture, remaining deeply rooted in the ongoing practices of European colonialism and the afterlife of the global slave trade.

66 Guillaume and Munro, 1.
One region that is fairly well represented in Barnes’ collection is the Sudan. Another well-represented region is the Ivory Coast. They are both regions that have sustained the wounds of imperialism and human trafficking for centuries. The following work that I will discuss, from the Barnes collection, originates in the Sudan. (see appendix, figure 3).

We can think of many things to say about the plastic forms of these sculptures, especially once we have freed ourselves from restrictive expectations that they will reproduce human portraits in a literal, or Western, "naturalistic" or literary manner. Some of those feelings of expectation will no doubt remain at our first look at sculptures, such as in figure 3, but using Barnes’ method we can soon learn to divest ourselves from them. For example, a key word that critics Guillaume and Munro use to describe figure 3 is “transformation.” They observe of the sculpture that it is:

thin and stiffly angular, like a child’s jumping-jack. At first sight crude and haphazard, it arouses in the observer unused to plastic form the feelings associated with a toy or caricature. But if these associations can be disregarded, the figure will stand out in its own right as a transformation of the body into a distinctive and forceful design. \(^{67}\)

Guillaume and Munro capture the tension and expectation that comes with this sculpture’s presentation, engaging it almost as if it were on the verge of movement. What appears to be disjointed about the figure really imparts a feeling of energy and life, and the various portions of the body, comprising different regions of mass, are skilfully balanced to preserve its energy.

In my own reading, certain essential abstract shapes, based on portions of the human body, repeat themselves, making sly reference to each other and uniting the figure

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\(^{67}\) Ibid, 74.
in a sequence of charged abstract impulses. The first shape is the forward-thrusting cone that makes up each of the breasts. The figure’s nose is another conical shape, which likewise points directly into space, giving the sculpture some of its motive charge. The figure is poised, yet animated, standing with its feet slightly apart. There is a slightly discontinuous vertical line, which travels down the center of the figure from its head to its feet, each bodily region engaging in a slight directional shift, revealing the potential of its life force. The initial feeling the viewer receives is one of direct, straightforward presentation. The figure’s arms swing from the torso, and likewise mimic the motive dynamic of the body and balance the firmly planted legs, which are posed almost, but not quite, under them. At the center of each vertical plane is a form that juts outward – the breasts and the pelvis, confronting the viewer in a similarly straightforward way.

The key thing to realize about this sculpture, in my reading, is that the female body has been reinterpreted and re-inscribed as a series of repeating, abstract forms. This becomes clearer when we look at the sculpture from the side. Four regions of triangular, conical shapes—head, breasts, buttocks and feet, as well as a conical shape jutting out from the stomach—combine to “represent” a human form, but also, in fact, to portray a complex, rhythmic, linear, abstract design.

This is the “transformation,” to which Guillaume and Munro refer. If the sculpture from the front looks simple and confrontational, from the side it is complex and ornate, suggesting the basis for the intricate linear pattern in a weaving or in a Matisse painting. *(see appendix, figure 4).*

The sculpture has other, surprising elements of design as well. The circular rings around the neck repeat themselves around the arms and also mimic, to a certain extent,
the carved slits of eyes in the figure’s face, uniting, again, different regions of the body with a purely “plastic” logic. Below the breasts, a series of small, carved squares and longer, linear marks create texture and an abstract pattern that is not life-like, but that suggests the body is an object to be adorned or made decorative, both in the form of sculpture and perhaps in real life. These markings don’t serve a realistic purpose, but they let the viewer know that the human body is open to interpretation and reinterpretation at the will of the artist who can inscribe his own graphic truth “over,” or “above,” the representational, as it were. “Surface decoration,”” write Guillaume and Munro, "is fused with and reinforces the form of the masses."68

Another region of Africa from which Barnes collected heavily is the Ivory Coast. His method of plastic analysis provided an understanding of these sculptures, too, which also represent his model of African ingenuity. In the following example from the Ivory Coast, (see appendix, figure 5), interpretive insights similar to my reading of the Sudanese sculpture apply. Again, I will begin with Guillaume and Munro, who observe that it has both a strong unity between areas of mass, and complex ornament, or decoration, covering its surface.

Additionally, when looking at the sculpture from the side, we see three primary areas of mass--the head and neck, the body and the legs. In my reading, the similarity in form of these regions establishes a unified rhythmic impulse. Each region receives detailed treatment, yet the sculptor was clearly conscious also of creating an overall effect by the way the different regions relate to each other and the whole. Each of the three significant regions of mass contains horizontal lines that contrast with the vertical of the

68 Ibid, 76.
standing figure as a unit. The jaw sticks out horizontally as do the forearms and the feet.

Noting this, Guillaume and Munro point out that:

> Similar rounded protuberances occur down the back (lumps on the head, shoulder and elbow, buttocks, calf and heel). Sharper ones come down the front (nose, lips, Adam’s apple, knees). The shape of toes and fingers relates them to the facial scars. The surface of the head is a network of interlaced designs: from the beard up and over the head moves a rhythmic procession of mounds and twisted cones, and between the same two points, lower down, is a parallel procession of straight and curving ridges. Curved grooves connect the two series, and parallel the contours of the head. The ear is a central axis for all these circling and radiating rhythms.  

