Décor-racial: Defining and Understanding Street Art as it Relates to Racial Justice in Baltimore, Maryland

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Meredith K. Stone
August 2017

© 2017 Meredith K. Stone All Rights Reserved
This thesis titled
Décor-racial: Defining and Understanding Street Art as it Relates to Racial Justice in
Baltimore, Maryland

by
MEREDITH K. STONE

has been approved for
the Department of Geography
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Geoffrey L. Buckley
Professor of Geography

Robert Frank
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
ABSTRACT

STONE, MEREDITH K., M.A., August 2017, Geography

Décor-racial: Defining and Understanding Street Art as it Relates to Racial Justice in Baltimore, Maryland

Director of Thesis: Geoffrey L. Buckley

Baltimore gained national attention in the spring of 2015 after Freddie Gray, a young black man, died while in police custody. This event sparked protests in Baltimore and other cities in the U.S. and soon became associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. One way to bring communities together, give voice to disenfranchised residents, and broadcast political and social justice messages is through street art. While it is difficult to define street art, let alone assess its impact, it is clear that many of the messages it communicates resonate with host communities. This paper investigates how street art is defined and promoted in Baltimore, how street art is used in Baltimore neighborhoods to resist oppression, and how Black Lives Matter is influencing street art in Baltimore. Using qualitative research methods, including interviews and newspaper analysis, I explore the opinions and views of Baltimoreans with respect to street art and provide insight into the conjunction of racial tension and artistic expression. This study brings to light important aspects of urban governance, social justice, community development and public space through investigation of activism through community-based street art.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my respondents who took the time to share their expertise and experiences with me. For their help in making connections in Baltimore, I would like to recognize the Maryland Institute College of Art and the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts. Thanks also go to the Creative Alliance, Jubilee Arts and the Baltimore Ecosystem Study.

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Ohio University Department of Geography for their constant support. I am appreciative for everyone’s willingness to discuss ideas and help me to be successful with this thesis. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Harold Perkins and Dr. Amy Lynch, who provided me with valuable advice and inspiration. Special thanks to Dr. Geoffrey L. Buckley for his encouragement and his willingness to guide me in research and life.

This study would not have been possible without the support of the National Science Foundation’s Long Term Ecological Research Program and Grant Number DEB-1027188.

Finally, many thanks to my friends and family for their reassurance and pep talks. Without them, I would not have been inspired to write about this topic that I care so much about.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban and Public Space in Cities</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Definitions of Street Art</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art in Cities</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentrification and the Arts</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methods</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Background</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Process</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: What is Street Art?</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Street Art</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of Street Art by the City of Baltimore</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development in Baltimore</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Resisting Oppression with Street Art</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentrification’s Impact on Baltimore Neighborhoods</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development Strategies that Empower</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Art as a Tool for Social Justice</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: The Black Lives Matter Movement and Street Art</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Context</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to the Uprising</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Conclusion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: Interview Questions</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Description of Interviewees.................................................................43
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Street Art in Memory of Freddie Gray and the Baltimore Uprising</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BOPA’s Map of Current Murals</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pontella Mason’s “The Baltimore Wall of Pride: Africa East to West”</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Megan Lewis’ “The Thoughts in My Head”</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In April of 2015, Baltimore was catapulted into the national spotlight after Freddie Gray, a twenty-five-year-old resident of the city, died in police custody. When the officers involved were acquitted protests and riots erupted in Baltimore and other cities across the country in association with the social media hashtag and corresponding social movement, Black Lives Matter. The events triggered frustration, sadness, and anger among activists motivated to fight police brutality and left Baltimore neighborhoods in mourning and in need of peaceful closure. They also signified a moment when neighborhoods and community members stood together for justice in the city they call home.

One outcome which transpired from protests was a candlelight vigil for Gray. It was here that the idea for a commemorative mural was conceived. Local artist, Nether, teamed up with Freddie Gray’s close friend Brandon Ross to create an art project near the location where Gray was arrested in Sandtown-Winchester (Giordano 2015). The mural portrays Freddie Gray front and center, flanked by civil rights activists Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and Thurgood Marshall, and those who protested in the name of Black Lives Matter in 2015 (Giordano 2015; Figure 1). This mural involved community input and support from neighbors and building owners. Nether said that Ross helped to mobilize the community and brought Gray’s family and friends to visit when it was completed. Nether also mentioned that he and Ross were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and wanted to call attention to the parallels between then and now (Giordano 2015).
Background

My tenure studying geography has been focused mainly around racial equality and critique of power structures. Additionally, I am a lover of the arts. My interest in street art expanded exponentially in the summer of 2013 during a visit to the Parisian neighborhood Butte-aux-Cailles. Never before had I seen an art form so mysterious and obvious at the same time. Bright colors, complex patterns, and strong social statements came sharply into view and yet the creators were nearly impossible to know. My interest in street art from then on became focused on playful, yet subversive, even sneaky, messages capturing feelings of unseen fellow humans. Street art does many things that art in museums and galleries cannot. These pieces come into view without warning, surprising observers with something graceful and profound. When going to a museum with the intention of seeing traditional art, one knows the goals of the visit. With street art, the viewer has no preconceived notions about the work, meaning it can catch
audiences off guard and teach them about new ideas and current events. Often, these topics say something about the political and social climate, including racial dynamics.

Street art is everywhere in Baltimore and across the world. Its prevalence is so notable that a google search for “street art” yields 161 million results. It has become incredibly popular with young people because of its engaging content, bright colors, and socially critical messages. The rise of the creative city has placed murals in the category of cultural features which attract young imaginative professionals. Many cities have street art festivals similar to Baltimore’s Open Walls, which will be explained in depth in the following sections. Baltimore is unique, however, because of its history with racial conflict and its role as the home to a world-renowned art school, the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). These two features of the city combine to make Baltimore a creative, passionate, and progressive place. There is a strong tradition of street art in Baltimore, exemplified by an interactive map produced by the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts (BOPA) showing all murals created since 1987. At present, there are at least one hundred and sixty-five murals in the city. Their distribution is shown in Figure 2.
Figure 2: BOPA’s Map of Current Murals
(https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1ufUGSVDu9bMrSdwR3Ays9Dm
mA&ll=39.340723323738565%2C-76.61546493022462&z=12)

Clearly, a history of racial discrimination and segregation in Baltimore is at play here. The institution of slavery contributed to the shaping of Baltimore, where inequality, segregation, and poverty were perpetuated through housing discrimination and redlining policies. These racist dogmas were ingrained in the urban landscape in Baltimore and their legacy is readily apparent today. Not only were Baltimore neighborhoods historically segregated but white flight, suburbanization, and deindustrialization all contributed to isolating black communities in inner-city, low income areas. Additionally, police violence – an unfortunate national trend— often falls along racial lines. Freddie Gray’s death at the hands of the police added another page to a long history of social and racial tension in Baltimore.

The events and history surrounding the Baltimore uprising bring together multiple important themes including racial and social justice, community strengthening and pride, and the ways street art can function in society. Street art can reveal diverse motivations,
power dynamics, and the ways in which different parties can use it for different purposes. It can produce a withering critique of society while still enhancing quality of life and beauty in neighborhoods. Street art often begins with “the people”—those who are inspired to create a wall painting that represents their values. On the other hand, institutions such as city government can use street art for redevelopment and sometimes gentrification. Although, these initiatives can be well-meaning and take the best interests of community members to heart, especially when they focus on human development rather than business development, they can just as easily go awry. For example, the city government sometimes recognizes how the arts can strengthen community through self-expression and beautification leading to the creation of programs that achieve empowerment. However, many question redevelopment through street art as a way to attract young creatives who will eventually displace current residents. This conflict presents the idea that one tool is being used for multiple ends. Simultaneously, top-down governmental policies and bottom-up grassroots advocacy generally use street art to help citizens and the city to grow and thrive. The complicated dynamics at play here showcase the intricate ways the politics of street art, racial injustice, and community come together.

**Purpose**

The main purpose of this study is to explore how street art functions in society. This research aims to investigate the ways in which street art is experienced in Baltimore by taking a look at the intersections of art, policy, socio-economics, and the geography of urban landscapes. The interviews and newspapers collected attempt to learn more about
the messages of street art and what they can teach others in and beyond Baltimore. To address these topics, the following research questions are posed:

1. How is street art being defined and promoted in Baltimore neighborhoods?
2. How is street art used in Baltimore neighborhoods to resist oppression?
3. By extension, how has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced street art in Baltimore?

Outline

This thesis is organized thematically into seven chapters. Each discusses a facet of street art’s presence in Baltimore. This introductory chapter offers context, such as Freddie Gray’s story, and the reasoning for undertaking this research. It also mentions Baltimore’s history of racial injustice and the unique aspects of street art. Chapter two reviews pertinent literature including urban public space, theory surrounding definitions of street art, how economic development has been discussed in past studies, and a brief history of Baltimore. The literature review ends by calling attention to more current conflicts such as the uprising of 2015.

Chapter three presents an overview of the data and methods used for this study. It also includes theoretic justifications for the use of these techniques. Chapter four provides answers to the question “how is street art being defined and promoted in Baltimore neighborhoods?” It addresses this question by taking into consideration the thoughts and feelings of Baltimore residents and the policies set forth by the city government. Common themes include street art activism, its connection to Baltimore communities, and whether or not it must be illegal to be called street art. Furthermore,
economic development plays into street art’s visibility in Baltimore and this is noted within the chapter.

Chapters five and six address the second and third research questions—how street art can be used to resist racial oppression and how the Black Lives Matter movement interacts with Baltimore street art. In this section, the differences between gentrification and economic development, displacement of residents, and the low participation of schools in the arts are discussed as ways that perpetuate division along racial lines. This chapter goes on, however, to investigate the ways street art can be used for social and racial justice through self-expression and representation of locals.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory about street art, cities, and the relationships between them has evolved over time. The literature on these topics draws on many different disciplines, frameworks, and time spans. This literature review will focus on five main themes, covering topics from broad philosophical theories to very specific context for this study. These themes are urban space and public space in cities, background and definitions of street art, art in cities, gentrification and the arts, and segregation in Baltimore. These themes all present valuable background information to apply to street art, Black Lives Matter, and policies instituted by Baltimore’s city government. This review will also identify gaps in existing research and point out contradictions.

Urban and Public Space in Cities

An important theory and building block related to street art in Baltimore is Henri Lefebvre's production of space. Lefebvre wrote “There is nothing, in history, or in society, which does not have to be achieved and produced” (Lefebvre 1991, 68). Thus, he argues, people are actors who create their own environments. Lefebvre reiterates that “human beings have produced juridical, political, religious, artistic and philosophical forms,” emphasizing that art in society is intimately connected to humans and the social establishments to which they are linked (Lefebvre 1991, 68). This idea is magnified specifically when thinking about urban environments. In “Cities Within the City” Iveson takes this notion further, mentioning that we not only create our environment but the way we do so is complicated by the power of different contributors. These actors play a large role in determining who and what belong in the city and in public space (Iveson 2013,
Similarly, Lefebvre asserts, it is important to know who produces, what they produce, how, why, and for whom (Lefebvre 1991, 69). The implication is that in order to understand the space of the city, one must grasp the dynamics of power that involve the creators, intentions, and consumers of the place in question. In this context, the ideas of those involved in the production of space can apply to the structures that manage the city as well as the artists and organizations who create works to be seen by audiences in carefully pre-selected places.

Public Space in Cities

Lefebvre’s ideas are, again, important when thinking about public space in particular. His theory of the “city oeuvre” or “open city” indicates that its characteristics are shaped and constructed by a collective community in shared physical space. Also, because of differences between social groups, there is conflict within this space according to different social practices. However, this controversy is essential to the city being truly “oeuvre” or open. When a dominant group produces the city in its own image, without conflict or engagement from a more general population, that is not a “city oeuvre” (Lefebvre 1991; Chiodelli 2013). Lefebvre’s philosophy reflects ideas such as hegemony. Miles states:

Hegemony is a concept that helps to explain, on the one hand, how state apparatuses or political society—supported by and supporting a specific economic group—can coerce, via its institutions of law, police, army and prisons, the various strata of society into consenting to the status quo…On the other hand…hegemony is a concept that helps us to understand…also how and where political society and above all civil society, with its institutions…contribute to the productions of meaning and values which in turn produce, direct and maintain the spontaneous consent of the various strata of society to that same status quo (Miles 1997, 66).
According to Chiodelli, synthesizing Lefebvre’s concepts, “the city attracts ‘everything’ (‘fruits and objects, products and producers, works and creations, activities and situations’); in doing so, it creates an opportunity in space through which all of these different things can come into contact with each other” (Chiodelli 2013, 489). This is essential to the theory surrounding public space—that it is open to the public, collectively managed, and social. Keeping this in mind while thinking about the city as a platform for creativity, institutions stand as forces of authority and control. Therefore, those who have roles within local institutions—namely government officials, educational facilities, and nonprofit organizations—exert more influence over public space in the city than those not traditionally involved in these fields (Goheen 1998, 481). Goheen contends that “Government must therefore make extraordinary efforts to orchestrate and control … behavior in public spaces” (1998, 483). This idea, however, presents problems given the complexities of ownership and expression in places considered to belong “to the people.” It is an accepted fact that public areas present the best space for campaigning and influencing opinions and for groups to gather to “exert their will within the political realm” (Goheen 1998, 486). Design in the city has political connotations which can influence when questions about public art arise. Once more, Lefebvre’s philosophy indicates something about shared urban landscapes – the degree of urban citizenship and who allows varying degrees of participation in urban citizenship is always relevant. In this way, art in the city is closely linked to urban planning, reflecting all the complexities of city management and development.
Background and Definitions of Street Art

Street art is an urban phenomenon but it is difficult to define. Most would agree that it is a type of visual expression that conveys meaning through different mediums. It encompasses several forms including throw-ups, stencils, paste-ups (sometimes known as stickers), slogans, posters, and pieces (Dickens 2008; Dovey 2012; Cowick 2015). The distinctions between these types of street art are blurred, however, and there is flexibility between the forms. One thing is certain—street art is rooted in the tradition of graffiti. It also has deep roots in the hip hop culture of the late 1970s and 80s in Philadelphia and New York. Certain types of graffiti are said to be older, with artistic writing appearing in ancient cultures (Halsey and Young 2002). The resistance of city-dwelling youth to urban renewal schemes in these places led to the expression of discontent in anonymous ways signaling contested ownership over space. The global ubiquity of urban graffiti was shared via music videos, with the famous Buffalo Gals standing out as the first to make street art international (McAuliffe 2012).

Though inherently linked, graffiti and street art are very different, imbued with different meanings, purposes, and messages. Graffiti “isn’t so much about connecting with the masses… it’s an internal language, it’s a secret language” and it has been given a bad reputation over time as an illegal nuisance, signifying government’s lack of control over society (Lewisohn 2008, 15). The way graffiti appears on city walls, trains, or subways is also often highly stylized and illegible, making it a form of communication for the limited few who know how to read it (McAuliffe 2012). Graffiti, as it evolved during the protest movements of the 1970s, developed core values such as artistic
expression, fame, power, and rebellion. This change in focus fueled its ability to spread political and social perspectives quickly (Cowick 2015). Street art is, in fact, frequently aligned with certain political stances and its political, social, and activist messages often give it more clout as a form of artistic expression than what is commonly understood as tagging. Street art can be an expression of lost voices and of resistance. Cowick says: “Street art has the ability to provide a historical narrative to a disenfranchised voice. When the historical narrative is created by those in power due to media control, the people sometimes take to the streets to create their own narrative in order to level the playing field” (2015, 31). This statement, in combination with street art’s extensive presence in many places worldwide, indicates that the forces of power are not representing all people equally, creating the need for outlets of expression (Miladi 2015, 130). In “Painting Human Rights” Tsilimpounidi exemplifies this by stating “anti-authoritarian slogans are the tools for the transformation of the city walls into social diaries. Messages differ, yet usually they are expressed against everything that can be seen as a symbol of the existing world order…” such as racism, capitalism, violence, war, and consumerism (Tsilimpounidi 2010, 112). Dovey et al. also explain that much of the research involved with street art, across the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, criminology, and ethnology, explores the motivations of those who create street art. These studies have concluded that street art is attached to rebellious and sub-cultural identities within the city (Dovey et al. 2012, 22). Furthermore, street artists often present messages that call audiences and viewers to action, encouraging them to fight for social justice (Miladi 2015). This assertion is agreed upon in scholarly research with
Tsilimpounidi noting “when human rights are violated and the existing power elite does not allow voices from the margins to be heard, when human suffering plays mute on the news; the political street art is a powerful and ironic critique written on the wall, informing passers-by that alternative history is playing out” (2010, 114). Street art serves a major purpose for those who create it, demonstrating that the function of their pieces is to act as a catalyst for social change, political action, and justice. In fact, Dovey et al. suggest that street artists use their creations as ways of expressing their “desires, pleasures, and capacities” (Dovey et al. 2012, 23). This is no different from any other type of artist, but in this case the blank walls of urban environments become canvases that exemplify “unfinished spaces of potential” (Dovey et al. 2012, 23).

Street artists are frequently recognized as trained artists, while graffiti “writers” often are not. Street artists spend a considerable amount of time preparing pieces in a studio environment, whereas graffiti artists may not prepare anything in advance before painting a wall. As a result, we tend to associate street artists with the “fine-arts” community (Lewisohn 2008). Furthermore, street artists are currently becoming part of the contemporary museum scene with many exhibitions featuring the works of recognized street artists. The famous artist, Banksy, for example, held a show entitled Barely Legal which helped to bring street art into the museum and gained popularity for the movement (Exit Through the Gift Shop 2010). Banksy is perhaps the most well-recognized street artist, with Shepard Fairey, known for creating former president Barack Obama’s iconic 2008 campaign poster, a close second (Warnes 2013). Street art pieces, such as those created by Banksy, tend to be site-specific with strong justification for
being placed in certain locations. Graffiti is less spatially connected and sometimes appears to be ubiquitous (Lewisohn 2008). These distinctions are not always clear in reality; nor is the manner in which cities choose to define types of art.

Another type of art seen in cities is community art. Miles (1997, 8) states “the community arts programmes which began in the late 1960s, or community wall paintings which, in the service of black power, women’s rights or movements for national liberation …were concerned to make visible the voices of groups who then lacked access to broadcast television; such movements are now seen as roots of what Lacy has termed ‘new genre public art.’” It is different, however, from traditional public art seeing as an artist “acts as a catalyst for other people’s creativity, political imagination … This is a reaction against the commoditisation of art by its markets and institutions…” (Miles 1997, 8-12). With this statement in mind, community art is, above all, a way to involve the citizens who live in cities, giving them both agency and participation in the art which is placed on their neighborhood walls.

Though there are differences and similarities between all of these words, which terms (i.e. “street art,” “graffiti,” “community art”) are used to describe art in the city, illuminates the complex discourse and attitudes surrounding it. In this thesis “street art” will be the term used to describe works present on the streets or in public space, with the exception of quotations from other sources.

Art in Cities

Broadly, the arts have a complex relationship with public space and citizens in urban communities. Arguably, city policy and economic status can either facilitate or
deter the arts. However, policies can also highlight inequality or present a prosperous and luxurious image. Burk (2006, 949) mentions that physical forms in public space should be “stripped of passion in order to be civil and rational.” In other words, historically, public space has been and should remain relatively neutral. The ways in which this traditional preference has been achieved, however, is controversial.

Public Art and Monuments

Scholars indicate that art seen in public is an “important spectacle in society” (Zebracki 2012, 118). Historically, commissioned public art has been focused around monuments. Monuments are recognized as “the allegorical figures adorning public buildings, triumphal archways and war memorials” which were popular through the 1870s to 1920s (Miles 1997, 59). In fact, Baltimore was recognized during the 1800s as “The Monumental City” due to the numerous bronze statues erected during this period (Kachadourian 2010). Monuments are “closely linked to national and imperial projects by casting public attention on heroic and iconographic images of military, industrial, and explorer figures and events” (Burk 2006, 950). Miles (1997, 59-60) reiterates that “Monuments stand in complex relation to time.” That is to say that they glorify the past and emphasize a history of those with power and a strong presence. Many of the statues and memorials erected also depict a past of conquest and war, implying violent acts and aggression (Miles 1997). This can be problematic given the extent to which these monumental pieces do or do not represent the citizens living in the city and using the space. Additionally, the way monuments represent certain events, people, or morals can systematically erase, damage, or exclude the legacy of disenfranchised, marginalized
groups or politically and socially distressing events (Burk 2006). Again, hegemonic discourse is engaged in the traditional public art of a city. Miles recognizes that “in the streets and squares of cities the commissioning of statues and memorials proclaimed the manufacture of a national public identity” (Miles 1997, 15). This perfectly captures the concept of social memory, the way in which pasts are reproduced, representing the ways societies wish to sustain certain memories. Social memory is intimately intertwined with the creation of cultural landscapes, historical narratives, and cityscapes (Lowenthal 1975; Foote 1997; Hoelscher 1998; DeLyser 2001; Stone et al. 2016). Furthermore, “memory is inherently about organized forgetting as well as organized remembering…therefore a consideration of memory and monuments must also acknowledge that most social memories are not transformed into monuments” (Burk 2006, 953). Alderman reiterates these ideas, stating “what is commemorated is not synonymous with all that has gone on in the past; what is defined as memorable or historically significant is open to social control, contest, and negotiation” (Alderman 2010, 90). Again, whose conception of the past and what is suitable to be commemorated is, in large part, a political process where those in power control the outcome (Alderman 2010, 90). The struggle of African Americans in the United States is one topic that is often purposefully forgotten and erased from historical consciousness (Alderman 2010, 91).

