RECOVERING AND RECLAIMING
THE ART AND VISUAL CULTURE OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is designed as Africentric research to fill a gap in the historical narratives on African American art and visual culture. Specifically, it focuses on the historical and cultural significance of the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. These visual artifacts, known collectively as Black Art, are directly linked to the Black Power concept and the Black Liberation Struggle. This study explores why Black Art has been overlooked in Art Education and how it can benefit the field as a site for enhancing racial literacy. This study looks at this dilemma as indicative of reductive bias due to a lack of knowledge about Black Art and persisting racial discourses associated with Black Art and its time.

This study explores the epistemological base, i.e., the origin, nature and intent of Black Art, as well as the movement’s influence on art-making, and arts influence on it. Considered an art form itself, the movement was at the epicenter of the historical and cultural nexus that birthed the Black Studies Movement, multiculturalism, identity politics, culturally-relevant education and Africentricity. This study examines the Black Arts Movement as one of the most productive and artistically inventive periods in American history. Despite this, Black Art is stilled maligned and misunderstood. Critical race theory breaks through the racialization and reductive bias blocking interest in Black Art; optimal theory weighs the efficacy of its visual codes. Black Art is thus reCognized by exploring the nexus between its historical and cultural content and intent.
Dedicated to my sister, Sandra Watts, and my brothers Luther, Richard, and Clarence; and especially to my son, Calid and our huge extended family.
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I dedicate this work to the fond memory of my beloved parents Clarence Bowen, Sr. and Pearl Morton Bowen; and to every member of my nuclear and extended family, here and abroad, who have encouraged me in this liberatory and affirming struggle. This journey would not have been possible without the early guidance provided by J. Garfield Jackson and Bernice Price, two extraordinary educators who supported my early education and put me on the path that has led me to this place.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The cultural history of [Black people] is as unique and dramatic as is her social history (Alain Locke, 1928, p. 234).

The Black Arts Movement had an impact similar to the Harlem Renaissance; it influenced a whole generation of artists around the world [and] not just Black and Third World artists (Amiri Baraka, 1980, p. 8).

The genius of the Movement was that it transcended conventional definitions and shuffled cards so adroitly that almost every event had political, economic and cultural dimensions (Lerone Bennett, Jr., 1985, p. 10).

The history of contemporary African American art and visual culture is incomplete. Missing are important stories about extraordinary African American artists and the compelling art they produce[d]. Among these missing stories are narratives and critiques about the artists and the visual artifacts associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Called the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept, the Black Arts Movement spurred cultural producers of all disciplines to write, paint and perform in service to the Black Liberation Struggle (see Neal, 1968).
Jeff Donaldson (1998), a painter, extraordinary art educator, cultural ambassador, and a leading force in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, described the Black Arts Movement as “arguably the most productive and artistically inventive period in the history of African descended people in North America” (p. 4). While today, the Black Arts Movement is best known for literature and dramaturgy, this study focuses on its art and visual culture.

Today as in the past, the Black Arts Movement has loyal defenders and ardent detractors (Collins, 2002; Gates, 1994; Neal, 1968, 1972). The following historical narrative shows that the movement has had a wide ranging impact upon artists and intellectuals, African Americans and others (see Donaldson, 1980, 1998; High, 1997; Spriggs, 2008; Van Deburg, 1992).

Literary critic Larry Neal (1968), a defender of the movement, compared the Black Arts Movement to a forum for cultural expressions that had been brewing long before Stokley Carmichael (1967) ever popularized the slogan Black Power. According to Lisa Gail Collins (2002) a professor of Africana Studies and art history, applauds the movement for being “the second concerted campaign [among African Americans] to effect progressive social change [across] the United States” (p. 4); but she also criticizes Black artists and intellectuals for habitually undervaluing visual artists and their work.