In crediting African sculpture with so much formal subtlety and serious inventive potential, Barnes and his colleagues from the Barnes Foundation, and Guillaume and Munro as well, flew in the face of the broader American culture that recognized indigenous African creativity, but assigned its products to a “low” realm of crudity and curiosity rather than the ostensibly “high” sophistication of the art of the Western tradition. The massive popularity of minstrel stage shows and literature, which mocked African-American culture for the entertainment of large numbers of white Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, also attested to the effort Barnes would have to exert in educating the American public about the complexity of African-American artistic heritage. Furthermore, in the refusal of most early twentieth-century academic American painters to interweave such African influences in their own work, (a refusal that includes Barnes’ own artist friends Glackens, Prendergast and Demuth), even Barnes’ artistic contemporaries revealed their trailing comprehension of the principles of modernist design in relation to leading European painters.

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69 Ibid, 90.
Barnes himself was able to move beyond certain stereotypes in looking at African sculpture because he had learned to appreciate the complexities it achieved in its formal properties. This was a lesson that relatively few others were able to appreciate at the time, given a cultural climate that had been influenced by deeply ingrained racist stereotypes to think that blackness and black creative expressions were things to parody and mock. Barnes felt that not only he and his colleagues, but the public also could observe these characteristics of African art and learn from them, if they were properly instructed. He took it upon himself to educate those in his inner circle, and it was his hope that the point of view, and even a curriculum of study based on the display techniques of the Barnes Foundation, would be adopted by universities throughout the United States.

By engaging with the racist qualities of American mass culture in this way, Barnes entered a highly volatile territory where the most inaccurate perceptions of “blackness,” such as those in the minstrel show, had the greatest currency as stereotypes, and did the most damage. Addressing his ideas to prominent universities as well as working people and African-Americans, he meant to counter this damage. He hoped to enlighten the elite and enfranchise both the working class and the African-American population with knowledge of the treasures of art and the creative spirit that he had learned about himself, collected and described.

In chapter three, I will discuss how Barnes’ interpretation of modernism participated in the reduction of such stereotypes, provided a basis for the “universal recognition of the validity of black cultural expression,” and participated in the voicing of
African-Americans’ demand for “the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions.””}^{70}

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^{70}Locke, 12.
CHAPTER THREE

AESTHETICS AND SOCIAL AGENCY: BARNES, THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, AND LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

Barnes was a controversial figure who collected radical *avant-garde* European paintings ahead of his time and exhibited them in the United States, challenging prevailing tastes. As demonstrated in chapters one and two, Barnes brought to his collection a progressive stance towards American race relations and the belief that fine art could uplift African-Americans and working class whites. In the close reading of a Barnes wall display in chapter two, we saw how Barnes emphasized African influence on European art through his collection and exhibition practices. This emphasis was revolutionary because it questioned centuries of Euro-American disregard for African ancestral arts and heritage as being merely ethnographic curiosities or unsophisticated artifacts and handicrafts. Instead, Barnes demonstrated that great European artists were changing the tradition of Western visuality, through new work based on the art of Africa.

These collecting and display practices, simply on their own, would have made Barnes a difficult force to be reckoned with in Philadelphia society and throughout the art world where they pushed existing boundaries in American understanding and appreciation of radical, multicultural artistic statements. Yet, his revolutionary impact went further still. Barnes also understood the incorporation of African aesthetics by European *avant-garde* painters as an opportunity for African Americans to gain social agency and status in the US. That made him highly controversial at the time. According to historian Howard Greenfeld, Barnes’ “interest” in the African-American social cause
“went beyond mere rhetoric.” Greenfeld points out that Barnes was an important member of the relatively small group of American whites who actively supported the New Negro movement. Also known as the Harlem Renaissance, this movement emphasized “the affirmative values of the heritage of blacks and demanded for them full social and political equality.” And Barnes’s commitment to racial justice went further still.

Barnes also worked closely with The National Urban League, an interracial organization dedicated to improving living conditions for urban blacks by fighting employment discrimination. Barnes both donated to The League and contributed to its monthly magazine, Opportunity. The magazine’s May 1924 issue included an essay by Barnes which had previously been published in Les Arts a Paris, in which Barnes wrote of Opportunity: “I can see in the journal abounding evidence of the high intellectual and aesthetic status of the Negro.” All of these examples, which are well documented by Greenfeld, demonstrate Barnes’s ongoing involvement with contemporary activist groups committed to work for racial equality.

It is clear that Barnes both faced hostility and received support for his views. As this chapter will show, Barnes’s idea that the modernist aesthetic revolution was an opportunity for African Americans to gain social agency in the US coincided nicely with the flourishing of original African-American art and literature in New York as represented by the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. Barnes’ personal interactions with

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71 Greenfeld, 138.
72 Ibid, 138.
73 Ibid, 139.
the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, as detailed later in this chapter, further
demonstrate the significance of his commitment to the struggle for African-American
social equality, and the importance of his embrace of that struggle's social goals to our
own understanding of Barnes’ aims.