Museums and the Role of Outdoor Art

Another tradition in the field of visual arts is the role of the museum or gallery as a space in which to view art. Ironically, a defining characteristic of public art is, in fact, that it exists beyond the space of the gallery and museum and instead is outdoors (Miles
American cities in the nineteenth century found that new museums and public collections of art could be used to educate citizens (Miles 1997, 15). Art in public space follows the same philosophy. However, art shown in a museum is collected, managed, maintained, and curated to tailor-make the context and experience of viewing particular pieces. Though they may “share an ideology with the establishment of museums, both being cases of ‘public good’ aimed at social stability, the experience of art in public collections and in public spaces differs—in the way art is ‘framed’ by its location in a cultural institution or in a social setting…works collected in national galleries and museums of art were made as commodities for the art market, now represented as national heritage, whilst some examples of public art are less given to commodity status” (Miles 1997, 15). Reaffirming this idea, artwork has historically been handpicked or commissioned to reflect its monetary value (Palermo 2014, 527). The ideas connected with the placement of art in a museum signify how value is ascribed to it. For instance, attaching value to art work in a museum speaks volumes about art not located in the museum. Value is also relevant in terms of the people who are able to connect and interact with art in public or a museum. According to Miles (1997, 14) “works of contemporary art in public spaces are encountered by diverse publics who have to a large extent, no contact with art in galleries…” The rawness with which art is presented on the street takes it out of the “white cube” of the museum and places it into the real world where it can be seen by everyone (Gartus and Leder 2014). Furthermore, the way a city values street art influences how others value it. For example, if street art, graffiti, or otherwise unplanned murals are immediately covered or taken down by city authorities or
erased as part of a zero-tolerance policy, its context will certainly be devalued. Gartus and Leder (2014, 2) conclude that “both modern art and graffiti art require their adequate contexts to be correctly preclassified as artworks and subsequently aesthetically appreciated.” The art that is deliberately placed in a museum is meant to exist in a sphere with different messages as well as different time scales. Art that is meant to last far into the future has a different context than the (sometimes) temporally-limited nature of street art. This idea also relates to the notion of preservation. Of course, nobody would expect a painting in a museum to be defaced, painted over, removed, or undocumented. However, this can happen to art whose home is the streets rather than the museum. Clearly complex dynamics operating at different spatial and temporal scales affect how the arts are viewed, appreciated, and valued.

Public art can be controversial and received differently by different actors in the community. A famous example of contentious public art is Richard Serra’s *Titled Arc* located at the Federal Building Plaza in New York City (Mitchell 1990, 6). The piece was commissioned in the 1980s and the events that followed marked it as perhaps the most well-known (or infamous) piece of public art in modern history (Gaie 2010, 21). A one-hundred-foot-long piece of steel bisecting the plaza, the sculpture was meant to challenge the ways in which people moved in that space. However, the public disliked it, so much in fact that 45,000 letters were written expressing unhappiness and the work was dismantled and removed only eight years after its installation (Gaie 2010). This is paradoxical because it was commissioned precisely to suit the citizens of the area. Gaie
(2010, 22) mentions that the project was meant “to capture the energy, enterprise, and the fast movement of the city’s inhabitants.”

While the concepts of monuments, social memory, spatial context, and artistic intentions raise tensions over art in public, it is broadly recognized by scholars that there can be many benefits to these pieces. These include small-scale neighborhood revitalization, community development, social interaction, and civic pride. When done well, public art can even combat social exclusion (Schuermans 2012, 676). Exposure to art in public is recognized as significant to societal and community development. Miles (1997, 164) identifies, “the value of new genre public art” as “its ability to initiate a continuing process of social criticism, and to engage defined publics on issues … whilst its purpose is not to fill museums, even with Dadaist anti-art, but to resist the structures of power and money which have caused abjection, and in so doing create imaginative spaces in which to construct, or enable others to construct, diverse possible futures.”

**Funding for Art Projects**

Despite these benefits, institutions hoping to install public pieces must gain the funding to do so. Often, money is granted to arts organizations and individuals by corporations or governments in order to complete projects. Alexander (2014, 371) mentions this stating “Corporations are more easily approached when arts organisations ‘speak their language’ in being able to show corporations why funding makes good business sense. In these ways, arts institutions are required to take on, at least at surface level, the cultural beliefs of the funder.” The way grants are awarded under this process is questionable and might not take the beliefs of the public into consideration. Instead,
institutional values become visible in public, contrasting with art that sometimes aims to reject ideas such as capitalism and policies that promote gentrification, segregation, and uneven economic development. Again, power and governmental control are relevant to understanding art in the city. Clearly the overarching theme of hegemony is present in this conversation. Exploring ideas of space and power helps to elucidate the concept of street art as an expression of lost voices and of resistance. Cowick (2015, 31) says: “Street art has the ability to provide a historical narrative to a disenfranchised voice.” Additionally, art serves as a social vehicle for those who create it, demonstrating that the function of their pieces is to act as a catalyst for social change, political action, and justice. This sentiment is captured by Alexander (2014, 376) who mentions that many who work with the arts view corporate sponsorship as a filter that diminishes their ability to deliver social messages. The ideas surrounding funding of the arts reflect concepts of social memory and hegemonic power structures.

Gentrification and the Arts

Because of the intricacies of the dynamics of space, place, political, social, economic, and cultural ideas as well as all types of human actors, street art can be perfectly viewed through the lens and framework of geography. Urban, cultural, and social geographies engage with the ideas of space, power, and public areas by highlighting site specificity, interaction with community, and urban planning at all levels of involvement (Zebracki 2012, 118). In questioning how street art has impacted Baltimore, it is important to understand the role that economic, political, and social factors have played. Studying the arts in relation to modifications in the city is popular
among urban theorists. Common themes surrounding this idea are the concept of the creative city, gentrification, and more specifically the role of the arts in redevelopment—all very complex and significantly researched topics. These ideas all form a framework with which to view Baltimore’s past and present with the arts and culture.

**The Creative City**

The creative city is a concept formulated by Richard Florida, a well-known urban scholar. In essence, he states that “members of the creative class—including scientists, engineers, architects, designers, educators, artists, musicians, entertainers, etc.—stimulate a region’s economy by introducing new ideas, new technology, or new content” (Acs and Megyesi 2009, 421). Raising levels of economic prosperity involves attracting creative people to the workforce. One way to achieve this is to create environments where these individuals want to live and work. Atkinson confirms this by writing “the idea of an economy based fundamentally on creative skills and services has become a popular and driving discourse... Ideas around creativity have thereby affected the tone and strategic direction by which many cities, more or less gifted in these attributes, seek to manage their economies and, increasingly, the arts...[for] the attraction of talent and innovative capacity” (Atkinson 2009, 64). Therefore, though the competitive attraction of “creatives” applies to the production aspects of an economy, such as the skills they bring to the workplace, it relates just as heavily to the consumptive aspects as well (Ponzini 2009, 434). Furthermore, Grodach affirms that cities invest in “smaller-scale arts-themed areas as amenities to attract skilled labor and engender neighborhood redevelopment” (Grodach 2014, 22). This can be problematic, however, because as cities make plans to
attract creative workers they can make assumptions about who cultural policies really affect (Glow 2014, 497). Indeed, cities “tend to conflate ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ with ‘economic’ so that ‘participation in society actually means economic participation’” (Glow 2014, 497). The associations with capital in the form of culture and creativity have strong ties to globalization, where cities compete with each other. Schacter (2014, 163) argues that “Rather than local authorities supporting the arts for the communal, social, or psychic well-being of their citizens then, rather than ‘bringing in culture’…to soften or even edify ‘urban economic development,’ the strategies of the Creative City ‘do the opposite: they commodify the arts and cultural resources, even social tolerance itself, suturing them as putative economic assets to evolving regimes of urban competition.’” Atkinson asserts that cities are trying to survive by “connecting their capacities to what are seen as deep changes in the conditions of the global economy” and that urban governing bodies are very intentional about this (Atkinson 2009, 65). Policy changes are formulated to produce “the kind of environment that will attract talent and subsequent economic success” and furthermore, this kind of environment is meant to be tolerant and diverse, in accordance with the values of the creatives (Atkinson 2009, 65-66). Additionally, beyond attracting citizens, policy changes can also lure tourists interested in urban cultural experiences (McLean 2014, 2159). There is a contradiction present here, however. The policies put in place to attract a creative, tolerant, and diverse workforce are instrumental in pushing out other creative and diverse artists and stifling innovation in the arts, effectively disturbing vibrant and healthy communities (Glow 2014, 497). Critics of the creative city thesis argue that this plan is “almost total complicity with a globally
domineering cultural policy in which the arts are reduced to a mere instrumental cog in the ‘creative,’ ‘regenerative’ wheel” (Schacter 2014, 162).

**Gentrification, Redevelopment, and the Arts**

Unsurprisingly, gentrification is often the outcome of the shift to the creative city. Gentrification is defined by Sharon Zukin as "the residential movement of middle-class people into low income areas" (Zukin, 1987, 131). As mentioned above, governmental entities can be intentional about setting up policies which lead to gentrification. The places that gentrify, however, might already be environments or neighborhoods which creatives view with potential. Ley (2003, 2527) indicates that low income areas are prime real estate for artists who “value their affordability and mundane, off-center status.” Furthermore, “What the artist values and valorizes is… more than the aesthetics of the old urban quarter. The society and culture of a working-class neighbourhood, especially where this includes ethnic diversity, attracts the artist as it repels the conventional middle classes. Identification with the dispossessed, freedom from middle-class convention and restraints, and the vitality of working-class life have all long been associated with the artistic, bohemian lifestyle” (Cameron 2009, 40). Artists tend to view potential in different ways, as unattached to economic prosperity, and they then participate in the value shifting practice of redemption through aesthetic appeal (Ley 2003, 2528). This work done by artists presents their “sweat equity,” putting in hard work to create bohemian neighborhoods (Grodach et al. 2014, 21). This practice gets tricky when the artistic value of a place changes and is “seized by investors to attract capital reinvestment in the built environment” (Grodach et al. 2014, 22). Cameron confirms this
by explaining that money flows into areas that have been occupied by artists, who are then displaced by gentrifiers (Cameron 2009, 39). Those who are displaced then are not able to enjoy the impacts of revitalization in their former neighborhoods (Grodach et al. 2014, 22). The citizens of gentrified places tend to feel distanced from the local businesses and character as creatives and tourists are attracted and an “unaffordable hipster haven” is shaped (Schacter 2014, 168). This effectively destroys the attractiveness of certain areas for the artist and leaves “little to choose between Disneyland and the commodified artist” (Cameron 2009, 43). Reviews and critiques of this process are generally scathing although some see it as a positive progression in urban space, which is almost certainly the goal of public policies to encourage it. While this literature is comprehensive and explores urban revitalization in many different contexts and settings, the role of the arts here could certainly be a contributing factor.

Baltimore

Baltimore is still coming to terms with de-industrialization and population loss since the 1950s (King 2014). The city’s history is fraught with racial, industrial, and economic difficulties. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad catapulted industrial growth, particularly in the chemical, fertilizer, and transportation businesses (King 2014). During this time, immigrant and African American populations were attracted to the city, often living and working under appalling conditions (King 2014). During World War II, shipbuilding became a lucrative industry with Baltimore emerging as the largest producer on the entire east coast (King 2014). However, this growth presented problems with existing zoning requirements. These regulations were changed to make more room for
heavy industry and development which also brought more people to Baltimore (King 2014). This dynamic would change, however, with the end of the war leading to shifts in industries and increased pollution, which would push Baltimore into the post-industrial period (King 2014). The 1970s through 1990s saw continued de-industrialization, white flight, and suburbanization despite urban renewal efforts dating back to the 1950s (King 2014).

Redefining Baltimore after the decline of industry and population has been difficult (Friedman 2012). To develop and bring life to the downtown area, the city government has spent over $2 billion between 1960 and 2000 to encourage tourism and economic growth. This has been somewhat successful with 21.3 million visitors in 2010 and $86 million generated in tax revenue annually (Friedman 2012). That said, the increase in the tourism industry has done little to encourage permanent population growth, evidenced by the nearly 350,000 person decline between 1950 and 2010 (Friedman 2012). Nevertheless, the arts have historically played a large role in Baltimore. Street and contemporary art are currently present in the area and public art initiatives are part of the Baltimore Development Cooperative (Kachadourian 2010). However, Baltimore in the twenty-first century is not well-known for its cosmopolitan high-culture. Instead, the city is sometimes referred to in pop culture as “Bulletmore, Murderland” or even as an “urban war zone” (Sellers 2015, 2; McCauley 2016, 2). A long-time industrial center of the Mid-Atlantic, racial tension and deindustrialization characterizes the city today. Furthermore, homicide rates have risen in Baltimore since 2013, according NPR.
In fact, murders have increased by sixty three percent since 2014, despite a relative decrease nationally since the 1990s (NPR 2016).

**Segregation in Baltimore**

Discussion of gentrification in Baltimore necessarily focuses on disproportionate impact directed at minority and low-income groups— with African Americans being especially targeted— and is broadly based in past housing discrimination and segregation. In fact, Baltimore City enacted one of the country’s first segregation ordinances in 1910 (Boone et al. 2009, 779). Indeed, it was the very first city to designate “white” and “black” blocks. The segregation ordinance stipulated that “no blacks (with the exception of black servants in white houses) could move into blocks that were half white and vice versa” (Boone et al. 2009, 779). Other cities across America adopted and copied the legislation (Pappoe 2016, 117). It included stipulations which included prohibition of whites selling homes to blacks (Pappoe 2016, 118). Furthermore, real estate agents were discouraged from showing houses to black citizens which were in predominantly white neighborhoods, and could even have their licenses revoked for such an act (Pappoe 2016, 119). The National Association of Real Estate Boards firmly adhered to the belief that white property values were lowered by black residents, resulting in policies such as these (Pappoe 2016, 120). Accompanying these acts of de facto and de jure segregation was a system of redlining promoted by the Home Owners Loan Corporation. “Redlining is a broad term, denoting the discriminatory treatment of people living in certain neighborhoods by mortgage lenders…In effect, a ‘red line’ is drawn around certain areas…and these areas are either excluded as clients or are subjected to
more stringent conditions…the issue of race becomes especially relevant when high-risk areas also happen to have high concentrations of minority households and businesses” (Boliard 2015). This type of income discrimination was meant to demonstrate which neighborhoods were likely to foreclose on loans coinciding with black designated areas. It perpetuated a cycle of prejudice, making it extremely difficult for African American residents to escape forced undesirable living conditions.

Because of Baltimore’s historic “Ordinance for preserving order securing property values and promoting the great interests and insuring the good government of Baltimore City” (as it was entitled by Baltimore Mayor J. Barry Mahool in 1910) and the current demographic makeup of the city discussions of racism and economic strife are particularly relevant there. Jim Crow policies for both public and private institutions contributed to a legacy of segregation and economic troubles for black men and women as well as the city of Baltimore. After the Home Owners Loan Corporation was discontinued in 1950, the Federal Housing Administration took its place and continued redlining strategies (Pappoe 2016, 122). According to Pappoe, “In Baltimore, virtually all black neighborhoods were redlined” (Pappoe 2016, 122). Additionally, the Federal Housing Administration encouraged white flight, described as “out-migration of middle class whites to the suburbs” by making homes there affordable to them (Pappoe 2016, 122). This same opportunity was not afforded to African Americans, however, further supporting disinvestment in black neighborhoods. Poverty was concentrated and patterns of vacancy and abandonment occurred (Pappoe 2016, 123). This was also compounded by the loss of industry and manufacturing jobs Baltimore experienced in the years
following World War II, resulting in the city’s population declining by 350,000 between 1950 and 2010 (Friedman 2012, 210).

At present, black citizens comprise sixty-three percent of Baltimore. Twenty-three percent of the city residents live in poverty (United States Census 2015). Pappoe (2016, 128) writes “Research has shown that living in a neighborhood with such a high concentration of poverty is associated with living in an environment that offers little to no opportunity for success… the concentration of poverty goes hand in hand with high crime and violence.” According to the United States Census Bureau, “Baltimore had the fifth-highest rate of homicide…and the seventh-highest rate of violent crime” (Friedman et al. 2012, 210). For black citizens living in Baltimore the history of discrimination and racist acts have compounded over the years. Recently, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has called attention to violence and deaths inflicted on African Americans by police officers. The movement began in the Summer of 2013 by Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors who created the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. The women took to social media during and after the trial and acquittal of George Zimmerman, a Florida security guard who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed seventeen-year-old (Young 2015; Cobb 2016). Similar events have transpired across America since with Black Lives Matter gaining press and national recognition (Ampofo 2016, 19). Street demonstrations and protests have followed the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in New York City, Sandra Bland in Texas, and others (Young 2015; Cobb 2016). In Baltimore, the death of Freddie Gray after he was arrested in the
Spring of 2015 escalated the presence of the movement and manifested in civil unrest, uprising, and riots in the city (Scriven 2015, 120).

I am positioning this study to understand and further the cause of street art in the modern and creative city. Change in policy could mean a push against the discrimination and consumerism of capitalist society which disregards the lives and values of low income communities and the interests of particular neighborhoods in Baltimore. At this point, relatively little has been written about Black Lives Matter from an academic standpoint, likely because the movement is so recent. Additionally, because street art is still relatively ambiguous and unclear in its definitions research has not placed it firmly in theory. My study aims to shed light on how street art in Baltimore is impacting policy and the Black Lives Matter movement.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Methodological Background

To discover the myriad ways policy makers and citizens of Baltimore interact with street art requires qualitative methods. A fundamental goal of this study is to understand how human and cultural experiences with street art and the Black Lives Matter movement are connected to the social structures which regulate the urban landscape. Qualitative methods are suitable because they investigate “processes and relations that sustain, modify, or oppose those structures” and “emphasize multiple meanings and interpretations rather than seeking to impose any one ‘dominant’ or ‘correct’ interpretation” (Winchester 2010, 6). In essence, this research seeks to understand the intersections of social structures and individual experiences. The questions posed here might not produce generalizable answers that can be applied easily elsewhere. The how’s and why’s of street art in Baltimore are highly contextual and include factors related specifically to time and place, unique events, and culturally relevant processes. Broadly speaking, qualitative research often includes goals of making contextually situated social change. This research includes political and social unrest and discussions of policy regarding the rights of self-expression. Policy which allows the voices of marginalized citizens is ideal.

Theoretical Frameworks

The qualitative research methods employed here include a combination of methodological frameworks such as grounded theory, phenomenology, critical geography, and case study analysis. Elements of each are used to answer the research
questions laid out in this thesis and as such, they fully address the philosophical contexts of the inquiry.

Grounded theory aims to produce data with which it is possible to speculate about themes or trends (Hay 2010, 282, 377). Phenomenology focuses on the experience of a group of people with a phenomenon—namely street art and Black Lives Matter—and find its meaning. Using this approach, it is possible to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon itself through the human actors who have encountered it (Schram 2006). Combined, these research traditions allow us to develop a firmer grasp on what street art is, the motifs surrounding it, and how people experience it in conjunction with social activism, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. The tenets of critical geography cause us to challenge power relationships and seek solutions to problems involving inequitable social relationships (Kindon 2010, 269). Finally, this thesis can be viewed as a case study where a single unit, Baltimore, is intensely investigated with the hopes of finding ideas that could help investigate similar issues in other cities.

Methodological Process

Because this research involved human participants, approval by the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was necessary. This process ensures equitable selection and treatment of interviewees. This study received an exemption because it involves “research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior” (Ohio University Institution Review Board). As such, interviewees were given a consent form which enabled them to read a short section about this study, as well as their rights to end their participation,
decline to answer any questions, or choose not to be audio recorded. Because concepts involving race, government, and art can sometimes be controversial, pseudonyms were used so interviewees could remain anonymous. This practice enabled them to speak freely without worrying about negative backlash (Warren 2002).

*Interviews as Data*

Interviews are a productive way to elicit information from community members and decision makers (Warren 2002). The oral exchange of information allows for expansion on topics and filling gaps that are left by other types of data collection (Dunn 2010). Interviews also provide insight into and reflection on opinions and experiences of individuals or representatives of groups (Fontana and Frey 1994). Because this study has set out to examine power relationships and some of the dynamics of social inequality it is crucial that the data gathered do not reinforce unequal dynamics. The interviews were completed in keeping with the ideology behind critical geography. Interviews allow participants to engage in the concepts they view as most important while simultaneously using their own words and non-verbal ques. This type of data collection also ensures diversity of opinions and views among respondents. Interviews for this thesis represent both institutions as well as individuals of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, and educational experiences.