The personalities of the Black Arts Movement were many, their viewpoints diverse, yet the struggle they all faced though was very much the same. Black Power advocates directed African Americans to turn inward for answers--to generate personal and community strength to overturn racism in America and to improve their own lives. This call for action literally drove Black people to change the visual landscapes they
moved through. They collapsed the barriers between the domains of art and forged into action every facet of visual culture they could access to combat racism and construct an alternative to integration which seemed to require loosing one’s sense of self (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967).

Despite having been a significant period of productivity in the cultural arts, there is relatively little literature about the Black Arts Movement that focuses on the art and visual culture that enlivened the era. This obscurity motivated Chicago artists to organize:

Because the Black artist and the creative portrayal of the Black Experience have been consciously excluded from the total spectrum of American Arts, we want to provide a new context for the Black artist in which he can workout his problems and pursue his aims unhampered and uninhibited by the prejudices and dictates of the [white] mainstream (From the Statement of Purpose of the Organization of Black American Culture, in Collins, 2006, p. 287).


Even fewer provide meaningful biographies about Black Arts Movement artists that appropriately interweave personal and political factors with artistic output. Two notable biographical studies include one on Faith Ringgold by Lisa E, Farrington (1999); and another is by Robert L. Douglas (1996) who produced an important study on Wadsworth Jarrell, one of the founding members of AfriCobra, the Chicago-based arts collective. Moyo Okediji (2003) has written an insightful study about Jeff Donaldson in
which he employs Yoruba aesthetics to valuate Donaldson’s work. Another well-
documented biography concerns the revolutionary Black Panther Party (BPP) artist
Emory Douglas of Oakland, CA. Edited by Sam Durant, this study appears to be an
“authorized biography.” It includes an interview with the artist by the accomplished
documentarian St. Clair Bourne, This heightens its authenticity.

This interview gives Douglas the opportunity to represent himself as consciously
engaged in revolutionary art-making for shared political ends. He is not simply ordered,
he participates in collective decision-making about the graphics he produces to promote
the party line and enlighten the community about the services the BPP provide. Douglas’
self-reflection offers a different view of his investment in how his art service the struggle.
His point of view prompts one to question the biographical study that Erika Doss (2001)
produced about Douglas. Doss (2001) argues that Douglas works within a “protest
aesthetic”. She seems to suggest he was naturally drawn to this aesthetic because of his
impoverished background, his brushes with authorities as a youth, all of which made him
angry—angry enough to create the police/pig icons and other cryptic signs opposed to the
racist oppression under which Blacks were forced to live.

A look at the Current Discourse. Black cultural expression has increasingly
become sites of “enlightened” scholarly discourse. Doss’ biographical narrative is
provocative, however, it is reductive and misleading if one is to believe Douglas’ own
comments about his life. It appears that Doss draws some of her content from a narrative
written by Elton Fax in 1977. No where in that study does Fax, an African American art
historian and artist, refer to him as angry. To accept this notion that only anger propelled,
oversimplifies Douglas’s role as a thinking agent in the production of graphics for the BPP Newspaper and other art work.

Insights can surely be gleaned from both accounts by comparing the two viewpoints. This brings attention to how African Americans “speak” their experiences and how those who are not African American “hear” that which is spoken (see hooks, 1992). This brings into question who has power and control over defining the historical and cultural contexts that support differing points of view. As bell hooks (1992) cautions “without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure” (p. 2).

This study therefore troubles these ideas and weighs the competing discourses and values concerned with historicizing (or not) Black Art. These dictates often lessen the importance of the points of view, knowledge constructions and aesthetic considerations of “marginalized” cultural producers. Such devaluing or reductive bias can result in gross misunderstandings and lead to an inability or unwillingness to comprehend this “othered” knowledge. Thus we must be mindful to ask how and from whose point of view and theoretical stance is meaning made and popularized; and for what ultimate ends.