This chapter examines the ways in which Barnes’s social philosophy, as detailed
in chapter one, interacted with his aesthetic philosophies, as detailed in chapter two.
First, Barnes shared the ideals of the value of original African American cultural
production with the artists and writers who formed the Harlem Renaissance, and
interacted directly with these leaders in the struggle for equality, during the establishment
of the Barnes Foundation. Both Barnes and high profile artists within the Harlem
Renaissance movement shared a goal of advocating for the equality of African Americans
through aesthetic practices. Second, Barnes exhibited a continued commitment to these
ideals later in his life when he donated his entire collection to Lincoln University, the first
historically black college in the nation. Finally, as the concluding section herein seeks to
demonstrate, understanding Barnes’ educational and aesthetic missions remains relevant
in the present, as he hoped it would. Today, Barnes’s legacy is in the hands of the Barnes
Foundation which exists as a separate entity from Lincoln University and is tasked with
maintaining both the future of his collection and his educational mission as articulated in
his will. It is for the sake of maintaining this part of the Barnes Foundation’s task that it
remains essential today to understand fully the ways in which Barnes’s legacy of
collecting and education, and his theories and interpretations of modernism, are
inextricable from teachings about the struggle for African-American social equality
through aesthetic practices.
II. THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE:

The Harlem Renaissance flourished in the 1920s, while Barnes was most actively collecting, exhibiting and teaching. It was a reaction against attempts by white Americans to apply restrictive definitions of blackness to African-Americans, and an effort to counteract resulting misrepresentations of African-Americans’ artistic heritage. Leaders of the Harlem Renaissance movement included prominent black intellectuals Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois, Walter F. White, and Langston Hughes. The hope of many of these scholars, artists and writers was to shape a new American attitude toward African-Americans based on a deeper understanding of African-American cultural heritage as fundamentally equal to the great achievements of white Western cultural heritage.\(^\text{76}\)

Crossover between Barnes’ goals and the intentions of the Harlem Renaissance was tangible as well as conceptual. In particular, art historian Alain Locke and the writer James Weldon Johnson were both in direct communication with Barnes during early stages of the Harlem Renaissance. On March 21, 1924, Johnson reached out to invite Barnes to a dinner gathering of writers and painters who figured prominently in the Harlem Renaissance movement. This dinner took place at the Civic Club, in New York. Over a hundred writers and publishers associated with the movement were in attendance. The dinner led to the publication of *The New Negro*anthology, which contained a chapter by Barnes. In it, Barnes argued that African-Americans had the potential to overcome the effects of their oppression in the United States and to contribute powerfully to American

\(^{76}\) Rampersad, ix.
culture based on their spiritual and aesthetic heritage and capabilities. He maintained that white Americans would benefit if black Americans consented to “a working alliance…for the development of a richer American civilization to which he, [the Negro], will contribute his full share.” 77

*The New Negro,* compiled by Locke in 1925, was one of the most powerful and pivotal articulations of the movements’ goals and principles. It contained essays, poetry, fiction and criticism emphasizing the need for the African-American community to embrace its own authentic African-American heritage in order to combat racist misrepresentations of black culture and abilities on the part of white America. 78 It also contained illustrations drawn from the Barnes collection of African sculpture, which were presented alongside the writing of contemporary poets and intellectuals, as symbols of sophistication and ingenuity, rather than as uncivilized, primitive expressions lacking consciousness and intent. Here the visual and the literary – the ancient and the modern – coexisted flatteringly side by side, mutually reinforcing, but not mimicking each other. Historian Arnold Rampersad emphasizes the broader context of the movement.

Rampersad points out the challenges posed by racist ideologies that were widespread in United States culture at the time. “Race, and the idea of white racial supremacy,” he writes, “enjoyed the lofty status of a science at the turn of the century and down into the 1920s.” 79 The Harlem Renaissance had to operate amidst powerful beliefs among most whites that blacks were both physically and culturally inferior and had little potential for improvement. When seen in this context of longstanding racism in the United States that

78 Rampersad, xviii.
79 Ibid, xv.
vilified African-American abilities and undermined their potential to fully participate in mainstream American life, the true urgency of the Harlem Renaissance movement to further racial equality and dignity and status for black Americans becomes clear.

Rampersad also emphasizes that many of the efforts of the Harlem Renaissance were targeted not only to black but also, crucially, to white audiences. “Through the display of black sensitivity, intelligence, and artistic versatility,” Rampersad writes, “it was believed that whites would come to a new understanding of the humanity of African-Americans and help to accelerate social change.”80 In other words, Locke’s anthology contained an assumption that the best hope for racial uplift for blacks depended on white, as well as black, appreciation of black culture. This highlights both the fundamental goals and challenges of the movement.

Thus for the proponents of the Harlem Renaissance, Barnes, a white collector, had an important role to play, and his understanding and appreciation of their goals was very important to them. Barnes's chapter in The New Negro is entitled, “Negro Art and America.” It makes powerful and radical claims on behalf of African-Americans in general and black artists in particular. In the essay, Barnes wrote admiringly of African-American artists having, “tremendous emotional endowment, luxuriant and free imagination and a truly great power of individual expression.”81 In keeping with the way that Rampersad analyses the aims of the movement to appeal to white audiences, The New Negro essay foregrounds Barnes’ particular plea for wide appreciation of black artists by white viewers. “The renaissance of Negro art is one of the events of our age which no seeker for beauty can afford to overlook,” Barnes wrote. And as if that were

80 Ibid, xvi.
81 Ibid, 19.
not enough of a call for this art to grab the attention and appreciation of white culture connoisseurs, Barnes continued, “As art, it bears comparison with the great art expressions of any race or civilization. In both ancient and modern Negro art we find a faithful expression of a people and of an epoch in the world’s evolution.”