The interviews followed an in-person format and a semi-structured protocol. According to Dunn’s (2010) guide to interviewing, “an interview schedule might be prepared with fully worded questions for a semi-structured interview, but the interviewer would not be restricted to deploying those questions. The semi-structured interview is
organized around ordered but flexible questioning” (110). For this thesis, semi-structured interviewing enabled me to plan the interaction according to important themes while simultaneously remaining open minded to the topics the interviewee wished to discuss. According to Schensul et al. (1999) “Because in-depth interviews are designed to obtain the perspective of the interviewee, anything that interferes with this purpose is detrimental to the process (144). However, the semi-structured format also allows for redirection and rephrasing of questions, since “interviews take place in a social interaction context, and they are influenced by that context (Fontana and Frey 1994) (Schensul et al. 1999). The interview protocol for this thesis can be viewed in the Appendix.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in the visual arts in Baltimore. Because I am not a resident of Baltimore, it was crucial to find connections who would be willing to welcome me into their networks. Google searches for “arts in Baltimore” helped inform me of a few organizations which figure prominently in the artistic communities there. I found that The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts (BOPA) are major players. The websites of BOPA and MICA led me to other arts organizations in the area such as Creative Alliance and Jubilee Arts. Once I knew of these, I contacted individuals who possessed job titles connected to my study. After sending preliminary emails, I was either directed to more appropriate contacts or engaged in email conversations which led to the acceptance of an interview. Reaching out to people through organizations ensured that I was introduced to experts in their fields who knew relevant information regarding
the goals of this study, and who were interested in taking the time to participate in an hour-long interview. The interviewees included employees at neighborhood-based arts non-profits, MICA educators, and employees of BOPA, a semi-governmental entity.

Permission was secured and all interviews were audio-recorded per the requirements of the informed consent process. Audio recordings are invaluable as they ensure an accurate record of the topics discussed. They also relieve the interviewer from having to take detailed notes. For this thesis it was imperative that interviews were transcribed verbatim, therefore recording was the most suitable option (Schensul et al. 1999). Of course, there are negative aspects to audio recording interviews. First are the feelings of surveillance that accompany the process. Also, fears about saying something controversial can make interviewees feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. To allay these fears, I ignored the recorder after the interview commenced. This allowed interviewees to focus on our conversation instead. The interviews were conducted in person during a visit to Baltimore in October 2016. Each of the six interviews was approximately one hour long.

Transcription of interviews is necessary for analysis. A transcription, in essence, ensures that a written copy of the interview exists. I used ExpressScribe software to type the interview while listening to it. ExpressScribe is free to use and enables recordings to be slowed down, replayed, and paused, making a crucial process more simple. Furthermore, transcription is also important because the second time hearing the interview helps engage the researcher in analysis. The extent to which interviews are transcribed verbatim is often the choice of the researcher. Verbatim transcription provides
discursive and contextual clues leading to analysis of nuances, feelings, and perspectives. However, verbatim transcription can also reinforce negative stereotypes or make interviewees feel uncomfortable if they read the final product. For this study, verbatim was chosen as the most appropriate method to capture the true essence, character, and ethnographic context. The alternative option is a clean transcription which removes grammatical error, false starts, wandering thoughts, and run on sentences. These types of transcripts look solely for the main ideas being expressed.

As an accompaniment to transcripts, memoing procedures were helpful during this phase of the research. A critical aspect of qualitative research is examining positionality and reflexivity during the research process as they provide an outlet for the researcher to write thoughts and analytical reflections. However, according to Birks et al., “memoing as a research technique is not restricted to the analytical phase of research. From the time a study is conceptualized, memos can help to clarify thinking on a research topic, provide a mechanism for the articulation of assumptions and subjective perspectives about the area of research, and facilitate the development of the study design…a priority to ensure the retention of ideas that may otherwise be lost” (Birks et al. 2008, 69). At the very least, memoing throughout the process helped me keep my thoughts straight and my ideas recorded. They provide a research diary with systematic notes which can also be used to communicate with other researchers interested in the formation of the study.
Table 1: Descriptions of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym of Interviewee</th>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Institution/Organization</th>
<th>Artist (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Faculty- Master of Community Arts</td>
<td>Maryland Institute College of Art</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Baltimore Ecosystem Study, Graduate of MICA</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Fellow-Community Arts, Community Organizer</td>
<td>Creative Alliance, Graduate of MICA</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Faculty- Master of Community Arts</td>
<td>Maryland Institute College of Art</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Arts Administrator, Director</td>
<td>Jubilee Arts, Graduate of MICA</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Public Art Specialist</td>
<td>Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Newspapers as Data*

Another type of qualitative research involves the collection and examination of textual documents. “Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation—‘the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon’…The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods” (Bowen 2009, 28). Because I had relatively few interviews, it was important to find other sources that would add opinions, feelings, and general information about Baltimore street art. For this thesis, I gathered twenty-five newspaper articles from *The Baltimore Sun*, *The City Paper*, *Yes! Magazine*, and *The Baltimore Brew*. Each source has an “About”
section which explains the purpose of the newspaper. The Baltimore Sun describes itself as:

…a media company rooted in award-winning journalism, which harnesses proprietary technology to present personalized, premium content to a global audience in real time… [It] draws content from its vast media portfolio, where a commitment to informing and inspiring communities has earned 92 Pulitzer Prizes and a monthly audience of 60 million. From pixels to Pulitzers, tronc [owner of The Sun] brands optimize content and create engaging experiences for audiences across all channels.

The City Paper About section states:

City Paper has been dedicated to giving the Baltimore metropolitan area an alternative source of news and opinions on local politics, communities, culture, and the arts. More than 300,000 readers turn to us every week for Baltimore's most comprehensive calendar of events; coverage of the latest in movies, music, visual arts, and the printed word; provocative voices on topics ranging from sports to sex to cyberspace to City Hall; and stories they won't find anywhere else… We use more than 1,600 yellow street vending machines and circulate in more than 1,800 locations in the metropolitan Baltimore area. Baltimore City Paper's innovative website, City Paper Online, easily reaches web users in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. metropolitan area, as well as around the country and world. … The site currently averages 300,000 unique visitors and 1.75 million page views per month.

It is important to note that tronc Inc. owns both The Baltimore Sun and City Paper. Yes! Magazine, however, has different ownership and is not based in Baltimore. On their website they say: “YES! Magazine reframes the biggest problems of our time in terms of their solutions. Online and in print, we outline a path forward with in-depth analysis, tools for citizen engagement, and stories about real people working for a better world.” It is important to understand how these sources of news define themselves and furthermore how this definition influences the stories they publish. I used Google and searched relevant terms which represent themes such as “street art,” “graffiti,” “Freddie Gray,”
“public art,” and “murals.” The Sun, City Paper, and Yes! Magazine were the ones that discussed these terms the most. These newspapers all contributed opinions and voices which expanded my data set. The content of newspapers provides information about events, critiques of artists and city politics, and people who I could not access.

Processing and Analyzing Data

The process of coding qualitative interviews and documents reduces data to more manageable sizes and identifies important themes. I followed the steps of coding as recommended by Meghan Cope (2010) who wrote about coding as a technique within grounded theory. Grounded theory is commonly used in conjunction with coding because the data become the source for creating new theoretical concepts. In essence, the theory is “grounded” in the research. There are, of course, different types of coding such as latent, manifest, descriptive, and in vivo. However, for this study analytic coding most closely matches my goals and the types of data I gathered. According to Cope, analytic codes “reflect a theme the researcher is interested in or one that has already become important in the project. Analytic codes typically dig deeper into the processes and context of phrases or action” (Cope 2010, 283). The first stage in the coding process is open coding, or initial coding. Charmaz (2006) mentions that in this step it is important to keep an open mind to the themes present in the data and in turn, this becomes one of the first steps in analysis. I used open coding for roughly half of my data in order to find meanings, actions, events, and experiences. In MicrosoftWord, I read line-by-line asking questions such as “what is happening here?”, “what is the interviewee describing?”, “how does this instance relate to others?”, and “what is the main point being discussed?” I
made comments on the documents which reflected my answers to these questions. One important aspect of open coding is avoiding assumptions which limit what the data can tell us. To avoid this problem, line-by-line coding is often used to ensure researchers think critically and seek meaning. From this open process, the open codes can be categorized into bigger, broader, thematic ideas. They form the basis of focused coding, wherein the researcher develops a relational coding structure with important themes. Structuring codes is critical because it keeps ideas organized and therefore understanding the relationships between them is simple. Cope (2010) indicates that coding structure “enables the data to be organized in such a way that patterns, commonalities, relationships, correspondences, and even disjunctions are identified and brought out for scrutiny” (284). For the focused coding process, I used Nvivo software to create codes or as Nvivo calls them “nodes.” I gradually read through my interviews and newspaper articles and assigned sections of text to themes. Sometimes, one chunk of text fit more than one theme and because coding involves taking text out of context, there must be enough text to understand the meaning. These double meanings can be very important analytical moments wherein contradictions, relationships, motives and power dynamics show through. Once the text was thematically organized, it became possible to write a thematic and narrative analysis diving into more depth about the themes.
CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS STREET ART?

“How is street art defined and promoted in Baltimore neighborhoods?” This question is closely tied to this research and must be addressed to understand how street art is used to resist oppression and how it contributes to the Black Lives Matter movement. Major ideas such as justice, community, and power were discussed in detail by interviewees and newspapers. These are taken into consideration in defining street art. Additionally, the information presented in this and the following chapters is related to the main themes laid out in the literature review. Urban and public space, funding and value of the arts, controversies in public art, and racial discrimination all come into play when discussing how street art can be defined and how the City of Baltimore promotes it. At this point, introducing key players is necessary. Just like other cities, Baltimore does not exist in a vacuum. People and events enter into the scene freely and bring with them new ideas, initiatives, opinions, and feelings. These all interact, contribute to complex dynamics, and provide context for the data used to answer research questions.

As mentioned in the methods chapter, MICA and BOPA are two entities with a strong presence in Baltimore’s arts scene. Both are mentioned in interviews and newspapers here and are discussed significantly and consistently throughout this study. MICA, or the Maryland Institute College of Art, is a school of fine arts located in central Baltimore. Established in 1826, it is one of the oldest and best-known colleges of art in North America (About MICA 2016). MICA’s Masters of Fine Arts in Community Arts program is especially closely connected to this study. Students in this program work with communities to initiate and complete art projects, including, but not limited to, murals.
and street paintings. They favor a bottom-up approach which values the input of neighborhood members above all else. Students also learn about grant writing and art education in the program and use these skills while working with communities. Because this line of study emphasizes community engagement, many students continue their professional careers as arts administrators at local arts nonprofits in Baltimore. This connection means that MICA’s Community Arts students are intertwined with decision making about arts at multiple scales.

BOPA also works closely with the community but on a different level because of its status as a semi-governmental entity. The Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts is a 501 c (3) nonprofit organization which functions as the city’s arts council. Their primary goal is to “make Baltimore a more vibrant and creative city” (BOPA 2016). Historically, BOPA was a city government entity but funding and budget cuts made it necessary for the two to separate. This enabled BOPA to fundraise privately without conflict of interest. One longstanding effort sponsored by BOPA has been its mural program which began in 1975. Started under former Mayor William Donald Schaefer, the program seeks “to make Baltimore neighborhoods more attractive, instill a sense of pride, provide employment for local artists in their own field, combat graffiti in neighborhoods, and engage young people in the beautification of their own communities” (BOPA 2016). This initiative has created a tradition of mural making in Baltimore and enabled local artists to engage with neighborhoods on a deeper level. However, because of BOPA’s connection with government, it is associated with institutional power and potentially gentrification.
Other main players are the Creative Alliance and Jubilee Arts. Both have close relationships with MICA and BOPA but function more at the neighborhood level with slightly smaller projects. Creative Alliance is located in Highlandtown, a diverse neighborhood in southeastern Baltimore, and supports a growing Latino presence in the city through collaborative arts projects and creative spaces. Jubilee Arts is located in Sandtown-Winchester, Freddie Gray’s former neighborhood, and struggles with vacancy, economic problems, and drug abuse. It focuses on creating a space for art, engaging youth in mural projects, and remembering the historic neighborhood’s most famous residents, such as Thurgood Marshall and Billie Holiday. Jubilee Arts has been significantly involved in justice-motivated projects following the Baltimore uprising in 2015.

Key events also come into play while exploring definitions of street art. One mentioned frequently by news outlets and in interviews is Open Walls, the street art festival in Baltimore’s Station North neighborhood. The festival is described on the Open Walls Baltimore website as an “unparalleled street art project managed by and located in the Station North Arts & Entertainment District” (Open Walls Baltimore 2014). The project was curated by Gaia, a well-known artist who splits his time between Baltimore and traveling the world. While there are diverse opinions about Open Walls—it has come under fire in recent years for its lack of community outreach and support for local artists—it has majorly affected the artistic community in Baltimore and will be discussed in more depth.
Another important actor is Wall Hunters which uses street art to call attention to vacant, derelict, and dangerous houses across Baltimore. The project is a collaboration between local street artist Nether and Carol Ott, the politically engaged director of the organization Housing Policy Watch. Ott’s nonprofit focuses on grassroots advocacy that highlights neglect by Baltimore landlords and works with Nether to shame them into fixing properties they own. Though controversial, the Wall Hunters project has been successful at publicizing neglect problems and sometimes even convincing landlords to do something about their properties. An added bonus is that the murals are well made and visually pleasing to many. That, however, has not kept Wall Hunters out of court.

Defining Street Art

As discussed in the literature review, street art is ambiguous and many disagree on the precise qualities that mark its characteristics. Though it is often equated with graffiti and illegality, this was not quite the case in conversations with interviewees or in Baltimore newspapers. Although the question of whether illegal creations can be considered “art” is interesting, it falls outside the scope of this research. Instead, interviewees commented on how they understand street art and the aspects that unite it. In particular, they responded to questions about how to draw the lines between street art, graffiti, and public art. Seeing as these lines can sometimes blur, there was not necessarily consensus among interviewees.

A key finding of this research is that street art is difficult to define. Interviewees offered ideas about how broad the term street art can actually be and the types of
activities it includes. Note that all interviewees’ names have been changed to protect their identities. Patricia, an artist and educator at MICA, mentioned:

Street art can be organized ok… it can incorporate everything. It could incorporate every genre of art, it can be performance, it can be painting, it can be sculptural forms, it can be oral histories as you go walking down the street. It depends on what one views as art and again, art is in the eye and ear, in my opinion, of the beholder. It can be used as a catalyst to incite change, to facilitate change, to coerce change it can be beautiful and terrible. It can have a terrible—I’ll put it this way, it can have a terrible, terrible beauty to it. It can be painful it can be inspiring, that’s what I see. But it is about the people more so than a person or an entity.

In this statement, Patricia recognized the vague qualities of street art. She remarks that it can encompass anything and that it certainly depends on who is viewing it and how. Street art, to Patricia, is enlightening in a “painful” way. One interpretation of this is that its complexity makes one think about powerful subjects. An obvious concept to note and keep in mind is that street art is, of course, on the street. Because street art is a largely urban phenomenon, Baltimore presents ample opportunities for it to be created. Hard, outdoor surfaces are key to creating a piece of street art. Furthermore, Patricia makes specific note that the way she sees street art corresponds to groups of people rather than individuals or establishments.

Hazel, a local artist who has painted murals in Baltimore, also struggles to define street art but thought of it in relation to a mural she was fond of. She said: “I mean there’s a mural … I don’t know if it would really fall in the category of street art but there is…a really nice mural on Maryland Avenue…” When Hazel thinks of street art, the image conjured is that of a general wall painting that she likes. According to these two informants, street art is not easily categorized. Both interviewees pause momentarily
while they try to find their words, signaling that they are concentrating on finding the proper way to describe street art. Pauses such as these are markers that suggest a change of mind or shift in thinking. This suggests that street art is difficult to define and talk about. Their statements mirror findings that speak to the difficulty of defining street art.

Activism and Protest in Baltimore Street Art

Patricia remarked on street art’s potential to bring people together for change and inspiration. This is a critically important element for Baltimoreans talking and writing about street art. In fact, other sources echo Patricia’s feelings about street art capturing a socially and politically engaged point of view. An article entitled “Putting the art back in street art” by Baynard Woods, a writer at the City Paper, critiques the street art festival in Baltimore, Open Walls, and compares it with what he views as a more constructive arts endeavor, Wall Hunters. Woods writes:

The best street art has always had a subversive, political bent. In fact, Wall Hunters—curated by the street artist Nether in conjunction with Carol Ott, a Republican who runs Housing Policy Watch, to draw attention to vacant houses in Baltimore—feels, as a whole, so much more successful than Open Walls because it maintains this political edge. Nether is able to accomplish the rare task of seeking community input by taking their side against an enemy, helping them draw attention to the deplorable condition of some of the vacants in their neighborhoods. And instead of using public money…he is privately funded. It feels rebellious and punk and yet also righteous.

This quotation mentions a few things that are specific to Baltimore—namely local artist Nether (the same artist who created the Freddie Gray mural), Baltimore’s vacancy problem, an arts program designed to address the crisis, and the city’s unique brand of community activism. The Wall Hunters street art project captures this activism well, according to the City Paper, specifically calling attention to its success at being an edgy
way to protest. Essentially, Woods argues that this form of activism embodies the best, most successful, street art. Open Walls, on the other hand, has been significantly criticized in the print media and by interviewees. The festival gathers together roughly twenty artists from across the world to create pieces in the Station North neighborhood in downtown Baltimore. Up until now, there have been two rounds, one in 2012 and another in 2014. Open Walls has been criticized for failing to include equal representation from women and local artists and has also lacked input and participation from the surrounding community.

These criticisms from neighborhood groups such as the People’s Power Assembly illuminate some of the priorities of Baltimoreans involved in the arts. Joe, a community organizer and artist, agreed. He called attention to the events surrounding the Black Lives Matter uprising in Baltimore when several buildings in his neighborhood were set on fire. Because of his work, Joe is an advocate for street art that makes an impact on the neighborhoods where he works. He said:

"Studying aesthetics to me is very important when you talk about art because the underlying principles people are using behind art and community is really important. That’s where you get at the heart of what people are really doing and why. So …a street artist that’s doing street art is much more relevant and important to the community than someone you paid a lot of money to come in and do what they do. And I think [in] Baltimore because it’s trying to very much push empowerment and transformative change that you get people that represent … You know what, we don’t want to just fund another mural that’s just pleasing to the eye. We want stuff that’s going to speak about what we’re challenging because when you’re in a community, when things are burning down, it’s the forethought. You don’t want to be having conversations about race on burning buildings on top of rubble on top of burned down buildings and if you have these conversations beforehand… that’s when they’re authentic that’s when they’re earnest."
Joe’s statements are powerful. He emphasizes the creation of street art and murals that embody more than just pretty paintings. His view is that any mural which engages with socio-political challenges facing the community is far better than a “top-down” approach that enlists an artist to come in and make a painting solely for the sake of having a pretty painting on the wall. He advocates for pieces that call attention to the very specific racial tensions that exist in Baltimore communities. Additionally, he implies that street art engaged with these issues can lead to productive conversations that encourage change, especially in light of the Baltimore uprising. Joe says that street art can be used as a tool to foster empowerment and transformative change. Putting positive and inspiring messages that respond directly to local challenges in the urban landscape can, according to Joe, make an impact. Such action can also deter violence and reduce frustration if done right.

Another interviewee, Maria, a public art specialist who works for BOPA, questions the term street art, not knowing where to place it. She sees it in relation to public art. She remarks that it should respond to and engage with events and people in Baltimore.

I see street art very much as this sort of I don’t know how to explain it… a new name for something that is already in existence but it’s essentially hip public art. I would even venture to say that it’s falling out of fashion as a term. I think people are starting to get kind of bored of that name … I’m convinced that in like four years it will be called something completely different because …thinking of public art as something very stale often geometric and unaccessible and not engaging or too permanent, not responsive enough to the now. The benefits of doing what I think a traditional understanding of what street art is far more temporary, far more quick.
Once again, a critical aspect of Maria’s definition of street art is that it engages with people and responds to current events. While this statement does not specifically mention political activism, the term “hip public art” Maria uses alludes to art which is new, innovative, and accessible. She calls attention to the idea of defining something by what it is not, rather than what it is. In terms of contrasting street art with public art, street art is neither stale nor lacking commentary on society. To Maria, the line between street art and public art involves engaging with current events and local people. Public art summons ideas of random shapes that do not encourage viewers to think critically or react to challenging ideas. Maria’s idea of street art is that it is fundamentally current, easy to understand, and participates in the social landscape of the city.

Another article, written by Tim Smith of The Baltimore Sun, confirms Maria’s feelings. The piece discusses a collaborative street art event with artists from Buenos Aires called “Roots/Raices.” The event was organized specifically to bring together Latin and American artists to explore social and racial issues. Collaborators include Matt Fox-Tucker, Alfredo Segatori, Pablo Machioli, and Richard Best. The mural they created together pictures an early species of human called “Homo naledi,” suggesting our common ancestry. Tim Smith writes, “Alfredo Segatori felt pretty strongly about expressing what's going on in society,’ … Segatori said he considered the mural ‘like a mirror to look back at our roots, where we came from,’ as well as ‘to show the reality of the society that we live in,’ a world where ‘there is still a lot of violence and intolerance.’”
The Argentine artists relate to the racial struggles Baltimore faces because of a history of prejudice against indigenous peoples. There is common moral ground between the artists and they all care about making art that visually represents prejudices that affect their homes. In Baltimore, racial violence and intolerance have been at the forefront of political conversations and the media. After Freddie Gray’s death, artists responded with pieces on this topic. It is common for artists to reflect on problems in society through their work and this transcends international boundaries. Another article from the City Paper recorded an interview with Baltimore muralist Ernest Shaw, Jr., who created pieces for impoverished neighborhoods in the 1990s. J.M. Giordano of the City Paper asked:

‘What advice do you give to the next generation of muralists?’ to which Shaw replied ‘Know thyself. Recognize that artists are responsible for socially documenting their times, raising the collective consciousness of society, creating places where people can connect with loved ones (living or transitioned), and spearheading movements. Our gifts are not for our benefit solely.’