Was Douglas merely a hostile, angry, urban black youth whose talents were co-opted by others to perpetuate a “protest aesthetic” or should we know more about his choices and will this knowing bring greater insight and understanding about his work. In contrast to Erika Doss’ articles on Douglas, Lisa E. Farrington (1999) provides a more deliberate and less nuanced journey into the world of Faith Ringgold. Looking at the art Ringgold produced, and the impact she has had within and outside of the art world, Farrington unfolds Ringgold’s story, which has roots in the Black Arts Movement. She
approaches this study from a Feminist perspective. To be fair, Doss’ (2001) work is only a chapter, whereas Farrington produced a book. But even a chapter can be misleading as we are left with a final image of Douglas turning his back on dangerous icons he made. While this may be so, why did this happen?

Overcoming present dangers inhered in naming, Moyo Okediji (2003), as noted above, has written about the iconic status and far-reaching contributions of the African American painter and art educator Jeffery (Jeff) Donaldson whose words and images “have helped to shape current concepts of African American art education, art praxis, and art criticism” (p. 88). Both Donaldson and Jarrell were among the first to construct a contemporary, Pan-African/ Jazz-informed Black visual arts aesthetic (Donaldson, 1970). Together they helped to conceive of an ethnically-sound approach to art-making and art scholarship—an approach that fully embraced the significance of meaning making through Black Art to uplift Black people (Donaldson, 1970; Okediji, 2003).

Among the most notable “whole movement” studies are those by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (2006), Jeff Donaldson and colleagues (1998), Robert L. Douglas (1996), Frieda High (1997), James Smethurst (2005), William L. Van Deburg (1992) and there a couple of others. These works are to be applauded for striving to rectify flagrant omissions in African American art history, particularly in relationship to the Black Arts Movement. Even so, as the art historian Richard J. Powell (1996) once forewarned, such efforts are still too few and often lack depth. Fortunately, Collins & Crawford, Donaldson and colleagues, Smethurst and Van Deburg have produced inclusive histories of the movement, highlighting its complexities, challenges and strengths.
There are many intersecting issues associated with *Black Art*. In this study, *Black Art* as italicized here, specifically refers to the art and visual culture of the Movement. Here again, BLACK is understood as meaning more than a color—a notion that two authors have used possibly to link African American art with mainstream Western art history as Matisse wrote a short essay entitled “Black is a Color” in 1945. Richard J. Powell (1998) uses this phrase as a chapter title while the French art historian Elvan Zabunyan uses it as the tile of her book on African American art history.

But here, *Black Art* identifies an art that was deeply socially-oriented and conceived to engage its public in a critique or celebration of Black life, its struggles, social conditions, hopes, problems and accomplishments. Amiri Baraka (1980), an exceptionally-gifted writer and visionary who was looked upon as a spiritual leader of the Black Arts Movement insisted that “the ‘Blackness’ of the Black Arts Movement was the attempt to restore the national priorities of the Afro-American nation and oppressed nationality to the art of Black artists” (p. 8).

Like the Harlem Renaissance, the Movement influenced an entire generation of artists, not only in Black America and the African Diaspora, but also in Europe and White America (see also Collins, 2000; Patton, 1998). The Movement was as political as it was cultural and it had deep historical roots. And since history is a dialogue, according to the historian Lerone Bennett, Jr. (1985), its deep roots connected it to the first slave ship and its importance will continue until “American deals with the total challenge of the Black presence” (p. 10). As the racial landscape is changing dramatically, what remains of many of the problems remain, though possibly of less severity, except in the area of epistemology and knowledge construction and valuation.
Counter-Aesthetic Stance. When Black Art first stepped outside the Black community en masse to seek anointing by the White-dominated mainstream art world around 1969, it was greeted with skepticism, ridicule and condemnation from high-profile gatekeepers (Kramer, 1970, Andrews, 1978). The largely figurative socially-oriented art found little favor in the world of abstractions and minimal conceptualizations of art. The concept of Black aesthetics was also rejected (see Kramer, 1970, Shields, 1973).