Barnes’s essay is a strong contribution to the idea that African-Americans could elevate the broad spectrum of American life if the richness of their heritage was appreciated for its full potential. The inclusion of this contribution by Barnes in The New Negro shows how involved he was in the struggle for African-American racial equality in the US from the early days of his career.

In addition to contributing his writing of the “Negro Art and America” essay, Barnes’s own collecting and educational work shared many of the directives he articulated in that essay. By exhibiting black African art alongside European art, Barnes constructed an environment in which white viewers as well as African Americans and others would interact with both aesthetic traditions at the same time, and in the same physical and cultural space of the museum. If we return to the close reading from chapter two with this thought in mind, we can begin to see additional motives for the manner in which Barnes arranged his art pieces. It is clear, for example, that Barnes arranged his collection of African sculpture to highlight similarities with modern masterpieces such as Matisse’s Joy of Life, whose figural articulations are directly reminiscent of the African sculptors’ experiments with the human form. This project of display played directly into the goals of the Harlem Renaissance as articulated in The

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82 Ibid, 21.
New Negro - to enfranchise the humanity of blacks in American culture through the appreciation of their aesthetic accomplishments.

Yet this objective to appeal aesthetically to white viewers was also fraught with tense complications and potential pitfalls. It treated black dignity as dependent on white acceptance. And it posed the importance of “Negro art” as completing “lacks” in white culture, rather than as an independent and self-justifying artistic practice. In so doing, it in some ways perpetuated the very racial hierarchy it sought to overcome. Part of the problem was the perceived need of a minority group for majority white patronage and other support, and such contradictions were difficult to navigate. Elements of problematic justifications for white appreciation of black culture reflect this underlying and unresolved weakness. For instance, in “Negro Art and America,” Barnes also wrote, “The white man cannot compete with the Negro in spiritual endowment. Many centuries of civilization have attenuated his original gifts and have made his mind dominate his spirit. He has wandered too far from the elementary human needs and their easy means of natural satisfaction.”\(^{83}\) This essentialist interpretation of whites as burdened by centuries of civilization, in implied contrast to blacks as somehow less civilized and therefore somehow free from this burden, is a legacy of prejudice framed as liberation. This quote by Barnes exposes the ongoing force of stereotypes of racial hierarchy even amongst those seeking greater social status for African Americans. For all his progressive and enlightened work towards racial justice, like so many others of his time, and ours, Barnes remained an imperfect individual working in the context of a culture of racism that was (and continues to be) deeply challenging to disturb.

\(^{83}\) Ibid, 20.
Perceptions of differences in the role of African versus African-American art further complicated the goal of producing social uplift for African-Americans through an appreciation of black artistic heritage, and it is important to recognize these difficulties in order fully to understand the significance of the intentions of the Barnes collection. For many prominent Harlem Renaissance artists, including author Langston Hughes, African heritage as well as African-American heritage provided a source of cultural pride for African Americans, Hughes frequently incorporated positive images of Africa into his poetry. For example, in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” he reimagines his ancestral past:

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young,
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep,
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids about it.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers. 84

As a significant collector and appreciator of African art, Barnes wanted to further this message of pride in the heritage of African-Americans.

Yet the incorporation and reassessment of African heritage from the vantage point of American cultural practice presented a complex and sometimes troubled relationship with African-American pride. Hughes’ poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” also gives voice to fierce memories of the distance imposed between African-Americans and African culture by the malign legacy of US slavery. Nor was the African American poet’s idea of Africa precisely the same as Africans’ own experience. In The Big Sea, Hughes’ autobiography, he details a trip to Africa in which he meets Africans who call him a “white man” as a result of his “copper skin and straight black hair – like my

84 Ibid, 141.
grandmother’s Indian hair, except a little curly. This contrast between Hughes’ clear personal feelings of love and longing for Africa as articulated in his poetry, and the reality of his separateness and difference from African people and culture, illustrates some of the tensions embedded into the quest for racial uplift for African Americans through an appreciation of African, rather than African-American, heritage.

Barnes’s collecting and display of African art for his museum, rather than African-American art, participates in and in some ways replicates this tense interplay. His underlying interests and resources coincided effectively with both the goals and difficulties of the Harlem Renaissance. Both sought to enhance mutual respect between peoples of different races and to resolve a history of oppression through the mutual admiration of cultural heritage. As demonstrated in chapter one, Barnes believed that modernism had the potential to uplift working class whites as well as African-Americans, but he saw the social empowerment of the African-American community as a particularly significant application for his pragmatic aesthetic philosophy. Similarly the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance sought to combat racism by the promotion of African-American heritage and contemporary artistic production.

III. LINCOLN UNIVERSITY:

Barnes did not stop at simply arguing for a broad revision of American attitudes towards the sophistication and complexity of African-American cultural heritage. He also worked in material ways to combat practical obstacles that African-Americans faced

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in securing equal access to American social institutions and justice as a result of discriminatory attitudes towards their cultural refinement and potential. This section examines both Barnes’s attempts at practical interventions to further black access to American institutions of power and status, and also the practical resistance that he faced in attempting this. In doing so, it seeks to bring Barnes’s social philosophies as detailed in chapter one, exhibition values as detailed in chapter two, and activist commitments as detailed in the previous section, into the perspective of tangible realities.