Shaw’s answer to Giordano’s question emphasizes introspection and critical thinking among artists. In other words, artists should depict things they care deeply about in society. He emphasizes the obligation to serve as illuminators, paying attention to socially relevant issues. He also notes that artists are endowed with the ability to represent topics in a way that others cannot. Sometimes, Shaw says, artists instigate and lead social movements. They even act as historians occasionally. In a city that has recently seen social unrest, street art and murals can connect people and memorialize those who have passed. It is not uncommon to see messages of hope and condolences on
city streets. Shaw is a seasoned veteran of socially aware street art and wants other artists to carry the torch for more enlightened and engaged society.

Shaw’s feelings are shared by Maura Callahan of the *City Paper*. They both feel that artists should participate in social movements. She discusses the ethics of political art and expresses strong anti-hypocritical feelings:

If an artist creates political images in support of a movement to be exhibited in a museum or gallery, but fails to participate in the movement's activism directly, there is an obvious gap between the ideas their art communicates and the ideas it intends to represent. If artists are to make effective political art, they must be directly involved in the movement…and not be totally isolated in their studio. And even when art is made in direct proximity to revolt, it should not be seen as a symbol of a movement, but as a result of that movement. Those artworks exist and they are effective because they express the anger, despair, or perplexity of injustice.

Though this quote does not specifically use the term street art, it does mention art that may be on the streets. When Callahan says, “direct proximity to revolt” it is easy to see how this connects to protests and movements occurring in neighborhoods where street art is voicing the opinions of those involved. Not only does she mention the necessity of participating in the movements an artist is calling attention to, she discusses how pieces can be site-specific and very connected to the walls they adorn. Pieces of art can convey the feeling and mood of protests in a way that other media cannot because they are isolated within the safe walls of a gallery.

Overall, social justice is a very important component of street art. The quotes presented above argue that street artists can be catalysts for social movements. They do more than just paint good-looking pictures. Rather, their art puts a social and political message in public space. Some projects are more successful at this than others, but
regardless, they have strong ethical and moral meanings attached to them. The implications here are that in order to be qualified as street art, social justice and protest are key motivators.

**Community Connections in Street Art**

The above section discusses how political and social protest are essential characteristics of street art. This idea is connected to another very important feature which categorizes street art in Baltimore—its connection with the community where it is located. The two issues go hand in hand. An article from *The Baltimore Sun* quoted international artist Matt Fox-Tucker: “What interests me in particular with street art in Baltimore is that it feels really connected to the community…It is a form of protest, if you like, but it's also about trying to bring communities together.” Fox-Tucker recognizes the importance of protest but makes specific comments about Baltimore’s community-based art. He sees this as a unique and positive aspect of Baltimore’s art scene. Connections to the community are important because of the social justice components. For instance, street art is good at showing political protest but it means more when it represents real people in a real place. It is an outlet for their voices, the things they care about, and want. Art done this way represents more than just one artist who puts a piece where they want it. An article about Open Walls by Julie Scharper of *The Baltimore Sun* highlights important and specific elements of Baltimore’s history with street art:

Baltimore has sponsored mural programs since the 1960s and more than 170 have been painted on city walls in the past 27 years. It's only recently that the city has emerged as an important hub for street art. Most of the city's mural projects have historically been "community-driven," said Bill Gilmore, executive director of the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the
Arts. Neighborhood leaders would choose an artist, theme and wall and approach BOPA for funding, he said.

Scharper calls attention to BOPA. This semi-governmental nonprofit organization provides support to arts initiatives across the city and works very closely with the Mayor’s Office. In the past, the City of Baltimore had an arts council called the Mayor’s Advisory Council on Arts and Culture that was directly connected to the city. Cuts to funding meant that the Council had to separate from the city. This led to the creation of BOPA and opened the door for fundraisers. As mentioned, historically, Baltimore has supported community driven murals. The city emphasizes a “bottom-up” approach to street art and murals wherein neighborhood residents collaborate on ideas for art pieces and reach out for support to complete them. This contrasts with public art initiatives which begin either with a single artist or a large entity such as the city government or a business. Giving voice to community members is a priority in Baltimore.

Because of this bottom-up tradition in Baltimore, Open Walls was criticized for lacking the community input that Baltimore street art often has. Again, Julie Scharpe of the Baltimore Sun writes:

Some question whether the Open Walls muralists seek enough participation from the community. As Gaia laid out the design on the wall on a Sunday evening, members of the activist group the People's Power Assembly, which meets across the street, questioned why there had not been more advance notice of the project. Gaia said that he and the Station North group had reached out to community leaders, but — although he wished he could — it would be impossible to speak with everyone who would live with the wall.

Open Walls is a complicated example that will be discussed in more depth throughout this study. Some laud it for bringing art into Station North while others criticize how little
residents have actually been involved. Artist Gaia is not blind to the importance of community; however, in this case it seemed more important to him and the Station North decision makers that the project was done on time. The goals of the project were different from other community-based projects. Again, they were publicly called out for diminishing the public’s role.

While it may not be immediately obvious to all why community input is important, it strongly relates to ideas about social activism and protest. An opinion in the *City Paper* indicates why community input is preferable for street art. Author Baynard Woods says:

> Everyone who lives in or even passes through a community sees a mural, but, by nature, only a few get to create it, or choose the subject matter. Bad or insensitive murals can feel assaulting to the resident or the passerby, so the community feels a right to be included. And yet, everyone has a different version of “bad” and every mural, however great to some people, will be bad to someone. And those unfortunate pieces that try not to offend end up hated by all.

This statement reminds readers how controversial street art can be. As Woods says, only a few can be in charge when designing a piece but all must live with it once it is completed. Tastes in art vary as does the control over what people see in their neighborhoods every day. Woods argues that pieces that try too hard to please everyone end up being widely disliked and unrepresentative of local people. There is no such thing as policy that suits every person; however, those that generalize can be criticized for their lack of depth. The same can be said about “vanilla” public art which tries to be too neutral. Interviewees called attention to different ways this is approached in the
Baltimore arts community. Kevin, an arts educator and theorist, discussed Open Walls in Station North saying:

They don’t interact with the community, they don’t hold dialogues, nobody asked the community. It’s a mostly African American community but it also has this little street of Korean restaurants and in one respect it’s cool that there’s a huge portrait of one of the owners of the Korean restaurant like fifteen stories tall but the local community that’s mostly black [is] saying why did you pick him? He doesn’t live in the community, he comes, he works. It’s not a bad thing but somebody, neither the Korean or the black community decided what to put on the wall and I heard there’s at least a hundred thousand dollars’ worth of money invested in those murals… And that usually means some form of power whether its collective power, negotiated power or authoritarian power decides what goes on the wall. Hopefully it’s more of a consensus based collective decision.

Kevin’s opinion reflects distress over the way Open Walls went about deciding the topic for a large mural. He argues that it does not represent those that live in the neighborhood and they had no say in deciding what it depicted. Kevin believes a lack of consensus in Station North led to the project having an authoritarian air. Collective decisions can lead to art that is more well-liked and respected among community members.

How power dynamics affect the surrounding communities regarding street art will be addressed in more depth in later sections. However, here, we can learn important aspects of power which help to define street art. Given comments about street art contributing to activist causes, we can appreciate why community driven art does more to capture social justice. Group efforts in Baltimore neighborhoods, as opposed to arts endeavors which stem from individuals or those in power positions, can much more accurately represent the values of people who live there.
Street Art’s Legality

A theme which produced a greater diversity of opinion is the degree to which street art is sanctioned. Some statements from newspapers and interviewees raise questions over whether or not a unifying characteristic of street art is its illicit creation on walls. At this point, it is important to note that oftentimes mural and street art are used in the same breath. Joe, artist and community organizer, arrives at his definition of street art through his understanding of graffiti:

I think public art is supposed to be art that’s functioning. I think that so many artists like Banksy have brought that up. What you do with street art is basically what you do with a canvas. It’s just the legality of it and the bodies that are doing it and the state sanctioning that goes with it. So a lot of the murals you see around the city like Greg Biels which has a native American in it … was to show like there’s a present native community [and] indigenous presence here.

Joe brings up the idea that street art is fundamentally illegally created; however, he thinks hegemonic forces view it as such because of perceptions of who is creating the street art. His statement repeats ideas of power playing a role in the definition of street art. He says “state sanctioning” is the deciding factor making street art illegal and notes that street art is, in essence, the same as paintings created on a canvas. Joe also switches from the term street art to the word mural abruptly, leading to questions of whether they can actually be considered the same thing. He mentions the function of street art, and how it should serve a purpose. He uses an example of a mural that reminds viewers of the native peoples in Baltimore. Joe’s statement wraps the ideas of social purpose and community function into one message while simultaneously discussing questions of legality.
Other interviewees agree that street art may be illegal. However, they opine that unsanctioned art is not necessarily unwelcome. Often, they express their ideas in conjunction with those of the socially-minded concepts discussed earlier. Hazel says:

So that was definitely a kind of guerilla action although I’d say a more socially-conscious one than somebody just spraying graffiti … just to say I am here [laugh] and commanding the space. They had a more political purpose … a more activist purpose. And that was going on for a while …. it was in some of those neighborhoods where there [were] abandoned houses and slum landlords and they were trying to shame people into doing something. And I think … the residents were like yeah, good.

Hazel references Wall Hunters to make her points. Though the landowners in this case have not sanctioned the paintings, they have been received well by viewers. Though it is technically illegal, many think it is a necessary and provocative project. She also continues to compare street art with graffiti, making clear distinctions between the two practices. Hazel uses the term “guerilla” to capture associations with the “underground” nature of unsanctioned art. This calls to mind aspects of street art and graffiti which may be similar under certain circumstances. Graffiti writers and street artists who wish to remain anonymous sometimes take to the streets at night. This way it is harder to catch them if they do not have permission to create their pieces. Hazel goes on to flesh out some of the distinctions between street art and graffiti:

I think graffiti sometimes is unwelcome … to me … I have a problem with people just deciding it’s ok to spray their name all over something … it does belong to our public space and … it can be kind of depressing to me … in New York it got really out of hand for a while and the subway cars were all covered … maybe it doesn’t feel so great to just have it all marked up by people who just feel like it … some of whom are not very skilled either. It’s not very pleasant to look at, just writing your name all over something … but that I guess is the distinction.
Hazel distinguishes graffiti from street art and notes that street art is pleasant to look at and requires skill. The artistic merit of street art is distinct from that of graffiti, though graffiti writing can have merits. New York, of course, is well known for graffiti on trains with some liking it and others feeling that it leads to decay. Ownership of the city is an important concept that intertwines with illegal art. However, Hazel thinks that skilled art that is pleasant to look at is desired by citizens. Maria from BOPA says:

I think they’re all forms of public art. I think that it’s just a different name for things that have been in existence since people were painting on caves. … It’s just fashion, what name it takes sometimes… you can just see the care that people put into a project and whether or not it’s good or bad is so clear to you as a viewer. Whether it’s something that’s thoughtful or just a throw up … I guess really it could just come down to whether something’s sanctioned or not … when I think of graffiti I think more of marking territory.

Maria comments on differences between street art and graffiti, placing them both under the umbrella of public art, a term which often does not conjure ideas of illegality. However, she says definitions could come down to sanctioning or not. That said, she views graffiti as a territorial act rather than an artistic one. She is more interested in the thoughtfulness and care put into a piece, remarking that the viewer can tell if something is just haphazardly put on a wall or whether it is skilled art. She maintains the idea that graffiti’s purpose is to mark places as territory rather than calling attention to justice with powerful ideas. Morgan Showalter, responding to a Baltimore Sun article called “Street riding is a Baltimore art form,” writes:

Take for instance graffiti, an equally controversial activity, which is at best an urban catharsis, more likely blight, and rarely art. Few are the true artists who rise above a pedestrian activity.

So what is art? This question has been asked since the time of Plato. Perhaps in this case we should ask, what is not art?
Anything can be done artistically, masterfully, with a skill above and beyond the ordinary and that somehow communicates at a transcendent level.

These comments call graffiti into question again but they suggest that in order for a piece to be considered art, it must be special in its level of skill. This is one way that street art rises above the “pedestrian” level. Local Baltimore artist, Nether, spoke with *The Baltimore Sun* about a piece he made depicting Trayvon Martin, a young black man who was killed and is now associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. According to *The Sun*:

> Nether said he didn't ask permission from the building owners before pasting up the posters, and acknowledged that what he's doing is ‘on the gray side’ of the law.

> He said that's why he uses wheat paste — a mix of flour, water and wood glue that is less permanent than the paints used for graffiti. He paints his images on top of a heavy graphic paper, which can easily be scrubbed off.

That said, even though permission was not granted, the piece was not referred to as graffiti. The title of the article, “Trayvon Martin depicted in Baltimore street art series,” clearly places Nether’s work in the category of street art. Though the piece was not sanctioned (it was placed on an abandoned building in the center of Baltimore) it is not referred to as graffiti. This demonstrates that perhaps the illegality of street art is not one of its defining characteristics or uniting features. Arguably, graffiti is seen as more illegal than street art, otherwise graffiti might be more newsworthy, with more articles written about graffiti popping up across town. Regardless of its illegality, Nether’s art is referred to as art based on the skill required to create the piece. Graffiti is not commonly seen in the same light as a piece of art. Therefore, the wheat pasting of Trayvon Martin is considered street art whether or not it was created with permission. Often, discourse can
reveal a great deal about how terms are defined. One of the most telling statements in Baltimore newspaper articles was one from Ernest Shaw, Jr., an artist who created many murals across the city in the 1990s. He spoke with interviewer J.M. Giordano of the City Paper who asked: “What's your opinion on graffiti-art murals as opposed to the more traditional ones?’ Shaw replied: ‘Murals are murals. Paintings are paintings.’”

Though sometimes street art’s legality is called into question, it should be noted that this is not something that is absolutely necessary to be classified as street art. Rather, whether street art requires skill and is in demand, seems more important. If street art’s nature as an unsanctioned act was paramount, perhaps interviewees and newspapers would refer to it as graffiti. More often, street art is equated with murals in Baltimore.

Of course, it is impossible to reach consensus and draw one conclusion when it comes to urban art. According to interviewees, it seems that the defining characteristics of Baltimore street art pieces are their messages of activism and justice, their connection with the community, their noticeable artistic skill, the degree to which they are liked by the community, and perhaps some sort of guerilla action. These qualities interplay significantly with city power dynamics and the socio-political aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Promotion of Street Art by the City of Baltimore

After discussing the elements that define street art and separate it from other art projects such as graffiti and public art, questions about how the City of Baltimore promotes street art are important to address. Government influences the laws, the way money flows, and how street art is valued in the city. Politics are incredibly relevant to
urban art and sometimes reflect hidden hegemonic power relationships. The promotion of street art in Baltimore is a complex process but arguably city officials are quite supportive. This attitude might come from the tradition of wall paintings initiated by Mayor Schaefer in the 1970s. According to a story in the City Paper by J.M. Giordano:

“In the fall of 1973, Baltimore's iconic mayor William Donald Schaefer had a ‘bright’ idea. The same man who would pull the Inner Harbor from the sludge of industry to become a tourist destination a decade later wanted to do something about the city's walls. They were ‘dull and drab,’ he told The Sun at the time. So the ‘Do It Now’ mayor helped secure a $10,000 grant, Sears donated the paint, and the mission to brighten up Baltimore's neighborhoods was on.” Schaefer’s ideas have persisted today— the city government is viewed as a pro-arts entity by many.

In learning about the City of Baltimore’s perspective, Maria discussed the role policies play in promotion of street art at BOPA. After all, it is the Office of Promotion and the Arts. She said:

We haven’t been aggressive in terms of implementing any kind of permitting process for murals which is definitely a trend nationally to move in that direction and it’s only a matter of time before that bubbles up [and] becomes a problem and we have to make that happen but there are not any restrictions at all. If you have permission from the property owner and get whatever sidewalk permitting you need to put a lift on it and we strongly encourage people to conduct community outreach before they put any kind of project up. And that’s like we make recommendations for best practices but we don’t currently restrict that.

Maria’s discussion of restrictions or lack thereof shows support for street art in Baltimore. The encouragement of murals is important because it means less red tape and greater likelihood of a piece being completed. Though technically this does not extend to
illicit street art, she described how the office deals with those issues. Remembering debates over illegality in street art, Maria’s statements are telling about the climate that influences it. She remarked:

We try not to stop unsanctioned work in general… We can’t really do much to protect work that is unsanctioned … for example … there’s this bridge that is up the street where they regularly tag it and recently an artist did a really nice, quick, line drawing on the bridge … and the department of transportation … reached out to us and were like ‘oh is this an arts project?’ We think somebody maybe applied to do this as an arts project in the past but we don’t have evidence that we granted the permit and if we don’t grant the permit then we can’t necessarily leave it up there … so even though it’s a piece and I actually kind of like it, I think it’s great, we can’t necessarily protect it. What I can say is ‘let me try to find the artist so if it is something they created intentionally’ … at least do the digging to try as best I can [to] protect the work. But we don’t have a leg to stand on legally.

Maria mentioned that though art projects that have not been sanctioned may look nice, without the paperwork, BOPA cannot legally step in to protect pieces of street art. This shows a tension between the values of BOPA as supporters of street art and the legal process that must be followed. Maria’s feelings show that she sees merit in street art pieces and the BOPA office goes beyond the average call of duty and retroactively tries to permit work that shows skill. Maria says:

For example there’s a graffiti warehouse which is in Station North and they have an alley that is a privately-owned space but it’s a free wall. We’ve been supportive of organizations that are trying to create additional free wall sites … there’s a group called Section One that’s trying to develop an art park in the area … we are supportive of the project we just can’t say ‘yes we permit you to do something on a location that we don’t own or have control over’ so that’s all we can do. So call us if you need to know how to get a permit or something like that.

From Maria’s point of view, BOPA even attempts to develop spaces for graffiti-style art to be created. Legal walls and sites such as those owned by Section One are where
graffiti writing and more formal street art intersect. The Mayor’s Office recently tried to combine the two ideas. Kevin stated:

I really haven’t seen that much illegal graffiti in the last few years. There was a crackdown by the former Mayor, Mayor O’Malley and they have a quasi-partnership with MICA about doing murals as an anti-graffiti thing. I don’t know how deep that was of a relationship because I never heard anything more about it and I was teaching a murals class then…there were some politics involved but for whatever reason I haven’t seen that much illegal graffiti. And of course where you see it is I believe often more about power or anti power…

Kevin’s knowledge of Mayor O’Malley’s initiative demonstrates the City’s appreciation for graffiti art and the desire to enlist artists to create something more widely enjoyed. While the city offices reject involvement in such projects and criminalize graffiti, projects like this attempt to bring communities together, celebrating efforts that reflect skill and beauty.

Joe mentioned similar projects in Highlandtown where officials sought graffitists to help create murals. He said:

So when I think of graffiti here I think I give it credit because through public works projects…it’s really empowered a lot of artists who would otherwise just do graffiti, to do things in the name of the city. So that’s a really beautiful part about being here at this particular time in Baltimore because there’s a lot of granted funding to hire local artists. A lot of the local artists first started out as graffiti or delving into that … the fact that artists here in Baltimore can fund their projects and can do large-scale projects with the support of the city, that’s very important.

Joe’s message is that the city helps to channel the artistic talents and spirits of young people interested in graffiti writing. They are encouraged to get involved with arts and this might be contributing to the decline of graffiti in the area. The city plays off the strengths of graffitists and generally supports creation of pieces. On the topic of support,
funding from the city and BOPA is crucial. Maria helps secure grants for arts projects in Baltimore. Obviously, money is critical to getting anything done in any city. Some are critical of money given to arts projects when there are so many other needs in Baltimore. However, often the two go hand-in-hand. Maria mentions a program which provides money for artists to work with vacant lots. She recognizes the need for street art made in collaboration with communities:

I also manage grant programs through community organizations and artisans interested in working with communities. That includes a program called the transformative art prize which offers up to $30,000 in funding for artists and communities that want to work together to create large-scale works of art whether they be sculptural or murals. …and that sort of started a program called lots alive which is a granting program for artists interested in creating temporary arts programming or installations for vacant lots within the city of Baltimore.

The grants support goals that turn an eyesore into an asset which can, in turn, influence the economic prospects of a neighborhood. Nina, an employee of an arts nonprofit on the west side of Baltimore, appreciated the support from BOPA. She also recounted its past when it was a direct city entity:

So it used to be a department in the city government and it has since become an independent nonprofit but it still has privileges that are reminiscent of being a city agency; that’s why we call it a quasi [government]. But I don’t quite equivocate [sic] the mayor’s office with BOPA because they’re independent of each other. If you’re just talking about the arts council component, BOPA is super supportive and while it was our idea [for a mural project] there was no way that – I’m our only full-time employee – we could do that on our own. So it was critical that they came on board and they had the vision to make it big.

Nina’s organization participated in a project where assistance and sponsorship was crucial. They conduct a mural program with youth over the summer and recently decided to scale it up to include more young people. As a small nonprofit, in order for the vision
to be achieved, she needed resources which were scarce in her neighborhood. She felt positive about the working relationship with BOPA, saying:

I think it’s just a really good example of when government or quasi-government organizations work with community based organizations. You each have things that the other can’t do. For every mural you need a permit, or a contract, and you need insurance, and you need scaffolding. Someone that has a larger capacity, and a bigger budget, and more experience and has access to the city’s insurance policies …can just do so much more and know the right people to call in the mayor’s office to get the contract that you need.