This conundrum of competing opinions about Black and Black aesthetics came in the form of either/or indictments that have effectively legitimized the absenting of Black Art from mainstream museums and traditional art historical texts such as Janson’s History of Art: The Western Tradition (Andrews, 1978; DePillars, 1990; Ransaw, 1990). And by extension, continued exclusion of Black Art from the art education canons reinforces the false perception that the genre is historically and culturally insignificant. However, this study argues that Black Art does have relevance for and beyond African Americans because the work is not monolithic, and addresses diverse critical social and cultural issues for the purpose of “world making” for the greater good (see Daniel, 1990).

Thus, what follows is a review of the historical and cultural merits of the Black Arts Movement for the purpose of reCognizing Black Art (Chanda & Daniel, 2001). To insure the results of the study are useful and can enhance art teaching and learning, it will explore seldom considered racial logics that contribute to the internal considerations related to understanding formal elements as well descriptive and contextual information that inform interpretations of artworks for deeper understanding.
This study necessarily contests the common assumption that *Black Art* is categorically labeled as “protest art” (Doss, 2002; Neal, 1972, Pohl, 2002). Protest is but one function of *Black Art* which is a very diverse body of visual artifacts which serve a variety of purposes most of which intentionally supported the aims of the Black Liberation Struggle.

This research also provides building blocks to fill knowledge gaps in African American art history. As Africentric scholarship, this study moves forward to recover, reclaim and reconstruct the ways we know *Black Art*. As such it necessarily challenges how dominant and familiar epistemologies address *Black Art* in order to demonstrates new ways to bring together serves to very timely because many of the original voices that helped to shape the visual domain of what is perceived as a predominantly literary arts movement are no longer with us. And, even though we move toward new racial horizons, this compelling genre of *Black Art* need not be lost simply because it did not subscribe to the racial paradigms of its day.

**The Problem**

The knowledge that circulates through art education about African American visual art is limited and frequently superficial and misleading as it lacks depth. One of the least explored periods of African American visual art productivity occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. This period coincides with the final years of the Civil Rights era and was known as the Black Arts Movement. This movement was inextricably bound to the Black Power concept and cultural nationalist ideology (Baraka, 1972; Karenga, 1967, 1980 & 1993), however, the debt that academia owes to Black Power as the impetus for multiculturalism, is largely forgotten (Karenga, 1993; Stovall, 2005).
The exceptional outpouring of African American cultural productivity during the Black Arts Movement crossed and transformed disciplinary lines. Black artists frequently integrated African artistic and aesthetic elements into Western art-making traditions. Much to the art and visual cultural was socially and politically oriented but the genre cannot and should not be reductively categorized as “protest art.”

More regularly today, general survey texts about American art such as those by Erika Doss (2002) and Frances K. Pohl (2002) do include works by one or two artists who emerged during the 1960s. The art criticism expert Terry Barrett (1985 & 2000) regularly includes Black artists or address Black issues in his publications. Artists like Melvin Edwards, Faith Ringgold, David Hammond and others whose works convey culturally-specific themes are often integrated into mainstream American art discourse.

Not to diminish the importance of such inclusion, this study, however, chooses to focus on the historical, sociopolitical and cultural contest of the Black Arts Movement; and the ways it informed and nurtured the above mentioned artists and many others.

Sociopolitical Context. Despite the devastating racial conditions that beset America during the 1960s and 1970s, Black artists struggled against the odds to creatively employ their talents to generate a new visual language that expressed their concerns and interests in the Black Liberation Struggle. From murals to paintings, from sculptures and performance art to installations and personal adornment, the Black arts community stretched the boundaries of art-making. It also disrupted the modernist distance between the public and the artist favoring instead to create a conscientious intimacy between the artists and the people. The mural movement exemplifies the
interdisciplinary, community-based interactive orientation that came to characterize the visual domain of the Black Arts Movement

There is much to be learned from this symbiotic relationship between the Black Arts Movement and Black Power advocacy and the artist and her public. The modernist notion of high and low art was destabilized and replaced by new standards of relevance and service. Consciously and conscientiously, according to literary critic Larry Neal (1970), artists sought to link art and politics in ways that advanced the liberation of Black people. Amiri Baraka (1980) explains further that “the function of [Black] art was to reach and educate and move and unify and organize people, not to mystify them or offer dazzling support of the status quo!” (p. 8). Such lofty ambitions provided artists a range of referents with which to construct social responsible art and a more engaged public.