To understand the full significance of Barnes’s actions, it is important to locate them in the broader context of legal and normative barriers placed on African Americans at the time. Barnes lived and worked during the era of Jim Crow segregation, a legal system of racial segregation in and beyond the U.S. south that extended from separate water fountains to separate schools and divergent employment prospects for blacks and whites. Jim Crow meant as well the close to complete evisceration of African Americans’ right to vote through the use of discriminatory polling and electoral processes on the state level. Blacks were legally barred from access to banks, jobs, and housing with whites, and restricted in their access to schools and cultural events.86 Blacks were also prevented from participating in mainstream white artistic and cultural practices that bestowed on their practitioners a cultural status of refined human dignity. In other words, the quest for black social uplift at this time needed to resist both prejudiced assumptions and very severe and tangible limits imposed on black Americans’ lives.

The Harlem Renaissance was successful in helping to combat black exclusion from artistic and cultural institutions, and thus from the social dignity they bestowed. Yet

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it was also the hope of the leaders of the movement, as well as of Barnes, that a fuller understanding and respect for black culture on the part of white Americans would move beyond the realm of cultural appreciation itself to the removal of discriminatory practical barriers on African American life, and thus pave the way for a fuller inclusion of blacks in all aspects of mainstream American society.

By the 1950s, and thirty years after both the Harlem Renaissance and Barnes’s collecting began, towards the end of Barnes’s life, some social progress had been made in terms of resistance to racial injustice, but the United States was still consumed by a debased and debilitating racism. This tragedy was evident in the continued strength of Jim Crow segregation. In the 1950s, literal and implied barriers to black entry into leading cultural institutions in both northern and southern states were far-reaching and persistent.

The context of the slow, long struggle to overcome the oppression of Jim Crow helps to reveal the full significance of Barnes’s educational mission, as detailed in chapters one and two. Barnes sought to educate both blacks and whites in the achievements of black cultural heritage. Even further than that, not only was black culture central to the educational mission Barnes fashioned around his collection, but instruction at the Barnes Foundation was meant to offer rigor and sophistication equal to the finest universities in the country while welcoming students of all races and economic classes. In the context of the widespread exclusion of African Americans from majority white universities, this element of Barnes’ educational mission takes on new and more significant meaning. The Barnes Foundation could provide an alternative educational and cultural center for black and white Americans alike, outside of and liberated from some
of the barriers and prejudices that marred mainstream and elite white American institutions at the time.

Barnes continued to pursue the dream of an educational institution that would further the goals of his collecting practices and support his social activism, as articulated in “Negro Art and America,” into the future. As it turned out, in 1950, Barnes had only one year left to live.\(^{87}\) In what turned out to be one of the final and also most heroic acts of his life before his unexpected death in a car crash in 1951, Barnes found a substantial opportunity to implement his goal of education for racial justice. He made a significant decision to grant posthumous control over the trusteeship of the Barnes Foundation to Lincoln University, an historically black college.\(^{88}\) In the last written draft of his will, written in October of 1950, Barnes left the privilege of naming trustees of the Barnes Foundation in perpetuity to Lincoln. This proved to be a controversial act in keeping with Barnes’ lifelong ability to incite conflict. The decision casts his collecting and display practices as a legacy to ideals of racial equality, and enshrines them as such in his will.\(^{89}\)

Africanist and anthropologist Niara Sudarkasa, then President of Lincoln University, detailed this history in her foreword to the 1993 book, *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation*. It was by then well known that Barnes had officially granted Lincoln University the power to determine the Barnes Foundation trustees in October of 1950. However, Sudarkasa’s account details the long and

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\(^{87}\) Greenfeld, I.


\(^{89}\) Sudarkasa, xi.
troublesome history of attempts to undo this agreement and maintains that Barnes intended Lincoln to be involved with the Barnes collection in a far more integrated and extensive manner than simply the naming of trustees. Sudarkasa cites the long and productive correspondence between Barnes and Dr. Horace Mann Bond, who became President of Lincoln University in 1951 in which Barnes discusses the Foundation’s plan to, “make our resources an integral part of Lincoln’s educational program…. to weld Lincoln and the Foundation in an educational enterprise that has no counterpart elsewhere.”

It is again helpful to recall the racial climate of America at this time in order to fully comprehend the radical nature of Barnes’s plan. Although blacks were legally barred from access to many of the most essential American cultural institutions - including universities, in Barnes’s plan, black faculty and students would be in control of one of the most significant art collections ever assembled in the United States, including both black African and white European cultural treasures. In the face of the enduring practice of racial discrimination throughout the United States, Barnes ended his life’s work in a way that was consistent with the way in which he had spent it: advocating for a broader appreciation of African- American heritage, equality, and fuller participation in American institutions.

This final act of leaving his entire collection in the control of Lincoln University was in many ways the capstone to the pragmatic strategy of Barnes’ aesthetic philosophy. Barnes clearly could have granted control over his extraordinarily valuable foundation to a multitude of other institutions. But there are three major reasons why his choice of a

\footnote{Ibid, xiii.}
historically black university as his beneficiary is consistent with the aesthetic and social philosophies developed throughout his life. First, it enshrined a physical space mixing black and white cultural heritage on terms highly likely to provide an equal footing for the egalitarian appreciation of the interrelationship of art from Europe and Africa. Had the collection been located in an historically white institution from which blacks were excluded or treated as second-class citizens, it would have been much less likely that the art would be viewed in the inclusive manner that could do justice to Barnes’s aesthetic theories. Second, leaving the collection in the hands of Lincoln furthered Barnes’s interests in democratizing art education by securing the practical access of African-Americans to elite cultural and educational opportunities at a time when Jim Crow legally barred black citizens from the vast majority of cultural resources of similar scale and import.