Nina’s appreciation was clear and she remarked that relationships between community organizations and government were, all in all, good. When involving community in street art projects, as discussed, people become involved in their neighborhoods and the art reflects their values. Government on its own might not be as successful in integrating the visions of multiple players, including citizens. Nina saw the perspective nonprofits can provide to government, having experienced local issues and established trust. She commented:

If they just show up one day and do a project, the neighborhood’s going to be like ‘who the hell are you?’ They’re going to feel some way about it. So we really were able to play on each other’s strengths and figure out who should do what to be most effective. So in that sense it was [a] really advantageous partnership for both organizations... The city will make funding available and then they give it to BOPA to distribute so then they become the ones that send out the grant requests and review the proposals and take care of the details. So that’s how they work together. We really haven’t had any pushback from the city on different projects that we’ve done.

Again, Nina’s comments reflect a strong connection with BOPA and an appreciation for differences in strengths. Nina uses the term pushback to bring attention to relationships that might not be so strong. Other interviewees recounted examples of what happens
when the city does projects without enough input from communities. According to Hazel, one mural was particularly hated throughout the city and might have contributed to the emphasis on community-based policies. She said:

Generally you have to submit and they probably still have some provision for community input or input by the people who live in the building. I would assume … that’s pretty standard now… It wasn’t just the giant cat issue [laugh] these things happened all over the country. There was a very famous one, a controversy about a big Richard Serra sculpture, you know about that? (Me: Yeah) In New York City (Me: yes) in federal plaza (Me: yep). That case dragged on for a long time and got a lot of press. So I think government agencies don’t want people mad at them, they want this to be an amenity not a problem.

Hazel mentions two controversies, one in New York, with Richard Serra’s famous Tilted Arc, and the other in Baltimore. Earlier, the concepts and debates over Titled Arc were explored. In Baltimore, a giant cartoonish cat adorned the side of a very visible building. Whether it was the style or the subject matter of the mural that was disliked Hazel was not sure, but she did say “it caused an uproar and that’s the thing about public art. I think when people were first doing it they’re like ‘oh this is nice, people will like you know this is better than a blank wall.’” This case demonstrates that a painted wall is not always better and carelessness in public art is noticeable. These two instances, though nearly 200 miles apart, both show how wrong commissioned public art without community input can go. Despite relative success working with communities, the city government has its own goals and ideas about what murals should do for Baltimore. Fortunately, working with communities and local artists has been fairly successful in Baltimore though the main motivations for doing so might be complicated.
Development in Baltimore

As discussed in the literature review, cities aim to stimulate economic development through creative people and pursuits. In Baltimore, development is crucial to addressing its diminishing tax base, flight, and other economic problems. On Baltimore’s east side, the arts are being used to promote development. Here, the East Baltimore Development Inc (EDBI), another quasi-governmental entity, serves as an example. They partnered with MICA to develop a space for students in the Community Arts Master’s Program. This project took place after another development scheme, involving Johns Hopkins Hospital, forced residents to leave. Gerald Neily of the Baltimore Brew said:

In the area east of the massive demolition area, MICA PLACE signals EBDI’s engagement in a different strategy. Instead of starting over by tearing everything down, they are starting over by inviting students to be urban pioneers in the re-population of the now-mostly-empty territory. The program will be limited to graduate students, who should already know a few things about the real world, if not about urban renewal.

In this instance, EDBI sought to bring art students into a struggling community. Because the Johns Hopkins project has been viewed negatively—the number of vacant homes is still quite large—EDBI tried a different way. Art can have a huge impact on cash flow—often the recognition of artistic areas captures the eyes of those seeking “hip” and “funky” areas to capitalize on. Such a strategy can also take advantage of artists’ work and stimulate distrust and displacement among citizens. As socially-minded critical thinkers, artists typically do not like to be “used” to gentrify neighborhoods. Many might
argue using their work in this way diminishes its intrinsic value. After she was asked about times when artists and the city butted heads, Maria said:

Constantly I think. I think there is a lot of railing against the idea that we, at least in general, our office is not going back to that economic development side of it. I think that the artists resent the idea of being used as tools for gentrification and whether that’s what’s happening or not, for economic development, they don’t like to be used that way and nor should they.

Maria believes artists in Baltimore prefer art for art’s sake, rather than as a means to an end which may hurt communities. Neily emphasizes that the occupied houses are few and far between in the area. Neighborhoods facing this problem can be further impacted by development. Kevin remarked on the process saying:

Artists are often offered inexpensive studios and apartments and move in and they make a place look fashionable and interesting. And things move in, businesses, people are moved out and often the artists themselves can’t afford to live there anymore. But that is community development and if you look around Baltimore … there’s at least 20,000 vacant houses. It means nobody’s paying taxes, that money can’t go into the schools as tax money.

Kevin’s statements highlight two things. First, artists are used and then removed from areas to capture their success in transforming places. Second, Baltimore needs money for education and social services. Therefore, the arts are a good way to stimulate the economy; however, only when initiated in a way that holistically develops and empowers community members. Joe works with a nonprofit arts organization near the new MICA building in the Highlandtown neighborhood. His area has been doing comparatively well with new arts initiatives and increased diversity. However, the Station North neighborhood gets much more attention for its artistic movements. He said: “The mayor’s office has been supportive of different projects here and their public artworks programs
have been really fruitful and … there’s a report out there that does compare the Station [North]—I think it’s biased though because I know the lady that made it and she worked for Station North so…. “Clearly, Joe makes a distinction between Highlandtown and Station North. Though his statement does not specifically state the result of a report he mentions, he seems to believe it discusses the productive elements of arts in Baltimore and in Station North. He also mentions a potential bias towards Station North arts initiatives. The successes there seem to be related largely to the artistic climate, the presence of murals, and MICA’s main campus. Ben Stone from Station North believes the arts make a huge impact, that they are wanted, and that it drives economic prosperity there. Julie Scharper wrote:

Ben Stone, the district’s executive director, said that people clamored for a second round of murals after the first Open Walls project. The 22 murals from the first series add to the distinct character of the neighborhood, home to theaters, galleries, restaurants and studios. "I'd much rather pay someone to do a mural than put a big Station North sign out," said Stone. "We use it as a hook to get people to come in."

It is no surprise that when people come in, dollar signs go up. Officials are hoping that the murals in Station North will help Baltimore recover and look hip. It is this motivation that can be criticized as, once again, diminishing the intrinsic value of street art and murals. The classic street art anti-establishment attitude cannot be as impactful when an institution such as Station North Arts and Entertainment drives their development. This push is representative of a power dynamic which, though complex, is looking for a financial gain rather than emphasizing a developed, socially just, community. To Baynard Woods:
That might be why they have spent, according to SNAE Executive Director Ben Stone, “just over $100,000” on Open Walls Baltimore, the mural and street art project in Station North now in its second incarnation, which is transforming the look of the state-anointed arts and entertainment district. As the mayor said when she cut the ribbon for the Station North Arts and Entertainment District office (the Chicken Box) standing beneath a mural of a hand holding a dove, done by Gaia, the shaggy-haired wunderkind curator of Open Walls, “The vibrancy we see in Station North is what we need in order to grow Baltimore by 10,000 families over the next decade.” And everyone else follows suit: When people talk about Open Walls, they mainly talk about politics and economics, rather than aesthetics.

Again, Open Walls is called into question for its motivations. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake feels that Station North and Open Walls are great ways to expand the city’s tax base. Many of the quotes in this section suggest a balancing act when it comes to the city’s role in promoting street art. On the one hand, it pushes an economic message criticized for attracting “yuppies,” “hipsters,” and “young professionals”—Richard Florida’s so-called Creative Class—and pays scant attention to the citizens who already inhabit the city. On the other hand, in order for Baltimore to have quality social services, money for schools, and youth programs, a broader tax base and financial resources are necessary. How to navigate these two seemingly opposing views is difficult. Often, words used to describe street art’s promotion fall into line with discussions of gentrification. Economic development is sometimes considered to have more socially just connotations. Gentrification is often viewed without those positive connotations. Maria reminds us that there is always something to achieve in promoting street art:

Yeah, I think that it’s something that comes to grant speak. So, who are you? What are you trying to achieve? And how can something get supported? What are the benefits to what you’re doing? And so you identify what those benefits are and make those cases based on who you’re talking to and what their needs are.
You make partners that way. I’m much more from the economic development side.

Maria mentions that arts programming can be a great way to form partnerships. This statement takes community into consideration and recognizes that though the city may be seeing dollar signs, there can be many benefits to using street art and murals for building a strong community development network. Identifying the line between economic development and gentrification can be difficult. The next chapter discusses ways gentrification can be harmful to Baltimore communities in more depth.
CHAPTER 5: RESISTING OPPRESSION WITH STREET ART

Clearly, street art has an impact on citizens and communities. It serves many functions in Baltimore and is used as a tool to achieve multiple objectives. The perspective of the City of Baltimore is that street art can increase revenue, tax dollars, property values, and businesses in areas which capitalize on it. This is the case in the Station North neighborhood, in particular, where Open Walls is recognized as a helpful street art event by the government. However, many citizens in neighborhoods outside Station North do not share the same opinions. Rather, they resent gentrification and the attitudes associated with it. Some feel that there are ways to empower and encourage economic development without ignoring the people who already reside in these areas. Ironically, some development efforts only perpetuate poverty in Baltimore. One way to steer clear of these problems is via justice-inspired street art. Art that captures these sentiments can help neighborhood residents feel empowered, express themselves, and transform their streets into more positive assets. When created in collaboration, they strengthen community ties. By contrast, pieces created by white MICA students or nonlocal artists without buy-in from the community can alienate local artists and residents. According to interviewees and articles, there are ways to create street art that send messages of social justice while simultaneously being culturally sensitive, positive, and aesthetically pleasing, thus resisting racial oppression.

Gentrification’s Impact on Baltimore Neighborhoods

In the last chapter, the City’s role in promoting the arts and economic development was discussed. Another way to understand the complex factors surrounding
street art is to look at other voices and non-institutional opinions. Those outside of the hegemonic power structure sometimes view economic development through a lens which places it closer to its more sinister neighbor—gentrification. Every neighborhood is different but Station North comes into the discussion frequently as a place that is rapidly changing, becoming more expensive, and displacing longtime residents. Arguably, the tactics employed by Station North are hurtful to the people who have been living there for many years. Joe contrasted Station North with Highlandtown:

It’s very different from Station North and actually people have made comparisons but for me there’s no comparison. Houses are still affordable here. It’s almost because not too many people know about it. The gentrifying element isn’t as strong here and the hoity toity-ness of art isn’t as strong here. Art is very approachable and relatable and affordable versus Station North which is a completely different dynamic. There are a lot more investments going on but because of that, a lot more displacement is going on. Not as much forethought is going on. Here, …a lot of forethought [is] going into how we are operating in the community. …there is a lot of thought going into it, how are we affecting the community… it’s really special to see that. It’s maintaining a lot of its character, it’s really interesting.

Joe feels that artistic development can either be done well or in a way that lacks forethought. He commends Highlandtown for establishing the arts within the existing community and considering how urban renewal affects them. He mentions that it helps maintain character and individuality which keeps the area affordable and approachable. For a community that still has low income residents, these are important distinctions. In essence, Highlandtown is not in the business of edging people out. Instead, the community is diversifying while still emphasizing street art. Rather than gentrifying, Highlandtown arts nonprofits are trying very hard to maintain something rather than
change it. In Station North, on the other hand, Baynard Woods sees a lack of character and substance:

OWB [Open Walls Baltimore] can’t maintain that same edge. It is trying to say something different. It feels more marketing-oriented and safe. In a sense, the content of the paintings is irrelevant. At some level, the paintings exist so that websites can talk about them as an example of the vibrancy which the mayor and others think will draw the “creative class” to the city.

Woods criticizes Station North’s decisions and implies that many of the murals lack depth and they are used as media tools to feign “vibrancy.” The art does not feel as successful or deep to Woods because it lacks site specificity and context. Open Walls seems like it is not embodying social justice that is firmly planted in the community but instead encouraging art that is just for show. The Station North initiatives are not there for the current residents; they cater to imagined future residents. This concept does not develop community but more often displaces and harms it. Other neighborhoods such as East Baltimore are also dealing with gentrification pressure and citizens have been displaced over time. According to Niely:

Parking is not prohibited – there just isn’t any. The only signs of life are in things like the satellite TV dishes, which still adorn a few window frames. Similar scenes exist throughout the adjacent neighborhood north of Madison Street, south of the Amtrak tracks, west of Patterson Park Avenue, and east of the currently active East Baltimore Development Inc. redevelopment area, which starts at Washington Street…EBDI’s massive demolition and redevelopment effort north of Hopkins Hospital has now reached a transition of sorts. In an area that was virtually a wasteland, after residents were moved out a few years ago and rowhouses were leveled to the ground.

This is an instance where efforts to redevelop the area have gone wrong. It does not seem that this strategy has helped the neighborhood very much. Rather it may have made the situation worse. Knocking down buildings and rezoning areas does little to prevent
population loss or improve community ties. In fact, this type of activity often leads to bigger problems, tension, and lack of trust in neighborhoods. Sometimes the issues of trust break along racial, class, and income lines.

*Displacement*

Baltimore has experienced development that has resulted in demolition and displacement in the past. “The City Beautiful,” an article written by Doug Birch for the *Baltimore Brew*, mentions failed projects in Baltimore and their consequences. Many of the examples in his piece pit the ideas of Richard Florida against those of Jane Jacobs, the renowned urban development theorist and writer:

Charles Center, approved in 1958 … was a classic urban renewal disappointment. It razed a huge swath of downtown and replaced it with sterile towers facing sterile plazas. Not only did it not become a magnet for growth, the areas around it promptly declined.

[City decision makers] decided to raze the old waterfront and build Harbor Place as a tourist destination. Harbor Place was successful, for a while. But Jacobs warns that places built mainly for tourists eventually lose their appeal. Harbor East, another large-scale property redevelopment scheme with a more sophisticated mix of retail and residential, has also been weakening the Inner Harbor.

While the Inner Harbor development is often associated with revitalization this article reminds readers that beyond being a short-term novelty, the Charles Center and Inner Harbor projects did not produce transformative change. When big urban projects like these knock down existing buildings and neighborhoods, they disregard the people. Without people, big development schemes cannot be successful. Jacobs suggests that smaller scale plans address urban development with a softer hand and keep charm and history intact. “Most of the lasting growth in the city has come in the micro-scale
rebuilding of older areas spared wholesale demolition and redevelopment,” notes Birch. “Yesterday’s slums, in some cases, at least, have become today’s historic districts.” The Charles Center and Inner Harbor developments have not lived up to the hopes ascribed to them. Baltimore is still struggling with low population, vacancy, and lack of resources. Jacobs’ disdain for these projects helps us to understand different approaches and the dynamics of urban power structures. The low-income groups targeted to make way for big projects have suffered and the payout for the “greater good” has not been nearly enough to justify it.

Distrust

Interviewees mentioned distrust as an issue among Baltimore citizens. The gentrification that has happened in Baltimore and in other cities across North America is well known and affecting communities of color disproportionately. Development schemes which value prospective wealthy creatives can negatively affect the residents that already live there. This process can sharpen racial divides and increase tensions. Joe remembers a time when this skepticism and fear was exemplified at a meeting. The discussion revolved around Latino immigrants who are often identified with early stages of gentrification. Joe remarked:

We had a Latino conversation one time at MICA and a lady got up very angry and yelled “in this city if you’re not black you’re white.” So a lot of the African American community see us as the unwilling, or willing, depends on who you talk to, participants in gentrification. I see me, being well versed in the theories of creative city—Richard Florida. I know who Richard Florida is because Richard Florida was used to gentrify my community on the border. So I already knew him. .. I don’t think that xenophobia [is] specifically anti-Mexican based … people like Trump are talking about…xenophobia and fear of change of the demographics of the country.
Joe brings up many important points that touch broadly on American politics and social relations. Notably, he feels that African Americans harbor distrust of others. As black residents of Baltimore have seen their city pushing economic change, they feel that racist policies force them out of their communities. Because of this, the woman Joe mentioned felt that if you are not one of us, you are against us. Though this is not always true, Baltimore’s history of racism and segregation can help explain these feelings. Joe also asserts that Richard Florida’s theories have impacted him personally by disrupting his hometown in Texas. He feels that these policies do not foster positive community building and diversity. People are reacting against gentrification because they equate it with the kind of change that devalues them. On a nationwide scale, many are afraid of what the Trump administration might bring. To put it bluntly, some fear too many white people, others fear not enough. These fears continue to create fissures and distrust in communities of all types. Maria also discusses distrust in terms of local artists working in the city:

We’re pretty cautious about allowing people to swoop in and just plop things into our city. Although it’s not as though that doesn’t ever happen, I think that there’s definitely a high consciousness. The arts community in general is not shy about calling out projects… sometimes it can seem very isolationist … I think about nationalist movements and not wanting— we need jobs to stay in this country and it’s similar in terms of the city and our mentality. I think though it really comes from a limited number of resources that a large population of artists are competing for in a very small geographic area. So when somebody comes in from the outside and is taking some of those limited resources it can really send people into a frenzy, or a panic, and a knee jerk reaction.

As a BOPA official, Maria understands why the arts community in Baltimore encourages resources to flow towards projects which benefit locals. People fear dispensing grant
money to artists who leave instead of staying to contribute to the community. The city, after losing population and deindustrializing, is concerned with rebuilding and creating vibrant communities. This cannot be done when artists come and go and create pieces that residents don’t relate to. Other strategies may be more beneficial to Baltimore communities—ones that are sensitive and fair but that also generate much needed financial resources.

Economic Development Strategies That Empower

The previous section delved into aspects of urban renewal which are negative for communities, specifically those of color. However, development can happen in ways that truly empower citizens, generate income, and strengthen communities. Kevin, of MICA, feels tugged in both ways on the implications of development through murals. He recognized the complexity of the situation by saying:

There’s, in my opinion, no pure right answer. What do you do? If you can bring in a tax base that makes the schools better, that’s a good thing. But is what you’re bringing in damaging some facet of the community? You also heard us talking about the murals upstairs and I don’t know where we’ll end up with that... We had a couple of students who had lovely designs for murals and public art and it wouldn’t have hurt anything but they needed to back out of it. Let me rephrase, would it have hurt anything? Depending on someone’s politics you could say oh just helping this development to happen by beautifying it … some would say artificially or superficially. .. We started seeing a lot of murals in what otherwise might be called a decaying area. You could guess that redevelopment is near. So do you do it? Do you not do it? My opinion, if we can sell them on what [art student] is doing, it’s a win-win. We’ll take your money, we’ll give you something beautiful, but we’ll really give something back to the community. Is that good or bad? I don’t know, it depends on who’s looking at it. …. So there’s dollar signs to development. There’s also a moral or ethical dilemma. People thought of us in suspicious ways when we moved in here and given the history with Johns Hopkins and EBDI it’s, in retrospect, completely natural to have thought that was going to happen. We’ve pretty much proven that we have something of value to give without taking anything.
Kevin is torn between his work with community-based street art and the consequences of using art for urban development. He views mural making in struggling neighborhoods as a good thing while some might be more suspicious of motives. As an arts professional, he feels that the arts can truly empower communities but simultaneously set things into motion which can be seen as superficial. Kevin does not see the mural making his students do as negative because of the way they go about it. They emphasize community involvement and want residents involved in the process. Again, the inclusion of community members is a defining characteristic that makes street art powerful and positive. Kevin went on to ask “You know the term placemaking? …Placekeeping is [an] alternate strategy. People I think use the term placemaking sort of as a knee jerk reaction as if it’s the only way to define it. But it implies that there was nothing there or it’s in need of repair or somebody’s going to make it something but placekeeping says something already is there.” This statement is powerful and clearly emphasizes the philosophy behind doing street art in neighborhoods well. After explaining two sides of development and the ways it can impact communities, Kevin captures a subtle difference in phrasing that has much different connotations. Though residents in East Baltimore did not trust MICA when they moved to the neighborhood, they have gradually built relationships which have been empowering. Maria continues discussion of ways street art can empower:

Well there’s a lot of different gains, in general. I think artists are held to a pretty high standard in terms of social responsibility in the city. I think that at least through our program we try to ensure that artists are engaging the neighborhoods they’re working in, in the hopes that they’re trying to create some skill building around those projects. So, community members can learn how to do work or how
to at least understand the process that went behind creating the work that comes up in those neighborhoods.

This example demonstrates how skill building through muraling can be a way to empower community members. As an employee who helps with grant writing, Maria knows there are things to be gained from street art. BOPA encourages artists to create pieces on powerful topics but also to engage with the community. Once the artist leaves, residents are not only left with a painting they helped create, they also know how to get it done. The goals for mural projects include teaching the process so it can be replicated. This aim correlates with economic development because the area is being spruced up a bit and also because it contributes to workforce development, a strategy that focuses on people rather than businesses.