This study draws heavily upon research recently generated by scholars associated with Black Studies discipline, also known as African American and African Studies, Africana Studies, Pan-African Studies Black or World Studies. However, it is also addresses what Lisa Gail Collins (2002) has described as the visual paradox at the center of African American thought which simultaneously supports a preoccupation with visual culture as it also neglects visual art and artist. This study examines this paradox within the context of the dominant racial logics that color American knowledge canons and research epistemologies.

As this study is directed to teaching and learning about the Black Art of the 1960s and 1970s, it is imperative to acknowledge that Black art images may be points of conflict for art educators who are likely to be young, white females from non-blended communities (Erickson, 2004; Milner, 2003; Sleeter; 2001). In addition, this subject
matter may also be unwelcomed by African American students as well as teachers if bell hooks (1992) is correct when she proffers that “all black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness” (p. 175).

Often buried deep within art curricula are remnants of racist Victorian-era connotations of blackness—connotations which reproduce white normativity and essentialize Black subjectivity. This racialized order was challenged and even overturned by visual artists and their counterparts during the Black Arts Movement.

**Blackness as a Signifier.** Art historian Michael D. Harris (2003) defines blackness as a discredited signifier; one that represented vulgarity, inferiority and lascivious behavior. Cultural critic Stuart Hall (2000) explores the shift from racial stereotype to racial knowledge through the marketing of cleanliness as and civilization as white; and uncleanness and savagery as black. In an analysis of color meaning, art educator Olivia Gude (1999) argues that the color white is perceived to connote transcendence and purity. Gude also intimates that students, and often teachers, too, do not necessarily make color associations based on symbolic conventions, but rather, through natural, unmediated human responses.

Even as the racial landscape promises dramatic changes today, the visual language of racial encoding remains only slightly disturbed. Silent and hidden behind veils of good intentions, a racial logic whispers, insidiously informing interpretation and relationships. *Black Art* overturned the efficacy of whiteness as the universal model for judging culture and representing experience.
The exclusion of *Black Art* from the art curriculum has prohibited meaningful student encounters with racial codes from whiteness to blackness and within historical as well as everyday contexts. Educator and psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum (1998) argues that as society, we pay a high psychological price for unchallenged silence about personal, cultural and institutional racism. These types of racisms are addressed by a wide variety of artists. But, according to Tatum, not to speak about them can lead to “loss of human potential, lowered productivity, and a rising tide of fear and violence” (p. 200).

Neither teaching nor learning is a neutral or transparent process. *Black Art* challenged the narrow ethnocentric boundaries that prevailed in art education during the Black Power era (see Chalmers, 1992; Efland, 1990). Christine Ballengee Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr (2001) have championed multiculturalism as one critical school reform movement in art education. Favoring an approach that infused multiculturalism with a social reconstruction approach, Morris and Stuhr argue for an art and visual education wherein teachers, student, staff and community are engaged democratically “to benefit disenfranchised social and cultural groups identified and investigated as a result of enlightened curriculum” (p. 9).