Finally, Barnes’s donation to Lincoln in some ways resolved the tension evident in his contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, whereby black status was dependent on white appreciation of black cultural achievements. In this case, white European art as well as African art was placed under black control. The access and status bestowed by management of the Barnes Collection would be in the hands of an historically black university with or without white approval. Indeed, this final act of Barnes’ was in many ways the epitome of his ideological life, as it was the capstone of his material ambitions.

Despite the apparent synergy between Barnes’s lifelong goals and his indenture of the Barnes Foundation to Lincoln University, however, controversy has surrounded his decision from the time of his death up until the present day. This controversy demonstrates how difficult it was for Barnes’s ideas to find acceptance in the mainstream
society of his time. Perhaps the radical aspect of his decision, to endow a black college with power over European cultural heritage as well as African cultural heritage, contributed to this controversy. Regardless of its underlying causes, the fact of this controversy shows a profound degree of difficulty in accepting and applying Barnes’s vision. It demonstrates that Barnes’ actions were unusual, and highly incendiary. It also reveals the practical obstacles that Barnes faced in securing the legacy of his collection and educational mission, illustrating how the conceptual aspects of his pragmatic aestheticism and his pedagogical vision interacted with the tangible limitations of the living institutions around him.

According to Sudarkasa, after Barnes died, “surprisingly little was said” about his decision to leave his collection to Lincoln. Immediately after Barnes’ death, Dr. Bond attempted to verify whether or not Barnes had actually incorporated into his will a provision stipulating that Lincoln would have the power to name the Foundation’s trustees in perpetuity, but he was unable to acquire a concrete answer at that time. Confusion was pervasive, with speculation that Barnes had actually changed the terms of the indenture several times and would have done so again had his life not been so tragically cut short. It would take until 1960 for clarification to be obtained that Barnes had indeed granted this power to Lincoln. By that time, President Bond had finished his term and Dr. A. O. Grubb had succeeded him as president of Lincoln University. These apparent difficulties in communication between two separate presidents of Lincoln University and the executors of Barnes’s will show that Barnes’s

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91 Sudarkasa, xiii.
92 Ibid, xiii.
plan did not come to unfold in an entirely smooth fashion. Rather, it was surrounded by
elements of confusion and protestation, consonant with the racial politics of the time.

In fact, this confusion foreshadowed what would eventually become an even
larger controversy, decades later, in interpreting the intent of Barnes’s will. This
controversy has resulted in ongoing debates about the role of the Barnes collection in
education, and the Foundation’s responsibility to provide public access to the galleries.
Reviewing the details of this controversy gives insight into the manner in which Barnes’
aesthetic and social mission continues to provoke discussion and debate relevant to the
twenty-first century.

Confusion and controversy around Barnes’ will surfaced, in 1987, with the
publication of historian Howard Greenfeld’s *The Devil and Dr. Barnes*. In that book,
Greenfeld cites a letter that Barnes wrote to the Dean of Lincoln in 1951 expressing
disappointment about the failures of the first year of the experiment to integrate Barnes’s
educational mission with Lincoln’s teaching. Greenfeld then suggests that Barnes
intended to terminate his relationship with Lincoln, but died before he could accomplish
this separation. Sudarkasa disagrees with Greenfeld’s evaluation, pointing out that many
other documents exist establishing in detail the extent of Barnes’s continuing relationship
with Lincoln, and the overwhelming likelihood that Barnes wished the relationship to
continue.\(^3\)

Yet there are some compelling reasons to doubt the full extent of Barnes’
commitment to leaving his collection to Lincoln. One such reason is that Barnes
originally sought other options to ensure the preservation of his collection and

\(^3\)Greenfeld, 115.
educational legacy. This search continued throughout his life, and he was engaged in it long before the Lincoln indenture was served. As early as 1924, Barnes was trying most notably to work with the University of Pennsylvania. Greenfeld points out that Barnes entered into an official agreement with the University of Pennsylvania School of Fine Arts in May of 1924.\textsuperscript{94} However, public outrage at this initial agreement, and resistance from the art establishment of Philadelphia, based on the suspicion that modern art and an integrationist educational platform posed a threat to the integrity of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods and school system, tainted the plan. The resulting controversy would eventually prompt Barnes to lose confidence in the ability of the University of Pennsylvania to further the mission of social uplift through aesthetic practices. Indeed, when the plan was first proposed, in 1924, Theodore M. Dillaway, then director of art education in Philadelphia’s public school system, stated that many of the paintings in the Barnes collection made him physically sick.\textsuperscript{95} He feared that if the University of Pennsylvania became a guardian of the Barnes collection, it would be “an invitation to anarchy” in Philadelphia’s school system, which did not promote courses in modern art and separated black and white students.\textsuperscript{96} For Dillaway and others who raised their voices in protest, the collection and Barnes’ apparent intentions to unseat racist barriers to access to Philadelphia’s educational institutions for blacks, were too radical to be accepted.\textsuperscript{97}

Despite rejection in 1924, Barnes made repeated attempts to work with the University of Pennsylvania, including in 1947 and again in 1950. Some of these attempts

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\item[94] Greenfeld, 116.
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\item[96] Ibid, 120.
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were met with indifference or even direct personal hostility, and all eventually failed. Repeated rejection on the part of the University of Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia’s art establishment shows that the Barnes collection, and Barnes’s educational mission remained too far outside of mainstream priorities to find acceptance in established institutions of power. Not only was Barnes personally and socially marginalized by many of his contemporaries, but the contents of his collection, and his hope that it could be used to further racial equality, did not find a home in mainstream, i.e., historically white, cultural institutions.  