Youth and Development

Many recognize that one way to develop the city in a way that emphasizes people is to get youth involved. A strong generation of young people can promote the future of the city. Getting programs off the ground, however, is difficult. Patricia, who has worked with youth in East Baltimore through MICA, recognized that “There are youth … from thirteen up to twenty-one, I’ll say, who are born leaders in this community. But because their skin is black they are viewed less than and the resources are almost nonexistent for them.” The struggles of institutional racism and policies that originated at the turn of the century are continuing to disproportionately impact black youth. Support for them is a key goal for arts organizations involved in development strategies.
One program in Baltimore, called YouthWorks, is particularly popular for development through imparting skills to young people in the city. A sub-program designed by Maria, of BOPA, and Nina, of Jubilee Arts, is called Art @ Work. The idea for the program came from another one instituted in the 1970s. Maria recalled “the goal is to build confidence and build the ability of people to enter into the workforce. And the origins of the program were really [supporting] the poorest of Baltimore. So when the program was started in the 70s it was called Keep the Walls for Baltimore and it was essentially like a WPA-style program.” Maria also mentioned that the program provided full-time work for local artists to supervise youth and create designs for new pieces throughout the city. It was beneficial to many parties. Funding was eventually cut for Keep the Walls for Baltimore. However, BOPA recently revived the program under the umbrella of YouthWorks. In addition, the collaboration between BOPA and Jubliee Arts has expanded because of the unrest associated with the Black Lives Matter protests. Nina spoke about the development of Art @ Work:

The city’s arts council heard about the idea and they [said] “That’s great we need to do more because we need to provide more opportunities for young people.” There was a really sincere concern about having the civil unrest and then a few weeks later school being out… so many young people having nothing to do all summer, and the tension, and wanting to find more opportunities for young people. So they decided to take our program for eight youth and scale it up to eighty. We did it in a period of six weeks but in the end instead of doing one mural with eight youth, we did eight murals with eighty youth.

Nina’s comments speak to the city’s concerns about the uprising. The surge of artistic activity after the protests in Baltimore will be discussed in more detail later. However, it became important at that moment to keep an eye on young people and encourage them to
build their resumes, positive social connections, and skills. Over the course of two months, a small project became a huge one and Jubilee took on eighty youth to work on eight murals. They worked alongside professional artists and learned skills beyond painting, including budgeting, writing reports, and how to conduct meetings. They are even paid for their work, all the while learning about leadership, community organizing, and self-expression through the arts. These are experiences that many across America and the world do not receive and there is potential for this program to help Baltimore and its young people flourish. Perhaps this will facilitate Baltimore’s transition to economic stability. When asked if the city views street art as an economic development program, Nina recalled her organization’s involvement with YouthWorks and Art @ Work. She explains that the city views YouthWorks as a positive way to help kids learn skills that will aid them when they reach the workforce:

I don’t know if they see it as a one-to-one [relationship] with just painting the murals but because it’s youth, yes. ..So in that sense it’s great …We work really closely with the component that’s in charge of distributing youth and making sure they all have jobs and meaningful job experiences. …. I don’t know if they’ve quite grasped the larger ideas that I think our organization is thinking about like creative placemaking, developing spaces that provide positive environments for families and young people to grow up and those bigger ideas. They’re like “Oh, it’s a youth job cool.” So maybe a little more simplistic than an arts theorist would think of it.

That said, she thinks the city government might not think as deeply about the benefits of youth working with murals. They might see the situation in a more minimalistic way. Regardless, having young people work on street art projects can build their skill sets and increase their confidence in the workplace. Nina remarks again that the city offices view this program more simply than arts programmers. “All of these agencies need photos…
and there’s just nothing better than a pretty picture of a youth painting a mural,” she observes. “It’s just a better photo than some kid sitting at a computer working on a finance report, although very valuable job experience. So, we are always in good favor with the PR people at all these offices.” The program has many benefits and the city recognizes that but perhaps not enough. The Public Relations department can continue to promote the advantages of Art @Work by showing what street art can do for young people and their neighborhoods. However, the dilemma of economic development is still at play here, calling into question the motives of the city, calling neoliberal theories to mind.

**Beautifying**

One way street art can aid economic development is through beautification. Murals and street art on neighborhood walls add color, brightness, and artistic value to an area. A nice painting is of course better to look at than a blank wall (that is, if the art is done well). The idea of beautification attempts to turn disamenities, such as a decaying wall in a vacant lot, into amenities like murals. Good artwork can be something to be proud of. Maria explained it like this:

Certainly having a wall that is beautifully painted by a very high quality artist, where it used to just be a rusted wall, is beneficial to like the quality of life in a specific area. ...the block becomes a little bit nicer. Or if you’re a resident and suddenly that block has an asset in it instead of a wall that maybe is considered uncared for or unmaintained. Certainly there’s that very direct economic relationship. I’m very interested in more [of] the workforce development side of that [such as] Art @Work.

Maria knows the significance of street art from her work with BOPA. She says that quality of life improves when there is a well-done painting for neighborhood residents to
see every day. She goes on to say that good art is worth something and street art is an asset to communities that struggle to care for dilapidated buildings. Maria also mentions economic relationships. If the block is nicer, it will attract more people to purchase things from local businesses, open new shops, and perhaps even move into that community. She relates this to the workforce development organized through YouthWorks and Art @Work. Many murals in Sandtown, where Jubliee Arts is located, were created by young people. They learned not only how to paint, but how to do community outreach, fill out permit paperwork, and budget. This is, of course, an important byproduct of beautiful paintings.

Patricia talks along similar lines. As part of the community arts program, Patricia knows the state of the neighborhood—in this case East Baltimore—and that street art can help the situation. She imparted:

This is a seriously traumatized community and this is one of the largest districts in the city. Where you are right now is just on the edge, it just goes on, and on, and on. Many of the boarded up homes, as you may have seen as you came in, at one point… there were 45,000 boarded up homes in this city. A good majority of them are here in East Baltimore. So what do we do with that? I don’t know what to do with it. We’re just one program, but maybe we can beautify those boards until something can be done. Maybe we can link with other organizations.

Painting the surfaces of boarded up windows and doors in East Baltimore adds a little bit of flair, liveliness, and hope to the people left in the community. A painted board seems to say there are still people here and we want something nice to look at. The abundance of vacant homes is troublesome because it means a lower tax base to fund education and other social services. As a MICA program, community arts cannot solve everything but they can support creative ways to send positive messages and community bonding.
Furthermore, arts can attract attention to places that otherwise might not get any. For instance, if a news article is written about street art appearing on boarded up homes, the community will become visible and perhaps raise awareness of the struggles there. This raises questions of how economic development functions in society and how to make sure it does not actually damage facets of the community. According to Patricia, street art is not harming East Baltimore but giving residents something beautiful to look at.

Another example from a Baltimorean gives more details about how art beautifies and transforms neighborhoods. The Baltimore Sun’s Mary Carole McCauley quoted Leonard Willis, “I was here when the neighborhood was at its peak... It went down to nothing. Now you look at something like this [mural], and it tells me the neighborhood is coming back. It lightens my day.”

McCauley adds:

The approximately 24-foot-by-18-foot wall painting is one of five large-scale water-themed murals — and the first to be completed — that will be created under the auspices of the Waterfront Partnership's Healthy Harbor Initiative. It also puts the finishing touches on a neighborhood beautification project that in three years has transformed a debris-strewn vacant lot into a green and fragrant oasis at the corner of McElderry Street and Collington Avenue.

Neighborhood residents are happy to have a piece of street art in their community. As Willis said, it signifies that there is care being put into neighborhoods that have fallen on hard times. Baltimore’s struggles caused many communities to crash, even though they were once vibrant. People feel that murals add a dose of something extra to help them stay optimistic about the future and encourage a recovery. Additionally, the mural has an environmental theme that has helped inspire clean-up of a vacant lot. Beautification is a
holistic solution to problems such as litter and dilapidation as well as social strife. Leonard Willis is glad to see street art and the revitalization that accompanies it.

Beautification projects can have positive economic and social impacts in Baltimore. These projects can also involve youth, helping them to develop skills needed for the workforce.

Street Art as a Tool for Social Justice

After investigating how economic development through street art can help communities, it is worth remembering this medium as a tool for activism and justice. The literature review discusses ways street art serves as an outlet for activism and protest. This concept is also mentioned in Chapter 4 which recognizes justice as a significant factor defining street art. Using street art to protest injustice, rebel against “the man,” and oppose hegemonic power structures is key to its ability to resist oppression, especially along racial lines.

Speaking generally about the arts, Patricia remarked: “So as far as making art and activism, I can’t remember in my adult life, not using art for that purpose…there’s always an element to it that is the privileged versus the unprivileged. Always.” As an artist and educator, Patricia has always used art as a means to advocate for justice. She specifically highlights the concepts of privilege in her art, noting that this is a significant recurring theme in her work. She means that her art calls attention to aspects of society that create boundaries between people of different backgrounds. As an artist who has experienced prejudice, she feels called to create pieces that comment on this. In her work, critique of
injustice is essential. Patricia’s statements suggest she is not the only artist who uses art this way.

Social commentary is important for other artists as well. Maura Callahan, a local artist and student at MICA, wrote the following for the City Paper:

Art has the power to heal, to distract, to offend, and, perhaps most importantly, dictate how history is represented. So it seems appropriate to say that artists should respond to contemporary, real-world issues through their art, especially when non-political art can feel like distractions—or worse, entertainment—when shit is going down. But art can't fix the world's problems, certainly not on its own.

For Callahan, one of the major aspects of using art to oppose injustice is that it can influence the way our world is presented. When done well, art should respond to current political and social events and represent conflicts specific to a certain time and place. Considering that art may last generations, it is critical that it shows the realities people face now. Documentation through the arts can be a powerful way to show current struggles as well as joys. Art should also be opinionated, according to Callahan. She argues that art which does not make a political statement is not engaging and can feel like fun and games when serious challenges are at stake. Rather than solving everything, Callahan maintains that art can lift our consciences to meet new social trials and tribulations. Joe echoes these feelings stating “this is a community that’s unlike a lot of others. Because the communities are challenged, I think the artwork should not shy away from that. Like anything there’s a place for things that are just of aesthetic value.” He agrees that particularly in challenged cities like Baltimore, art that confronts issues of injustice are important. Artwork is one way the people of Baltimore can have their stories told. Simple, pretty, pictures are not enough to make people think about what is going on
in the world. He suggests that the place for pieces like that is not in the streets of Baltimore.

Going on to talk more specifically about street art, Joe discusses the famous artist Banksy, raising consciousness, and targeting communities that need a dose of awareness about the experiences of historically marginalized races and classes. Joe says:

Public art is almost like the state sanctioned one and street art is for the disempowered. It’s so related to class and race… And seeing Banksy then take on the social justice bend…seeing race and class come into it… why are you going to bomb what’s already been bombed? You should be bombing the suburbs. Not even the suburbs, but Trump Tower. Those are the people who need the conscious raising… at the end of the day they’re like ‘damn my building keeps getting bombed.’

Joe asserts that street art is for the disempowered because it carries a lot of meaning for people who want to fight injustice. Street art serves as a way to communicate dissatisfaction and claim power from corrupt forces. He opines that public art is not so involved in the issues of race and class. A medium which is sanctioned by the government cannot have the same “for the people” messages. As mentioned in prior sections, art from a large hegemonic entity tries to please too many and winds up being too pacified. He talks about Banksy’s art and the way he “bombs” buildings. The term bomb is generally associated with graffiti; however, Banksy is changing those assumptions. Joe sees street art as a way to call attention to disempowerment. Therefore, his view is that street art should be thrust in the faces of people who are, in his opinion, causing injustice. He specifically calls out President Donald Trump as someone who needs to have his world view changed. Though it might not make an immediate difference to have illicit art appear on buildings, eventually people will notice repeat
occurrences. Perhaps the act of painting targeted messages will eventually filter into consciences.

Another one of Joe’s statements was particularly telling and nicely sums up the ideas in this chapter. He said “If you want to bring up socially-conscious art you should bomb the suburbs… The reason you’re doing it in the ghetto is because it’s more accepted and allowed. So, I guess it’s another way in which we still oppress poor people of color.” In saying this Joe means that inner city people of color experience graffiti and illegal art frequently, but arguably they are not the ones who need a lesson in justice. Illegal art is generally not tolerated in rich communities because property rights are inviolable and residents are empowered to take action against things that do not align with their values. Illegal art’s prevalence in certain areas signifies a power dynamic that marks a place as “decaying” or “blighted” compared with wealthy areas. Areas associated with “old money” as opposed to young creatives and “new money” are often historic and protected. Neither graffiti, nor murals, tend to be found in these neighborhoods. In the “ghetto,” people generally do not have the resources to combat illegal creations and so they are accepted as part of the urban landscape more readily. However, this signifies a serious divide in capital and property assets, which can be extended to low income groups’ difficulty in climbing the social ladder. These economic issues, in combination with bombing inner cities with graffiti and illegal art, continue to divide society.

Self-Expression

Using street art as a tool for social justice goes beyond its placement in the urban landscape. Making public wall paintings is also a way to practice artistic expression. The
Arts are lauded as a way to represent feelings, emotions, and opinions. This practice can have a positive impact on those who have struggled with poverty, racism, and other challenges. Creating art can also be a cathartic, centering experience helping to ease stress. Arts theorists see art and self-expression as positive social experiences that can foster creativity, critical thinking, and empowerment. Kevin is an arts theorist who sees art this way: “Mural programs really do bring art into neighborhoods and communities that would not otherwise have much of that. And I think there is value in that. I think sometimes it’s one of those intangibles. I think it enriches people’s lives, enriches their sense of possibility, makes their environment more pleasant to be in.” The meaning behind this is that murals and street art can reach people. Kevin sees muraling as a way to introduce people to the empowering abilities of art. It can help people to imagine different realities. Artists often have strong imaginations that generate vivid pictures in their mind’s eye. They can see alternative lives and scenarios. This can be helpful for people living in tough neighborhoods to see new avenues and new possibilities for themselves. Empowerment through street art programs can help strengthen confidence and expand opportunities.

Empowering through the arts and self-expression can be especially helpful to young people. Because of a scarcity of funding, many Baltimore schools have cut arts education programs. Many see this as a damaging decision. Kevin spoke a great deal about these ideas. In his opinion:

We owe it to our children to have access to self-expression in a variety of media. Music, writing, visual. The other day it occurred to me that we were talking about civil rights, and I was thinking "oh what is the definition of civil rights?" and
“why isn’t art or self-expression considered a civil right?” .... But of course, the schools are under a lot of pressure with getting their budgets cut. They’ve gone to testing and I would suspect that there’s a study out there somewhere that says critical thinking and learning are on the downward spiral in our public schools. That’s part of making art. Artists question everything that they’re allowed to and they should.

Kevin’s feelings are that equality and civil rights cannot be achieved without self-expression through the arts. Without media to convey beliefs about injustice, society loses a type of whistle-blowing. Artists, according to Kevin, are good at critical thinking and questioning ideas. A lack of interrogation of the status quo means blindly following the will of a few in power. However, the under resourced neighborhoods of Baltimore are struggling to fund education and arts programs are often the first to get cut. Arguably, this violates a right that should be exercised by all. Christine Stoddard of Yes! Magazine wrote: “The percentage of students of color receiving an art education has declined: 49 percent for black children and 40 percent for Hispanic children from 1982 to 2008, according to the National Endowment for the Arts. For white children, it dropped just 5 percent.” This demonstrates precisely what Kevin discussed. Access to the arts is being disproportionately cut by race:

Kevin: I don’t know why there are 30,000 empty houses in Baltimore… is or why there isn’t art in most of the city schools. I’m not saying there is a conspiracy but if you wanted to silence some people or disempower them, what would one way be to do that?
  Me: Take away their expression
  Kevin: Yeah. So, coincidence, accidental, intentional, semi-intentional? Or maybe I have my own constituency and they get my attention first and you’re on your own. We align ourselves with community organizers who know how to activate communities. There’s not a lot an artist can do by his or herself. They need to partner with other community based organizations to get things done.
Kevin, who works closely with communities in East Baltimore, thinks that taking away arts programming for kids silences them and limits their expression. As a result, children in Baltimore are less able to use art for empowerment. To Kevin, taking away art from inner city schools is a way to oppress people of color. He also remarks that politics can get in the way of ensuring equality. For this reason, his work with community-based street art often involves community organizers. They can help communities and arts set arts programs in motion and make sure they are beneficial to all. They can also help build trust between groups.

*Representing People in Communities*

The collaboration with community organizers in Baltimore neighborhoods helps another aspect of fighting oppression. Community organizers can act as “go-betweens” who communicate with multiple parties. This can be beneficial because it ensures community members’ needs and values are being represented through art projects. The approach further emphasizes civil rights and a grassroots style of advocacy.

Hazel remembered her participation in mural making in Baltimore. Her discussion references the failed project that was hated by the community—the cat mural mentioned in Chapter 4. Her statements call attention, again, to what happens when community is not involved in street art decisions: “They had had a problem with one of the murals …that was painted on the side of the musician’s unit union …And it was this giant…this big cartoony cat and it really annoyed a lot of people. They really hated that cat. So, I think that they were pretty careful after that to get community input.” Hazel thought this was such a problematic instance that she brought it up more than once in conversation.
This example further emphasizes what happens when street art does not involve anyone besides the artist. Pieces can be despised by neighborhood members while the artist eventually leaves the community and lives elsewhere.

Joe had something to say about this type of work as well. He discussed a class he took that did not highlight community input and instead embodied the top down way of doing art:

> I took one class at MICA in which the lady that was teaching the class said “Yeah I don’t like to involve community in my artwork because I think that it wouldn’t be my artwork.” She said that she basically did what she wanted and then convinced the community that it was good. And I was like wow that is a very different way of doing it compared to what we do in community arts. A lot of people in the community resent people who bring in artwork that they don’t feel relates to them...And everything’s harder, it takes longer, but you have the authenticity of saying you know this is a collaborative communal project that represents what people want.

While some artists prefer not to integrate community into their projects, they run the risk of offending nearby residents. This particular person even tried to convince communities that her art is what they want. This authoritative approach shows a lack of respect and trust in community members to help decide what good art is and what art they care about. If neighborhoods are not presented with art that they feel represents them, they will not feel connected to it or proud of it, the way they would for a piece created with their contributions. Community outreach can ensure genuine connections as well as validation from members and outsiders. Art that represents people living in the area is more likely to be endorsed by residents.

Joe told a story about two community street art projects – one that failed, the other done right. In the first situation, he came across volunteers painting a message to the
community. They had used an internet translator to write a phrase in Spanish. Joe, a native Spanish speaker, came along and saw that the translation did not have the meaning they intended. Instead of a phrase that said, “Here we spend our time,” it read “Here we waste our time.” Without knowledge of the subtleties of the Spanish language, it was culturally insensitive and had negative meanings. Instead of asking native Spanish speakers, who were abundant in the neighborhood, the volunteers lost the opportunity to make a truly collaborative piece. On a different occasion, Joe found a spray-painted message in a local park that translated “Let’s maintain the park clean together.” This expression captured a completely different and positive spirit and emphasized togetherness. Joe remarked, “Whoever wrote that is culturally much more relevant.” This is the outcome when people get involved in art projects together, a culturally relevant and positive piece.

Community input is important. One reason is that the values of residents are represented. This gives communities the opportunity to celebrate their heroes, demonstrate what they care about, and showcase their histories. Nina was interviewed in Sandtown on Pennsylvania Avenue. She described the rich history of the area and why using street art to show it is important:

Where we’re sitting on Pennsylvania Avenue is a historical arts district. So, this was where, during segregated Baltimore, all the black families—middle class and low class—everyone lived on this side, because this is where they could only live. This was the cultural arts center of black Baltimore. Thurgood Marshall was born in this neighborhood, Billie Holliday lived and performed here for a long time. And other jazz greats performed on this avenue. If you think of it, New York had Harlem, Washington D.C. had U street, Baltimore has Pennsylvania Avenue. Part of what we want especially young people, who don’t necessarily get that history, to understand is the legacy and the importance of the arts in this
neighborhood in particular. There’s a lot to be proud of here and to understand the importance of the arts in their history is really important to us. We try to incorporate that into drawing and to murals. A lot of our murals deal with history of black iconic leaders, nationally and from Baltimore. So, in that sense, I think what we do is really important, using arts to tell the whole stories.

Nina’s long description highlights the special aspects of the neighborhood, even though it has fallen on hard times. Pennsylvania Avenue, in her eyes, is culturally relevant and it is important to her organization that young people learn about their history. This is why many local murals, some completed with Art @ Work, showcase black leaders and the vibrancy that has shaped Pennsylvania Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods. Telling the stories of those who have historically been disenfranchised is key in social justice. Murals that present the histories of segregation as well as local leaders demonstrate the resilience of community members and empowers them to fight against injustice in the future. Including aspects of history that community members identify with is one way their voices can be heard in society.

Sometimes artists conduct extensive outreach to ensure they are accurately depicting the lived realities and values of community members. Though Open Walls has been criticized in this study and in Baltimore, some of the artists care a great deal about involving residents in their work, striving for a collaborative effort. Sometimes the philosophy of a particular artist can go beyond the scope of an event such as Open Walls. Julie Scharper interviewed artist Nanook about his involvement in Open Walls. She writes: “It's important for artists to channel the energy of the people who live and work near the mural into their work, Nanook said. When he created a mural … he spent days researching the neighborhood's history and chatting with residents. ‘It got me out of my
outsider's point of view,’ said Nanook, a 2011 MICA grad. ‘I wanted to create something applicable to their lives.’” While Open Walls was criticized for not taking this approach as a whole, every artist has the opportunity to conduct their projects this way, especially when they are outdoors and in public.