As an outgrowth of the Black Studies Movement of the 1970s, multiculturalism is directly linked to the Black Arts Movement, a little-known intersection that effectively gave voice to a major disenfranchised group. However as Stovall (2005) argues, multiculturalism has proven to be inefficient in producing relevant curricula because it often to fails to expose the critical roots of racial bias in the curricula. Fundamentally, Stovall maintains, “racism is endemic to the society and its evils are known, there is no excuse for not participating in praxis to change such realities” (p. 206).
An assumption that propels this study is that *Black Art* necessarily puts race at the center of discussion as blackness has a racial visibility in ways that whiteness does not (see Dyer, 1997). When Morris and Stuhr (2001) mention social reconstruction they barely mention race as a point of consideration. This is not the case with critical race theorists in education like Stovall (2005) and William H. Watkins (2005) who remain ever vigilant about the subtle ways white supremacy thinking has wormed its way into the foundations of art education and society as a whole (Chalmers, 1992; Desai, 1999).

Watkins (2005) highlights W. E.B. Du Bois’ social reconstruction views on education, some of which he interweaves into his thinking on the criteria of Black art as a sociopolitical instrument for change—a site of propaganda “despite the wailings of purist” (Dubois [1926] in Lewis, 1994, p. 103). Watkins also points out that “Black and White pedagogy has been as disconnected as Black and White history;” and as this study shows, as disconnected as the arts-based discourses on *Black Art*.

Therefore, *Black Art* is considered here because it can in very unique ways, as this study demonstrates below, spark a new discourse on race that is externally directed but internally important in that it unfolds as race reflective acts (Milner, 2003; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008). Race is a lightening rod for comparing these disconnections in order to dismantle the historical foundations of racism. This approach brings racial boundaries into focus and fosters awareness about how interrelated we are if we challenge the barriers that would keep us apart (Bolgatz, 2005; hooks, 1994, Keating, 1995; Tatum, 1997).

Even though multiculturalism in art and visual culture education promotes understanding across multiple identities, essentialism, hybridity, de-centeredness and
fragmentation, Blackness continues to reside far left of center (see Dyer, 2000). For musical theorist Jeff Chang (2007), and urban education specialist David Stovall (2005), multiculturalism is promising but problematic.

In this regard, this study, while directed at furthering multicultural reform in education overall, clearly argues that multiculturalism alone, even within the larger breakouts of class, gender, and race, remains centered as Euro-American discourse. Analysis here is filtered through other ways of knowing and experiencing the world. This study directly responds to the persistent hierarchical, hegemonic paradigms of difference perpetuated through Eurocentric thought and Western experience. Given this framework, Stovall (2005) argues that within simplistic approaches to multiculturalism “students of color are made to feel guilty for historical persecution [as they are] expected to “rise above” immigrant status like ‘white’ groups” (p. 205); as whiteness is too often re-centered as normative and blackness as outside the norm (also see Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998).

Because Black Art is directly linked to the Black Liberation Struggle it was summarily categorized as “social protest art” or “political art” (Doss, 2002; Pohl, 2002). Such a summary rebuke made it apparent that intellectuals and critics representing mainstream thinking not only dismissed the objects of Black Art, but also the skill and understanding of Black artists (Andrews, 1978). Critics of Black Art were Black and White who believed that the Black lives and experiences embodied in or represented by the works of art were of less significance that art about the lives and experiences of Whites.
In the matter of a black aesthetic, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) had years before noted the significance of spiritual music for sustaining a sense of wholeness among oppressed Black people. In this regard, *Black Art* too, was also a site of spiritual freedom (Neal, 1970). Thus, *Black Art* was and continues to be a site of spiritual renewal and resistance. It challenged America’s ugly racial history and presaged postmodern discourses on matters of power and domination and the hierarchical, hegemonic nature of the art world and its aesthetic paradigm. Given these parameters it is clear that *Black Art* might be viewed as a complex and likely difficult site of art inquiry (Barret, 2000; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate how knowledge of the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement in terms of its historical and cultural contexts, can yet benefit art education.