Lincoln’s eagerness to accept the Foundation was in sharp contrast to the actions of the University of Pennsylvania. Lincoln was willing to play a role as a partner to Barnes in advancing the cause of African-American education. Ironically, then, Barnes went from attempting, in solidarity with the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance, to gain acceptance for African-Americans through white appreciation of black art, to finding his own collection of primarily European paintings rejected by that same white establishment and locating it instead in a home with black control of its trusteeship.

A second reason to wonder about the status of Barnes’s commitment to Lincoln is the possibility that Barnes’s will was written in haste and did not represent his true intentions. According to Sudarkasa, Barnes was displeased at the outset of partnership, in 1951, because “his plans for a special educational program linking the Barnes Foundation with Lincoln were not unfolding precisely as he wanted them to.”  

Perhaps Barnes had begun to feel that Lincoln would not be the most effective place to carry his educational

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98 Ibid, 141.
99 Sudarkasa, xiii.
and aesthetic missions into the future after all. Another historically black university, such as Hampton University or Tuskegee University, may have been able to offer more. Definitive answers to these doubts and questions will never be clear.

What is clear, however, is that despite these controversies, the fundamental structure of the agreement with Lincoln remained intact for over 50 years and is still in evidence today. In 2013, after a lengthy struggle, Lincoln finally ceded control over the Barnes Foundation to a board of trustees appointed by the city of Philadelphia. But in fact, both Richard H. Glanton, President of the Barnes Foundation in 1993, at the time of the Foundation’s first international traveling exhibition, *Great French Paintings from The Barnes Foundation*, which was held to raise funds for the maintenance of the collection and the building housing it in Merion, and Bernard C. Watson, the current Chairman of the foundation's Board of Trustees, were appointed by Lincoln.\(^\text{100}\) Also, it is clear that the new Barnes Foundation has succeeded substantially in fulfilling the intent behind Barnes’s will, that the collection be used to educate Americans of all races in black artistic heritage as well as white European artistic heritage. Its success in this endeavor is suggested by the maintenance of the original wall displays from Merion at the Barnes’ new location in Philadelphia. These painstaking reconstructions suggest that the re-established Barnes Foundation intends to continue to provide viewers with the multicultural experience of art Barnes intended.

It seems that, at least in part, Barnes was inspired by his role in the Harlem Renaissance to believe that he would be able to arrange for his collection to be used as an educational resource that would bolster Lincoln’s curriculum and promote the

\(^{100}\) Ibid.
appreciation of authentic African arts. Barnes’s method of aesthetic interpretation of the revolution of modernism on the European continent contained the seed of his social activism. Barnes was revolutionary both as a connoisseur of fine art and also as a social activist. A true understanding of Barnes's legacy must honor both of these aspects of the Foundation’s significance and the intent of the educational mission behind it.

IV. EPILOGUE: MODERNISM AND THE BARNES LEGACY TODAY:

Trusteeship of the Barnes Foundation is currently administered by the city of Philadelphia, making it a public institution. There are substantial opportunities for the Foundation today to continue to expand upon Barnes’s legacy, and to influence art education for the twenty-first century American public. Three elements of Barnes’s mission are particularly significant: Barnes’ original ideas about modernism; the continuing relevance of Barnes’ displays and methods of aesthetic education to contemporary institutions; and the possibility of the extension of Barnes’ social activism to the arts and cultural heritage of minority groups other than African-Americans.

Barnes’s original views on modernism are key to a full understanding of his legacy today, both as a connoisseur and a social activist. Chapter two of this thesis showed how Barnes interpreted modernism as a liberatory formal approach to viewing, teaching, and interpreting art. As Braddock correctly emphasizes, the pragmatism behind Barnes’ displays and methods of aesthetic analysis are a unique response to the European avant-garde in painting of the early twentieth-century. However, there is also an opportunity today to extend Braddock’s insights to argue for the continued relevance of
modernist principles as a guide to the aesthetic functioning of society’s institutions. The particular modernist moment upon which the collection was founded is still relevant today, and Barnes’ aesthetic methodology is deserving of introduction to a wider public. The uniquely modernist focus of the Barnes collection establishes not only its historical, but also its contemporary relevance as a vehicle for higher education. The modernist impulse in painting contains the seeds of multicultural aesthetic appreciation that can be broadened not just to the arts of Africa but also to the arts of many different cultures, all of whom deserve a greater voice in American culture. There are possibilities in the present for expanding and enhancing Barnes’s vision for the broader appreciation of artistic heritages of the many cultures from which Barnes collected art, many of which exist as minority American cultures that are now struggling for greater representation and access to American institutions and mainstream life.

Now that the collection has become a public institution, Barnes’s educational intentions are particularly relevant. Although the Barnes Foundation still maintains informal educational relationships with both the University of Pennsylvania and Lincoln University, the greater public visibility of the collection can now further Barnes’s vision to increase social agency for oppressed groups through aesthetic education. Barnes’s aesthetic theories are relevant to later developments in modern art, but it is his pragmatic insight into the multicultural basis of modernism that continues to characterize the foundation’s relevance in the twenty-first century.