Creating something applicable to the lives of neighborhood residents is important for many reasons. First of all, when outreach is not included in the planning for art projects, the results can be disastrous. Also, in communities of color, representing the lived realities of the past and present engages residents as well as non-residents in their story. In Baltimore, the black community makes up a considerable portion of the city and members deserve to have their voices and those of their ancestors heard. Street art and murals offer wonderful ways to represent communities and their values if pieces are carefully thought out and communicated to neighbors.

Cultural Sensitivity in Street Art

Though justice has been discussed extensively in this chapter, there can be instances when street art can cross the line. On one hand, street art should be politically engaging. However, it should also be sensitive to the people who look at the piece every day. Interviewees commented that one reason why community collaboration is important is because the artists will eventually go back to their own homes in their own neighborhoods. This means residents are the ones who encounter the work most, so they should enjoy looking at it. Many indicated that the best works of street art are socially critical, culturally sensitive, and aesthetically pleasant. This can be a fine line to walk, but because street art and murals are public, it is essential. Art in galleries serves different
purposes and has different meanings. Nina summed up how the site-specificity of art can change its impact: “We definitely try to make sure aesthetics reflect the cultural identity of the neighbors that are living by them. Artists can make something that’s super incredible and aesthetically exciting but then they go home and they’re not the people that have to look at it every single day. And what is exciting to see in a gallery and to experience in a designated arts space doesn’t always translate as equally exciting or ground breaking in a public space.” In other words, place matters and so does the content of pieces. Neither galleries nor public space can capture each other’s proper atmospheric context. Also, Nina stresses that artists making work in public means that people who live nearby are the most important audience. They are the ones who must interact with it the most and therefore, it should suit them. She does not diminish the value of art displayed in the gallery, especially pieces that deliver powerful social commentary. She states:

I think it’s great to make art that’s controversial and socially challenging, especially in gallery spaces. When people go to see them, they know what they’re setting themselves up for… you can walk in, engage, and then you can leave. I’m not always a fan of that same type of ground breaking work in public spaces. Not that those ideas aren’t important, they need to be spoken about, but it’s not necessarily something you want to think about every night when you go home… if you have a really bad day at work and then you come home and you’re like “Oh yeah, that painting about murder,” that’s not always what a neighborhood wants to look at. And some of the neighbors do, so you have to kind of feel out the space.

Nina’s point is that space matters. The gallery is a designated space and the ideas that are presented there often push boundaries. That said, audiences can choose to leave whenever they decide they’ve had enough. Street art and murals are integrated in the neighborhood. They cannot be moved and residents cannot avoid them. Of course, controversial topics
need to be the subject of art but the place for that might not be on the walls of a community. Some residents have experienced traumatic and violent events and prefer not to be reminded of them. Even though injustice and violence affect society and should be interrogated through art, such displays do not necessarily mesh with the lived realities of people who experience them. For example, in the case of Freddie Gray, his family and friends might prefer to honor his memory instead of using his story to cast light on problems with police violence and racism. Then again, it’s possible that some living in the neighborhood would like to use street art as a way to address social ills. This demonstrates how important community-based projects are. The neighborhood decides how to walk the line between forceful activism and more positive messaging. Maria echoed Nina’s concerns. She says that artists sometimes assume that their groundbreaking work is appreciated in all settings. Instead of forcing work onto a community, she urges artists to “be more thoughtful and do your research and get to know the neighborhood, talk to people there before you throw something up on the wall.”

Bridging the gap between politically groundbreaking work and aesthetically beautiful, albeit tamer, art is difficult to separate from community engagement. Top-down approaches to street art that begin with the artist can disempower community members. Often, when the pieces are truly collaborative, residents decide on pieces that communicate the positive ways to combat injustice and celebrate history. Maria gave an example of work that embodies these ideas through the local artist Pontella Mason. She described one of his well-known murals in West Baltimore: “It’s a desert scene that has a sphinx and then it has these African dancers and NASA scientists in it. It’s really cool
work. He was very interested in educating the community about African history and African heritage … he would always have his wife paint the names of all the people that were represented so that anybody who walked by could learn about who those people were.” The art created by Mason embodies the positive ways Baltimoreans can fight oppression. It encourages looking back at African history and celebrating heroes in the black community. In this way, citizens can feel proud and confident about their past and future by having positive visualizations in public spaces. Sometimes, art that is more socially aggressive can be discouraging and depressing.

Figure 3: Pontella Mason’s “The Baltimore Wall of Pride-Africa East to West” (https://thelyfe.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/pontella-mason-staying-true-to-his-african-self/)

Nina explains the types of pieces she organized for Art @ Work. One of her goals is to create inspiring art that speaks to youth in Sandtown. Just like the Mason piece that Maria admired, Nina wanted the murals to send positive messages that are socially empowering: “We ended up painting those eight murals in Sandtown and those murals
had a different theme. They were about community pride, empowerment, and cultural history. If you drive around you can pick [them] out based on themes we did.” The Sandtown murals that were part of Art @ Work can be identified through their themes. Nina was careful to organize them around energizing and powerful ideas. She also references the idea of cultural history that can be uniting and encouraging, especially for young people. Nina gives another example of one of the pieces that is her favorite in the neighborhood:

It’s called “The Thoughts in my Head” by Megan Lewis and it’s an image of a black woman and she’s holding a tiny little world in her hand. Her hair is this huge afro and the top blends into these protestors and they’re in silhouette form. It’s really beautiful but I think it perfectly walks that line between something that is beautiful and striking—the aesthetics are incredible— but it doesn’t let you off the hook. It still kind of pokes at those bigger social ideas, without hammering you in the face with them. I think that’s where art can be so powerful. It can talk about those things without being didactic or preachy… I think it’s really powerful.

Figure 4: “The Thoughts in My Head” by Megan Lewis (http://portfolios.ringlingcollege.me/gallery/44681611/The-Thoughts-In-My-Head)
Nina’s favorite mural, she says, is a perfect representation of the issues in this section. It hints at important social issues without being violent or over the top. It suggests community togetherness as well as advocacy for justice. Nina also says the aesthetics are beautiful and the content is something locals can relate to. This means that people who walk or drive by it every day are presented with a piece that is nice to look at and delicately hints at inspiring social change. It is this type of art that in Maria and Nina’s opinions makes the best street art. Art is great at capturing understated meanings while still looking attractive. That is where its power lies. A final summarizing idea of this section is that when the content of a piece is subtle, the true impact is in the discussion that takes place in its midst. According to Nina: “Community-based work is very political. It can just be political more in the dialogue that takes place and less in the physical or visual representation.” Just because a work does not have strong political commentary pictured does not mean it isn’t political. Rather, indirect representations of these topics can spur dialogue between people that is very political.

This section discusses how art can tie together ideas about justice while still being sensitive to communities and the struggles they face. The best pieces of street art are able to do this seamlessly without compromising any aesthetic value or skill. This underscores the value of community outreach. Citizens are the ones who can best decide on their needs and the content of the murals on their streets. Murals that represent people in the area can be culturally relevant, empowering, and inspiring. This can be another way to fight against oppression in Baltimore. Forcing street art upon neighborhood residents imposes alternative values on them that might not align with their own.
This chapter used interviews and newspaper accounts to examine how street art can be used as a tool to combat oppressive forces. Exploring the way gentrification can hurt black communities is an important first step to understanding oppression in Baltimore. Tactics that break down community can be especially damaging and negatively impact residents. Instead, development strategies can employ the arts to increase the tax base and empower communities. Though development and gentrification fall into the same category, they can have different intentions and different results.

Human development puts the emphasis on the power and creativity of people, contrasting gentrification’s focus on tearing things down for new businesses. One way Baltimore is developing community is through youth programs such as Art @ Work. Not only does this provide opportunities for young people to work on murals during the summer, it also positively impacts their neighborhoods. These beautifying strategies can give residents new assets, hope, and something to be proud of. This also provides the chance for people to express themselves through art, a stress relieving and inspiring activity. The creation of street art and murals can also be used as a tool for social justice. This means locals can express their social and political opinions. Interviewees and newspapers suggest that the best pieces of street art capture the fight against injustice while still being sensitive to topics that are emotionally difficult. All of these topics intertwine to demonstrate ways Baltimore neighborhoods can strengthen community and combat oppression.
CHAPTER 6: THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT AND STREET ART

A crucial component of this research is how the Black Lives Matter movement has influenced street art in Baltimore. During and after the Baltimore uprising, there was a surge of street art responding to the movement and Freddie Gray’s passing. These very specific events exemplify discussions about what street art is and how it functions in society. Most notably, street art associated with the Black Lives Matter movement in Baltimore speaks to culturally sensitive, justice themed works, the bonding of community members, and healing after loss and trauma. This example unites the concepts discussed in prior sections, bringing them together in a holistic way that touches on social equality, activism and protest, community organization and collaboration, as well as city policy for urban transformation. This movement is correlated with the civil rights struggles of the past and responses to prejudice are common themes in interviews and newspapers. In this section, an explanation of Baltimore’s racial context is explored alongside the specific projects, pieces, and responses to street art and the uprising in Spring of 2015.

Racial Context

As mentioned previously, Baltimore is a city that has struggled with race relations throughout its history. Systemic and institutional forces have perpetuated inequality. Though economic development policies are striving to escape the negative cycle, it is important to recognize the, sometimes, invisible forces that have shaped the urban landscape. The powers that have contributed to historic racist policies have influenced how black Americans live today, affecting education, poverty, violence, incarceration, and drug and alcohol use, among other things. Julia Di Bussolo, the director of a program
called Arts Every Day, is an advocate for the way artistic programs can positively impact black youth living in challenged neighborhoods. She was quoted in a Yes! Magazine article about enhancing arts programs after the uprising:

It’s important to remember that the Baltimore uprising did not happen simply because of Gray’s death, but because of other frustrations affecting the city’s black youth in particular…To understand the uprising, you need context…There are so many layers. There’s so much more to the story as to why anything would happen in the first place, even before Freddie was arrested. There’s a reason why [his death] struck a chord. There’s a reason why that blew up the way it did.

To Di Bussolo, the arts can help youth express themselves, process events in their city, and form relationships with one another. For this reason, she advocates for arts programs that can help young people constructively object to the racism they experience. The frustrations that Di Bussolo describes, and that black youngsters are living through, are issues that affect their rights and their communities, such as police brutality and the lack of resources in their neighborhoods. Of course, these situations did not form overnight; they have been in place for decades. The Baltimore Brew’s Doug Birch called attention to the tradition of racist urban landscapes and Baltimore’s role in shaping institutionalized housing segregation. He wrote specifically about journalist Antero Pietila who chronicled the way Baltimore was formed into a segregated town in his book “Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City.” The book details “how restrictive covenants, redlining, blockbusting and predatory lending were used between the 1880s and World War II to keep blacks and Jews out of many communities… Cities across the country followed suit. Baltimore, home to the country’s largest population of free blacks before the Civil War, became a leader in ostracizing and marginalizing its
African Americans.” Baltimore’s role in cementing urban segregation is significant.

After de facto policies were overturned equality still was not the norm. De jure segregation meant white flight and suburbanization, leaving black Baltimoreans with a diminished tax base and social upheaval. The legacy of these events has significantly affected how the city operates today. Claims that the United States has morphed into a post-racial society do not represent the lived realities of minorities here. Rather, Pietila points out that “in 2008, the year of Obama’s election, more than half of blacks lived in areas that were more than 50 percent African American, while more than two-thirds of whites lived in places where blacks made up less than five percent of the population.”

Now, protestors are organizing against these forces using catalysts such as Freddie Gray’s death to advocate for broader social change.

Today, the situation is changing. However, the process of becoming a more equal society is not easy or understood by all. Protestors for the Black Lives Matter movement are aiming to change the dialogue about race by taking to the streets and making known the sentiments of people who are affected by injustice. The Baltimore uprising echoed Civil Rights era responses to racial prejudices with activists coming together and marching. However, at certain times and places, the protests did turn violent. For example, buildings were set on fire, vehicles were damaged, and businesses were looted. As Di Bussolo mentioned, these actions were not a response to only Gray’s death. They were reactions to years of discrimination and dissatisfaction with institutional systems. That said, the protests were a source of tension and stress for many in Baltimore. The National Guard was called, a citywide curfew issued, and many were injured. The actions
of protesters were matched by aggressive authoritative forces as well. Some believe that the uprising may have marked a shift in racial relations in Baltimore. Joe spoke about his experience with the uprising, explaining:

> During the uprising the building across the street from here was on fire. That liquor store, that shoe store that’s up the block, it’s just all around us... In the sixties, there was a white supremacist book store [here] and this part of the city was notoriously reluctant to integrate... And still to this day you see segregation between the white ethnic community and the black community. Although you’re starting to see a lot more interaction and you’re starting to see a lot of the older generation become much more tolerant and interacting more with the communities of color ... it’s just how it’s going to unfold ... there will be push back and there will be alternate views... when you think of how two years ago, there was military on the street. There was so much evil around the uprising and actually it was a very intense time.

Joe’s takeaway from the uprising was two-fold. First, he expressed the intensity of the event, pointing at all the buildings on the block which were set ablaze during the conflict. The aftermath of the fires was still visible even after almost two years. He remarked that the block was hit pretty hard and that the damage was all around. However, Joe also understood that the conflict and violence that ensued was justifiable with the exceptional history of the neighborhood. He recalled that fifty years ago, the area was notably discriminatory, expressing white supremacist attitudes. The white community was opposed to integration with the black community and this may have influenced activists pointing some of their protests towards this area. Joe also believes that these events signal a shift. As a resident, he has seen relations, dynamics, and demographics change. Contrary to the past, the area today is slowly becoming more diverse and relationships are improving with increased communication and interaction. Joe notes that change takes time and many will not agree, but it is the way of the world that we slowly progress. In
his opinion, the presence of military forces was oppressive and negative for the community. He even describes it as evil, implying that there still may be some racist policies at play through these actions.

The uprising may have begun a shift in Baltimore’s racial politics recently but traditionally the arts were not immune from inequality and segregation. Interviewees discussed their experiences as artists in Baltimore during the 1990s. Most notable was Patricia’s testament calling attention to the closed nature of the arts community. She explained her first two years as an art student in Baltimore stating:

During those two years, they instituted what was called First Thursdays where the galleries would all open. And it was a massive amount— if you’ll excuse my saying so— a massive amount of white people going to galleries seeing art. A fine art ilk... Baltimore did have a murals program with a very select few master muralists. And those people were actually used over and over again. So, it was a very tight knit and pretty much closed community. There were not many people of color. And not just black people, no brown people, no Latinos, I don’t even think Asians’ art was displayed or acknowledged. It was a white community, very closed.

Patricia’s story shows the way the arts were experienced as recently as the 90s. The arts and galleries in Baltimore were mainly oriented towards “high” western art, meaning the desired demographic was white folks and indoor pieces were favored. These galleries were in white neighborhoods and not inclusive of audiences or artists of color. In terms of murals and street art at that time, a small number of artists did the majority of the work. This group of white painters left little room for diversity. Patricia recalled that she could not remember any of the well-known artists being nonwhite. To say the least, it was not a welcoming community and Patricia felt rejected. The separatist attitude was arguably left over from the racist policies that shaped Baltimore. Because whites and blacks were
separated for so long, there was little interaction between the two parallel worlds. It was not until the later 90s, according to Patricia, that black artists gained recognition in the city. Today, many are arguing that this dynamic should change.

**Critique of MICA**

Ideas surrounding inequality in the art world persist today. Through exploring Baltimore’s street art, we can learn about how racial conflicts interplay with social movements and citywide culture. Many are critical of the role art institutions play in Baltimore. Just like policy makers occupy the decision-making power for the city, dominant arts groups can operate in this same way. MICA is a world-renowned art school with significant credibility and Baltimore is acknowledged because of it. However, giving too much recognition to MICA artists can leave out other local artists. Additionally, as a private and competitive university, it is expensive to attend. This means that many budding art students come from means and are more likely to be white. Furthermore, students at MICA are more likely to come from out of town.

While MICA brings some positives to Baltimore, mostly in terms of recognition, funding, and young creatives, it is of course important to remember to be critical of power dynamics that may inadvertently influence inequality. MICA gets a lot of attention from the city and outside of it and therefore some lower income, black, local artists are not receiving resources. Maria from BOPA specifically remarked:

I would be conscious of the bubbles of some of these groups. Baltimore can be very siloed and so just keep that in mind. Even though MICA has a great community arts program, it’s not necessarily deeply connected in the city or perceived that way, even if it is. There might be some organizations that have worked a little bit more closely [with communities.] I think that MICA is a very
institutional view and although they’re training those students to be critical of institutions, it’s still within an institution.

As someone who works very closely with communities and neighborhoods, Maria perceives that MICA does not have deep enough relationships in these areas. She remarks that though the community arts program is strong, it is still new and not necessarily engrained with challenged areas. Though the community arts program is young, perhaps over time it will become more deeply connected to the city. It is notable that this widely known, largely white, art school is not distinguishable in its outreach towards black neighborhoods. This idea also relates to notions of trust in the city. If neither entity trusts each other, it will be difficult to overcome perceptions of prejudice. Furthermore, Maria states that as an institution, MICA can only be so critical of institutions. Though critique of power structures may be a learning goal for students, the school can hardly claim objectivity on this subject. To do so would mean eschewing grants and funding they receive from government and corporations. To be truly critical of institutions and the hegemonic power structures that exist there, MICA would need to reject hierarchical structures, “dirty” money, and a certain amount of control over artistic endeavors in Baltimore.

Several others echoed Maria’s concerns with placing too much emphasis on MICA’s role in Baltimore. Some are worried that MICA students might not realize the gravity of the lived realities of black citizens. In one particularly pointed critique, the City Paper asked Nether whether the Freddie Gray memorial mural had received any complaints. Nether replied “The only complaints received were from white MICA kids.
I’m a white artist, so maybe I’m more approachable because of the color of my skin. Maybe they’re still in critique mode from MICA. I always refer them to some of the people in the neighborhood. They haven’t so far taken me up on it.” Nether, in this instance, remarked that his collaborative piece had received negative comments from MICA students. While he did not specifically state what the criticisms were, he implied that they may have been misguided or misplaced. Being a white artist himself, Nether felt that perhaps students found him approachable because they look alike. He also mentioned that the critics may have been overzealous in their complaints due to their coursework which requires them to think critically. Nether’s response to MICA students was to invite them to mention their concerns to the community members who decided on the content of the mural and helped to create it. So far, these students have not shared their criticisms with neighborhood residents, perhaps indicating their reluctance to engage. Rather than being critical of the institutions that led to the need for the commemorative piece, students chose to critique the work which represents something significant to locals. They themselves might even embody negative hegemonic structures.

While MICA still has merit and value in the arts community in Baltimore—many graduates go on to join local nonprofits and the community arts program contributes many well-made pieces across town—it is important to look beyond the so-called bubble. Nonprofits and neighborhood associations are more likely to do this than larger institutions. Residents of Baltimore neighborhoods sometimes discuss their frustrations with this dynamic. An article in the City Paper stated:
A local artist who goes by the name C. Harvey wants to see young black artists flourish. Prior to the uprising, she says, many black Baltimorean artists like her felt ignored. Now, the 28-year-old helps Baltimore youth sell their art online through her organization, Baltimore’s Gifted. Harvey believes that local institutions tend to favor white, outside artists like those from the Maryland Institute College of Art, an elite, majority-white, private art school that attracts many non-Baltimoreans. “It’s like Baltimore doesn’t know art outside of MICA,” says Harvey. “Oftentimes, we get completely passed over.”

As a black artist in Baltimore, Harvey wants recognition for artists outside of MICA’s scope. She feels as if Baltimore citizens, businesses, and governments unfairly favor the work of white upper class art students. These individuals get attention and resources that could go towards developing artists who can relate to neighborhood residents. For example, if the city is identifying new muraling projects, choosing an artist who has ties to the area in question might better enable community outreach and representation of those who live locally. Hiring MICA muralists who are white and from out of town does not have the same effect. Harvey implies that this dynamic may be changing with the uprising calling attention to black Baltimoreans who are creating things in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. One thing that Harvey is doing to help shift awareness is helping young people create pieces and selling them online.

Responses to the Uprising

Beyond supporting young black artists in neighborhoods, other responses that have empowered black citizens after the uprising have come in the form of specific projects and pieces. Additionally, the series of events have shifted thinking and publicized the conflict, influencing new attitudes in Baltimore and elsewhere. The uprising contributed to a new wave of creation responding to the tension. Maura Callahan
wrote about her feelings about being an artist during the uprising. She recalls how her work felt meaningless while real political protests were happening right outside her door.

She wrote for the *City Paper* proclaiming:

> The question of my social responsibility as an artist existed in my mind before Freddie Gray, but until the uprising, I managed to stifle that question and simply paint what I felt like painting. What I was painting and writing at the time of the protests…felt pointless and irresponsible, but I had convinced myself it was too late to turn around and create entirely new work…But then again, to ignore those problems entirely would feel equally if not more irresponsible, when nothing seems to matter more right now in Baltimore than the issue of black lives.