**Background to the Study**

Art as discourse conveys meaning on many levels. The range and historical and cultural contexts behind art and visual culture especially associated with the Black Power era of the 1960s and 1970s is missing from the canons of art education (Farrington, 2004; Harris, 2003) Art identified as black is usually produced by an African descended artists and has content that represents or is inspire by some aspect of the Black or African experience. That experience can be material, psychological and/or spiritual, but recognizably about some aspect of blackness, lived, known or imagined

It is common that when Western or European or Euro-American art and visual culture is concerned, one level of discourse that is not commonly a matter of art inquiry is the objects’ visible and/or *invisible* racial content. Until recently, art considered to be
produced by white artists has escaped racial meaning. David R. Roediger (2003) argues that it is common for white privilege and presumption to operate unnoticed. He further notes that “whiteness occurs in the context of a nation and world that constantly reproduce inequality but that also generate unending challenges as human solidarity reach beyond whiteness” (p. 53). Therefore, an important assumption of this study is that in regards to European or Euro-American art, race is usually not a critical factor; in fact it is seldom even broached. Race was basically a non sequitur when considering when evaluating and interpreting art, until the era of the Black Arts Movement.

During the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, race was a major consideration both in terms of the art and visual culture produced by African Americans; as well as in the discourses about that art. This study argues that these racially-bound discourses have effectively obstructed the inclusion of Black Art in the canons of art education (Delacruz, 1996; DePillars, 1990). This exclusion is due in large part to how blackness and black identity have historically and culturally been “othered” or marginalized in American society (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Morrison, 1993). Nell Irvin Painter (2005) notes that in the United States, where identity began with race the solidarity of enslaved Africans became race consciousness. These Africans routinely rejected prevailing conventions regarding racial inferiority and superiority.

However to this day, perceived blackness automatically connotes race and/or racial meanings. Film critic Clyde Taylor (1998) introduces a novel concept in relationship to Blackness and beauty. He argues that the characters depicted in Julie Dash’s 1991 award-winning film entitled Daughters of the Dust were too beautiful and
caused great discomfort among viewers. This is an interesting point of view as blackness historically has been a referent for ugliness.

The focus of this qualitative study is the historical body of Black Art from the 1960s and 1970s--the art and visual culture of Black Power and the Black Arts Movement. These visual artifacts and their historical and cultural contexts have been virtually excluded from the canons of art education. Art education loose is in this regard because the Black Arts Movement and its art and visual culture comprise the outpouring of a period of remarkable cultural productivity among African American artists and especially targeted to African American publics (Donaldson, 1998).

This period of art-making is second only to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance marks the first time there was a concerted effort among African American cultural workers to produce art of all kinds that recognized or expressed a unique aspect of African American life. Created by new black Northerners, the art of the Harlem Renaissance, according to Painter (2003), engaged “young and old, [and] embraced their blackness and recognized Africa as their past” (p. 12). The era of the Harlem Renaissance celebrated the idea of a New Negro.

The reality that black cultural production takes place on “alien” soil, so to speak, turns a spotlight on the relative lack of power and control blacks had and continue to have over representations of the black self. This sets in motion a perpetual conundrum of authenticity and ownership, which David Levering Lewis (1994) argues also confounded the notion of authorship during the Harlem Renaissance. For Lewis, this renaissance era was in fact “a somewhat forced phenomenon, a cultural nationalism of the parlor” (p. xiii).
It is well-known that Harlem Renaissance artists, such as writers Zora Neal Hurston and Langston Hughes, were at times, forced to submit to the dictates of their white patrons who defined the look and content of “blackness” (Lewis, 1994, p. xxi). Then as now, black expressivity relied on uncontested non-black, or more specifically mainstream white social and cultural norms Cornel West (1999) correctly describes this black effort as “selective appropriation, incorporation and re-articulation of European ideologies, cultures…” (p. 128).

When *Black Art* came along some 40 years after the Harlem Renaissance, it represented a new aesthetic, a Black aesthetic. The comfortable codes of blackness such as ugliness, poverty, slum-ridden, harboring self-contempt and abjection were flipped. Viewers especially Black viewers, were seeing heroic, images of nuclear and extended families, strong, voluptuous working women, powerful, working men, beautiful children, romanticized narratives of African life, real and imagined.