Lincoln University itself understands this relevance well, and although the custodianship of the collection has moved to another venue, the contemporary curriculum at Lincoln is making excellent use of Barnes’ legacy. As recently as 2010, even after the
university’s role in guiding the Foundation had been reduced, Lincoln has established courses for its students that remain loyal to Barnes’ original precepts of multicultural art appreciation. A Lincoln “Art Analysis and Methodology” course was established in 2010 that instructed students to “explore visual communication through the ‘plastic elements’ of light, line, color and space, and the elements and principles of design.” The course syllabus stated that Lincoln students, by “using the unequaled resources of the Barnes collection...will analyze a variety of objects in the Barnes Foundation galleries, including African art and works by Renoir, Cezanne, Matisse and Picasso.” Required texts for the course included Barnes’ The Art in Painting, and Dewey’s Art and Experience.¹⁰¹

In addition, in 2007 Lincoln announced the formation of a collaborative degree program with the Barnes Foundation, which would prepare students for “careers in museum and collection studies, museum education and museum communications.” The wording of the official announcement made proud, direct reference to the “time-honored legacies of the two institutions and their legacies, which dates back to the 1940s.”¹⁰² Finally, in 2011, Lincoln founded the Barnes Foundation Visual Center for Excellence with the goal of preparing students for professional careers in the museum field based on Barnes’ teachings.¹⁰³

But contemporary opportunities for Barnes’ many achievements to have a positive impact on American civic life and scholarly work now extend far beyond Lincoln University as well. To begin with, the intimate connection that Barnes drew between European modernism and African aesthetics can be maintained in the lessons the Barnes Foundation will now teach to a broader American public. Some scholars, critics and visitors to the Barnes Foundation will not be aware of Barnes’s contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, or the original intent behind the Lincoln partnership. Similarities between African and European aesthetics may not be readily apparent to visitors to the new foundation without explicit guidance from instructors. Education in these areas, using the original materials provided by Barnes and his contemporaries, like Dewey, is a clear ground upon which the Barnes Foundation can continue to make the kind of contribution that Barnes himself envisioned.

Additionally, Barnes’ vision of increasing the social agency of oppressed people through aesthetic education, a vision originally inspired by Dewey and taken very seriously ever afterwards by Barnes, can also be continued in the exhibitions and the classes offered by the new Foundation. The fact that Barnes made a substantial and recognized contribution to racial equality in the Harlem Renaissance suggests the continuing potential social value of his educational vision. This mission was a practical guide not only for the struggles of the African-American community, but for working-class whites and other marginalized groups throughout the twentieth-century, and there are many reasons to believe it can and will continue. Barnes’ insight into the interaction between European and African aesthetics remains a powerful tool for

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104 Sudarkasa, xi.
increasing racial understanding in twenty-first century America. Racial justice was
central to Barnes’ intentions for his collection. Adherence to the greatest potential of his
legacy mandates that the new Barnes Foundation prioritize racial justice in its
presentation of, and education surrounding, modernism in the Barnes collection.

Finally, the radical potential that Barnes saw in modernism, as well as his attempt
to guide American cultural institutions by partnering with an historically black institution
of higher learning, is what made the Foundation so unique and also so controversial.
The controversy was due in part to the American art world’s hesitancy at the time to
adopt modernist innovations in painting, and in part to Barnes’ relentless activism against
prejudice. But this heritage is what makes the Foundation unique. It is both a collection
of unrivaled masterpieces from the European avant-garde, and a unique institution meant
to be used for the education of a broad-base of Americans in aesthetics and ideals that
have proved difficult for American society to accept.

This interaction between aesthetics and social agency is as important as ever
today, as the Foundation takes on its new role as a public institution. Contemporary
interpretations of the forms of modernism that Barnes championed should emphasize
both the practical value of Barnes’ mission as well as the relevance of his philosophy to
the history of modernism itself. As the Foundation opens its doors to a wider public,
some critics have been tempted to provide revisionist meanings for Barnes’ wall displays
- which articulate the “plastic laws” of painting that he addressed in his writings -
misinterpreting the way these displays demonstrate meaning.

Barnes’ pedagogical theory is both an interpretive methodology for understanding
the work of artists like Matisse, Picasso, and Modigliani, and a foundational approach to
the appreciation of African arts and heritage through recognition of the plastic values they all hold in common. Further research into and appreciation of the full scope of this interaction between aesthetics and social agency can enhance the Barnes Foundation as it continues Barnes’ original work into the twenty-first century and continues to support the appreciation of the authentic cultural heritage of Americans of all backgrounds.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

FIGURES

Figure 1 Dr. Albert C. Barnes, © 2013 The Barnes Foundation.
Figure 2 Room XXII in the Barnes Foundation, Merion, photograph as printed in *Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 21.
Figure 3 Sculpture, Sudanese, the Barnes Foundation, Merion, photograph as printed in Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1968), 75.
Figure 4 Sculpture, Sudanese, the Barnes Foundation, Merion, photograph as printed in Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1968) 77.
Figure 5 Sculpture, Sudanese, the Barnes Foundation, Merion, photograph as printed in Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1968) 77.
Figure 6 The Barnes Foundation, Merion. Photographed by Todd Williams, 2013.
Figure 7 The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, 2012, copyright the Barnes Foundation.