Callahan’s statements recall how important artists are in documenting their surroundings and current events. Previous sections mention that artists can visually interpret social justice and inequality, subversively critiquing the forces at play in our cities. For Callahan, the uprising brought this concept to her mind anew. She became more aware of the subjects of her work as a painter and felt irresponsible that she had not been more attentive to black lives before the uprising occurred. Her response to the protests in Baltimore was to write about how critical the role of artists is, not just in the gallery, but out in the midst of the conflict. Joe reiterated these ideas by discussing his actions as an artist and community organizer after the conflict. His organization put together discussion groups, performances, and workshops to help the community mend. Joe said, “It’s been really cathartic for the neighborhood to have to, in the last four years, endure a lot around the issues of race and racism. Our workshops don’t shy away from them, the hardest of subjects…Art is very good in that people love art making as a universal…I was trying to get people together specifically to talk about race.” Baltimore does deal with racial issues quite a bit. The large black population and the separatism in the city
mean that the subject of race comes to the forefront frequently. Being frank and bringing people together to discuss these topics helps them relate to each other and process the events that have occurred. Arts organizations can fill this role because as Joe said, people love art making. One element of the human condition is to create things. It also brings catharsis and can help release feelings of tension, frustration, anger, and even fear. For this reason, art can spark dialogues that might not otherwise happen. People have the opportunity to “talk it out” with friends, neighbors, and even strangers when they are brought together under the auspices of artistic endeavors.

Specific Projects to Come Out of Uprising

As Joe discussed, art-making can be a great way for communities to come together to understand racial issues and become empowered on the topic. Baltimore saw a surge of street art during and after the Baltimore uprising which has encompassed projects, programs, and specific pieces. This section will provide examples of artistic works that have come about and how they respond to Black Lives Matter. Many of these pieces also speak to the specific events and unequal history in Baltimore.

The range of artistic ways communities have replied to the uprising and bigger social movements is broad. Some have painted murals, others have taken photos, and still others have focused on using the arts for workforce development. An artist named Devin Allen gained national recognition for his photos of the uprising in Time Magazine. After the protests in Baltimore, he began a program called “Through Their Eyes” which helps kids learn about art and showcases photography which represents their lives. Yes!

Magazine described Allen’s project and the way it empowers young people. One quote
said, “Allen sees what’s possible in Baltimore—a city long plagued by poverty and violence—especially using art to uplift the city’s youth... ‘This is the most important thing I can do,’ Allen says.” Allen views photos of kids’ experiences with their neighborhoods as well as the uprising as a way to empower them. Once again, we see how art making can enable self-expression, community building, and the fight against injustice. Young people working with Allen’s program are learning skills as well as strengthening relationships with each other, which could help lead to an emboldened next generation. This program contributes to ideas about empowerment, self-expression, and collaboration in communities.

Many others in Baltimore are also using pieces and arts programming to express post-uprising sentiments. Nina, in an interview, talked about how her organization, Jubilee Arts, responded to the crisis in Baltimore. As a nonprofit firmly engrained in Freddie Gray’s neighborhood, Sandtown, Jubilee Arts was mostly involved in efforts there. When asked about the rush of street art in Sandtown after the protests Nina responded:

So, two things happened. There was a collective of artists that worked independently that decided to curate a series of murals. Some of them they did themselves and they invited other artists. Mostly local, some regional folks, did them. They didn’t go through an organization they just worked as a collective. And they worked mostly directly with residents like “Hey you have this wall on your house can I paint it?” It was really a low-key process and I don’t remember the exact number they ended up with. A lot of those murals centered around the civil unrest, memorials to folks that lost their lives to police brutality, images of the protest that took place from different vantage points. Those were the first chunk of murals and then Jubilee [Arts] did a second chunk. We did eight, six of which were in Sandtown, two of them were in Upton.
Nina explained that two main entities created street art reacting to the events in Baltimore. First, a group of independent artists worked with residents to paint their walls. They simply talked to property owners and worked together to put up pieces with themes surrounding the uprising such as police violence and images of condolences for those touched by the lives lost. Jubilee Arts then worked with the community to paint another series of murals. These included youth from the Art @ Work program. Jubilee Arts used the uprising as an opportunity to get kids engaged in their communities, forming connections with role models, and helping them develop workforce skills. The program had been planned to originally include eight young people and after the uprising it was re-formatted to sponsor eighty. Nina explained this process in previous sections and mentioned that it was important to the city that young people had occupations during summer break. Frustrated and upset teenagers without anything to do after school lets out can get involved in trouble. It is better that they are offered the chance to be paid for constructive work that also places value on issues they care about. Therefore, the program contributes to social justice causes and develops the talents of empowered youth. Nina exemplified this idea by stating that the Jubilee Arts murals were easy to distinguish from the rest because of their community pride, empowerment, and cultural history themes.

The Baltimore uprising led to these artistic programs, specifically those sponsoring youth, and more. Smaller endeavors have also been realized since the protests and events such as individual pieces of street art. These can be slightly more spontaneous than the larger programs. There are countless examples of less formalized street art
throughout Baltimore. Many make commentary about the ways African-Americans experience their communities and the institutional racism that has shaped them. This solidifies the concept that street art makes a valuable contribution to society. It helps citizens make their feelings known and opens up a dialogue for healing and building community. One specific quote from Patricia sums up the way the uprising and street art’s responses well. She said “It was a very crucial time for the young people of our city but I think an optimal time for community arts and engagement. So, we just kind of took hold. It has not been an easy journey, it’s still not an easy journey. I think there are many organizations and people who have very good intentions but who don’t really understand that people don’t want charity.” Patricia means that the uprising, though difficult and challenging to communities has also shed some light on the positive and cathartic transformations that can take place. Seeing the hard-hitting social issues we face as a society today can truly inspire new ways of connecting to each other. Patricia’s statement also calls attention to the ways social justice can be misguided. In her opinion, a good time to strengthen community arts is when people are united for a common cause. The uprising brought together many different people from across the city and beyond. This meant they were ready to unite and contest the social structures that reinforce inequality. She also refers to endeavors that come in and “help” communities with giveaways but end up being superficial, demeaning, or inconsequential. This calls to mind the archetype of the “white savior” who swoops into black communities and doles out donations and then leaves and goes back to their own home. Doing justice-based, community-engrained, work can have much better results because the art is not just a
project to be completed. Instead, relationships form and street art becomes a diverse, dynamic conversation about topics local people value. A final statement by Nether condenses how Black Lives Matter and the street art associated with it functions in society. It also makes note that we can all learn from each other. He said “Painting this mural isn't going to solve police brutality…But it can act as a catalyst to change people's thoughts.”
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed the ways street art and racial justice interact. Themes such as defining street art, its role in fighting injustice, and the way it has been used to respond to the Black Lives Matter uprising in Baltimore were revealed through interviews and newspaper articles. These topics can be broken down into subcategories that help explain the lived realities and experiences of those involved in community-based street art in Baltimore as well as interesting power dynamics between institutions and marginalized groups.

The way street art affects locals varies from place to place and through time. Racial divides and conflicts—both now and in the past—have been highlighted by the media recently and these issues influence how street art is manifested in the urban landscape. The use of community-based street art as a tool for economic development emphasizes the relationship Baltimore’s city government has with it. Murals are noted for their ability to stimulate activity and turn neighborhoods into creative hot spots for young, hip people. Local citizens also use street art as a tool and recognize its value. It can beautify vacant lots and buildings, advocate for justice, and spark dialogue for sustained conversations about race and social conflict in American culture. Street art projects also help develop youth by teaching them skills, helping them express themselves, and connecting them to one another. Of course, not every project can be a shining example. Less successful pieces often fail to secure support from the local community, lack meaning, and do not represent the views of nearby residents. Overall, Baltimore citizens support street art initiatives and encourage community engagement in
the arts. However, tensions between top-down and bottom-up initiatives emphasize conflict over whose voices and messages are represented in Baltimore street art. Who controls different spaces and artistic endeavors collides with who has the rights to urban space.

Summary of Findings

Baltimore has a lively art scene and a strong tradition of muraling. However, the art community has not always been receptive to displays of art found outside galleries and museums, or to styles other than “high” western art. This is changing. Now, many are beginning to recognize the merits of street art and to see the talent, resilience, and leadership emerge in historically black neighborhoods. The Baltimore uprising of spring 2015 was a catalyst that led to a surge of community-based street art designed to call attention to culture, pride, grassroots activism, and those who have lost their lives due to police brutality.

To fully understand the value and function of street art, we must first define it. Qualities discussed by interviewees and in newspapers include street art’s transience and indistinct boundaries, its subversive political messages, its beauty and skill, and finally, in Baltimore, its “bottom-up” design and content. While there is good street art and bad street art, general consensus is that it must be wanted and liked by many different types of people to be appreciated. “Top-down” sponsored street art does not have the same motives and messages and therefore interacts with society in different ways. One aspect of street art that does not seem to be essential to its definition is whether or not it is legally sanctioned. More often, street art refers to art work painted on a wall with a deep,
meaningful, message. Graffiti, on the other hand, is considered distinct from street art and murals, according to interviews and articles.

Another finding of this research was how street art is used as a tool by multiple segments of society. It can be encouraged by city government to bring about very specific economic changes. According to Richard Florida, capitalizing on the arts is a great way to stimulate urban economies, drawing more creative employees and their wallets. That said, policies that promote street art for the purpose of gaining wealth can be damaging, disproportionally targeting under sourced communities. Diverse neighborhoods in Baltimore such as Station North are undergoing changes which concern some people. Due in part to its proximity to MICA, Station North has become a designated Arts and Culture district where murals abound, some from the Open Walls festival. Many of these works do not represent those who live in the area and appeal to an imagined future audience. Some worry that the existing community members will be displaced when prices and new buildings rise. Additionally, these same residents were more often than not, excluded from decisions about the content and design of the street art in Station North. While the city government views this as a successful project, neighbors do not share this point of view. These kinds of initiatives not born out of the people do not produce authentic messages or representational space.

Development policies which focus on generating new income and businesses are often associated with gentrification. That said, there are ways to use street art projects to promote of human potential and neighborhood stability. Community-based street art offers one way to strengthen economic prospects for neighborhoods. This strategy uses
grassroots collaboration to empower communities through beautification, self-expression, and youth programs that foster creative skill building. Through programs such as Art @ Work, a partnership between BOPA and Jubilee Arts, young people are paid over the summer to paint murals in their own communities. The goal of this program is to create art that celebrates community pride and the rich history of areas such as Sandtown, Freddie Gray’s neighborhood. Youth receive these positive messages of empowerment can feel a renewed sense of possibility and gratification. That said, it is once again important to critique the way institutions interact with vulnerable neighborhoods. Some may view this program as a neoliberal way to train submissive workers in low income areas. Rather than supporting young peoples’ pent up emotions and struggle for racial justice, the city puts them to work in a program. In this case, interviewees gave the impression that because Art @ Work is a government, non-profit partnership, it is less harmful than it might otherwise be.

Through collaborative street art projects communities are able to resist racial oppression and visually protest inequality, when they come from the bottom-up. This is not always easy to do though activist messages can challenge racial discrimination and prejudices. The best street art is also pleasant to look at and culturally sensitive. Murals with violent images, though clearly a statement on social justice, are not always well received. This is why nonprofits such as Jubilee Arts choose to portray famous black Baltimoreans and empowering representations of community engagement and activism.
Limitations

Like all research, this study has limitations which constrain its scope. For these reasons, and others, further investigation is recommended. Examples include conducting oral histories with Baltimore muralists and residents, mapping the distribution of street art pieces, and participant observation through the creation of murals in Baltimore’s neighborhoods. Unfortunately, it was not possible to accomplish these tasks. Furthermore, the extent to which this study is able to make precise claims is limited by sample size and the subjectivity of the researcher and interviewees.

One aspect that limited the scope of this research was the relatively low number of interviewees. Typically, qualitative studies draw on a large base of participants in order to get the most precise responses. However, as a nonresident of Baltimore, accessing participants was difficult. Sometimes “gatekeepers,” people who can guide the researcher to relevant interviewees when studying a new location, are used in academic studies. However, this was not the case for this investigation. Many individuals were contacted with the hope of gaining access to their communities but the six participants in this study were the only ones who responded to requests from the researcher. No interviewees were introduced through other contacts. That said, the data collected were rich, deep, and meaningful. Perhaps, in this case, quality over quantity contributed to the success of the investigation. Additionally, newspaper articles complemented interviews to ensure academic rigor and validity. In the end, the addition of newspaper articles broadened the scope of the research and enabled access to communities through The Baltimore Sun, the City Paper, the Baltimore Brew, and Yes! Magazine. Utilizing both of
these sources saturation, a marking point in qualitative research, was achieved. When researchers begin to discover repetition between interviewees and other data sources, it is safe to say that the “well has been tapped,” so to speak.

Being an “outsider” in Baltimore meant difficulty not only connecting with participants but also finding relevant murals throughout the city. Knowing where things are is a critical part of conducting research. Again, without gatekeepers and strong networks, there is a limit to what can be found. People who live their lives in a particular place will clearly know more about it in general. Familiarity with a locality or environment influences the range of information that can be known. Furthermore, comfort with one’s surroundings can impact the intensity and vigor of a study. As a lone, white, petite, female researcher in a city with a “reputation,” it can be difficult to know when surroundings are safe and when they are not. Thus my movements were circumscribed. Newspaper articles and the descriptions from interviewees helped familiarize me with important aspects of the study area.

A final limitation involves the positionality of the researcher. My background as a geographer of race and an ardent lover of deep, meaningful art, means I have subjective political and social opinions on the topics presented here. Reflexivity is one of the tenets of qualitative research. Self-examination is critical because it allows the researcher to maintain trustworthiness and rigor, meaning a traceable thought process and reasoning for each decision. As a researcher, I feel pulled towards topics that advocate for the realignment of unequal power relationships. Past research investigating the extent to which plantation museums tell the story of enslaved women and men instilled this in me.
Every person deserves to have their story told and street art is one way black Americans can claim the narrative of their lived realities and experiences. In this vein, the way researchers help give voice to marginalized groups can be related back to street art as a mode of self-expression and dissatisfaction with the status quo. Additionally, my political opinions cannot remain completely neutral on these topics.

Implications

This study has broad social implications given current events in American politics. The Trump campaign, and now presidency, have affected many minority groups negatively. These were topics of discussion in interviews. Participants specifically made note of their discomfort with President Trump and his philosophies. They recalled that women, immigrants, and black Americans have been especially concerned about what the new political tides may bring. The campaign slogan “make America great again” has many questioning whether “great,” in this context, actually implies “white.” This statement further suggests that America is not currently great and shirks progress in science, technology, diversity, and human rights. President Trump and his supporters instead celebrate the accomplishments of conservative, wealthy, white males while diminishing the contributions of people of color, immigrants, and women. Specifically related to topics presented in this research are ideas about supporting aggressive law enforcement and limiting academic freedom, adding to frustration for communities of color. The White House website published a section which states “The Trump Administration will be a law and order administration. President Trump will honor our men and women in uniform and will support their mission of protecting the public. The
dangerous anti-police atmosphere in America is wrong. The Trump Administration will end it…Our job is not to make life more comfortable for the rioter, the looter, or the violent disrupter” (The White House 2017). This statement grossly ignores the views of millions who are not only targeted unequally by police but also treated violently and sometimes killed. The case of Freddie Gray is just one of countless examples of young black citizens shot, strangled, or denied medical attention. Rather than sympathizing with those who have lost family and friends to misguided violence, President Trump claims to stand with officers. He even implies that Black Lives Matter supporters are violent, disruptive thieves. The Trump Administration makes no comments about racism or alternative cultural perspectives.

Another offense to communities of color is a recently introduced bill stating “no Federal funds may be used to design, build, maintain, utilize, or provide access to a Federal database of geospatial information on community racial disparities or disparities in access to affordable housing” (H.R. 482). This bill would essentially limit data showing racial inequalities. For geographers and minoritized racial groups, this presents significant problems and encourages a lack of transparency in government. Further research on the damaging nature of this policy would bring to light how important academic freedom is, particularly concerning racialized power dynamics.

A further affront to the rights of American citizens is the threat to completely withdraw Federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA website asserts “funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. … the NEA
supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America” (NEA 2017). This statement emphasizes diversity and access to the arts for all citizens. This idea is notable because under President Trump’s plan, low income communities will lose some of their abilities to fund programs that are benefitting all types of people. Wealthy communities will likely be able to pay out of pocket for continued arts access in schools and elsewhere. Many historically African American communities are less able to pay for this access themselves. Of course, the NEA is another institution with motives and messages that might not be concurrent with those of low income individuals.

The examples presented above question racial equity in the Trump Administration. These topics are significantly correlated with the feelings of interviewees and newspapers discussing street art in Baltimore. Using street art to combat racial oppression and advocacy against diversity makes a difference to people who create pieces and those who they represent. Support for inequality in government damages already underserved communities further. Studies such as this can provide context for how research on racial injustice, the Black Lives Matter movement, and street art come together. Luckily, suggested policies at the national level are not being echoed in Baltimore where community-based activism is valued. Local politics can still make substantive differences in the lives of residents. Specifically, street art with empowering, activist messages is a significant way to broadcast sentiments shared largely by residents. Self-expression, empowerment of youth, beautification, and human development all play
into the results of community-based street art. In order to alter the political culture currently at play, these messages need to be presented.

There is still much to learn about the dynamics of urban public space and street art. Conflicts over power relationships show that Baltimore is facing the issues of where street art should be and whose voice is represented. Further research could examine the tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches to street art. Once again, messages and motives in community and justice-based street art show complex dynamics and modes of power. In this vein, it is necessary to critique the production of street art by different groups and the authenticity this lends itself to. This issue is incredibly complex because of its complicity in the struggle over how space represents both citizens and institutional forces.
REFERENCES


Alderman, Derek H. “Surrogation and the Politics of Remembering Slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA).” *Journal of Historical Geography* 36, no. 1 (January 2010): 90–101. doi:10.1016/j.jhg.2009.08.001


Carpenter, Lauren1, lcarpent@psych.umaryland.edu. “Protest, Reflect, Respond: A Personal Reflection by a Social Worker in Baltimore Following the Death of


doi:10.1080/02665433.2013.800717


http://www.library.ohiou.edu/ezpauth/redir/athens.php?http%3a%2f%2fsearch.ebscohost.com%2flogin.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26db%3dedsglr%26AN%3dedsgcl.446664943%26site%3eds-live%26scope%3dsite


Friedman, Michael T., Jacob J. Bustad, and David L. Andrews. “Feeding the Downtown Monster: (Re)developing Baltimore’s ‘tourist Bubble.’” *City, Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (September 2012): 209–18. doi:10.1016/j.ccs.2012.11.004


Mary Carole McCauley; and Wesley Case. “From Ashes, Art; How Baltimoreans Have Used Photography, Music and Other Outlets to Make Sense of Freddie Gray’s Death and the Ensuing Unrest.” *Sun, The (Baltimore, MD)*, April 17, 2016.


McCauley, Mary Carole. “New Mural Lifts a Community’s Spirits – and Increases Awareness of Harris Creek Watershed.” *Baltimoresun.com*. Accessed January 30,


doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303422


Rubin, Hillary. “The Stories We Share: Reflections on a Community-Based Art Exhibit Displaying Work by Refugees and Immigrants.” *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 7, no. 2 (October 2016): 159–74. doi:10.1386/jaah.7.2.159_1


Schacter, Rafael. “The Ugly Truth: Street Art, Graffiti and the Creative City.” *Art and the Public Sphere* 3, no. 2 (December 15, 2014): 161–76. doi:10.1386/aps.3.2.161_1


Sellers, Frances Stead. “After the Riots, Baltimore’s Best Shot at Redemption May Be Its Arts Community; After the Riots and the Damage They Inflicted, the Arts Community May Be the City’s Best Chance at Redemption.” *Washington Post.com*, June 11, 2015, sec. Style.

http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=WPCOM00020150611eb6b000um&cat=a&ep=ASE


Smith, Tim. “More Art in Baltimore’s Public Places Addresses Issues of Race, Police.” 


Tsilimpounidi, Myrto, and Aylwyn Walsh. “Painting Human Rights: Mapping Street Art in Athens.” *Journal of Arts and Communities* 2, no. 2 (July 2011): 111–22. doi:10.1386/jaac.2.2.111_1


doi:10.1179/1476994815Z.00000000058


https://www.mica.edu/About_MICA.html


http://www.stationnorth.org/about/


https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1ufUGSVDu9bMrSdwR3Ays9DmmzA

“CEOsforCities-FosteringtheCreativeCity.pdf,” n.d.


http://housingpolicywatch.com/

“MICA Students Moving to East Baltimore Will Face a Mostly Blank Canvas.”


https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2012/10/05/the-city-beautiful-2/


APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Are you a resident of Baltimore? For how long?

How have the city government’s relationships with the arts changed over time?

How has this affected you as an artist?

How do you see the arts fitting into economic development and urban planning in Baltimore?

What kinds of art initiatives does the city prioritize?

How would you personally define “street art” vs. “graffiti” vs. “public art”?

What do you think the role of art in public space is?

What kind of arts education programs exist and how have you participated?

What do you think the role of government is in art?

Can you describe a particular instance where artists and government were in conflict?

How are community members involved in making arts policy decisions?

Where do you think the line should be drawn with sanctioned and unsanctioned art?

Do you have a favorite piece of “street art” (whatever your definition of that is) and why?

What are some things city residents can get out of unsanctioned art? How can unsanctioned art harm them?

How is it determined whether or not a piece is illegal or not?

What do you think can be gained from public art?