When the image or art object is perceived to be wholly about White people and produced in accordance with Western art values, that art is generally judged using very common art attributes. In Western art, the white women is considered the most beautiful (Dyer, 1997; Piper, 1996). This was not the case with the genre referred to here as *Black Art*. Little effort was made to understand the intersections and depth of the historical and cultural contexts that gave and continue to give *Black Art* meaning.

Racial identity and race relations were central themes to *Black Art*. Therefore, the content and expressive elements that informed and/or were represented in *Black Art* often contrasted, countered or even condemned the Western aesthetic and visual language. This served to reinforce the discursive formations around *Black Art* as well as its cognition

Groundbreaking research on discourse and race informs this study. Molefi Asante (2005) and Jacqueline Royster (2000) provide new vantage points from which to examine the discursive and rhetorical value of “black” bodies of communication. In addition, in terms of mainstream majority “white” communications, Teun van Dijk (1991 & 2002) found that discourse plays a fundamental role in the cognitive dimension of race and racism. Without knowledge of racism one cannot be expected to know how discourse is involved in its daily reproduction (Van Dijk, 2002, p. 146).

For example, in matters of race and on the subject of racism, the mainstream press serves a critical role as a critical and impacting site of discourse.

The role of Press in the reproduction of racism in society can no longer simply be assessed by listing its stereotypical topics…Since its role is largely symbolic and ideological, and hence based on discursive practices, we first of all need a thorough discourse analytical approach that is able systematically to describe and explain the subtleties of ethnic reporting…[as] the Press is not isolated but linked…to political, economic, or other power institutions…insight [is needed] into the complex questions of the…role of the Press and in particular of the detailed structures and meanings of its reporting, in the process of opinion and attitude formation (van Dijk, 1991, pp. 253-254).

In the 1970s, important exchanges took place between mainstream art critics and curators and their independent African American counterparts. This discursive exchange fundamentally influenced how the genre of Black Arts was perceived then and now.

Michel Foucault is credited with developing a theory about discourse as a signifier of power and the capacity to reproduce its power (Hall, 1993, & Sturken, & Cartwright, 2001). Fundamental to Foucault’s theory, is the notion that “discourses
produce certain kinds of subjects and knowledge,” which in various degrees influence the subject positions defined within the discourses (Sturken, & Cartwright, 2001, p. 354).

Though “race” may not be a natural category, “it” nevertheless plays a central role in the construction and rationalization of orders of difference (Torres, Miron, & Inda, 1999). This ordering of difference reveals interlocking relationships of power, subject position and knowledge construction and valuations.

It is commonly recognized that a racially-white ethnocentric (i.e., Eurocentric and Euro-American or Western) aesthetics dominates in the USA. H. Gene Blocker (2002) explains that the British/European cultural construction “remains the biggest part of America’s cultural roots—not only in terms of population but also in terms of contributions to American culture” (p. 188). What Blocker fails to acknowledge or admit is the racist underpinnings of the British/European cultural construction in American denied and even destroyed non-Western cultural forces. Because of this racism, i.e., “the complex societal system of ethnically- or racially-based domination and its resulting inequality” (van Dijk, 2002, p. 145), the art of White immigrants was deified and the art of those who Whites considered inferior (the African, Indigenous, Asian, etc.) was demeaned and denigrated, made to be exotic or defined as oriental.

The dominant power and authority of Whites constricted and even denied the possibility of an alternative aesthetic taking hold. Though assimilation is flaunted as an American ideal—all for one and one for all—it certainly was not as readily available to African American or Indigenous people. In fact, the denial of civil and human rights is what propelled the struggle for Civil Rights and later the Black Arts Movement. The cross-disciplinary discourses of the Black Arts Movement collapsed the boundaries
between disciplines engaging diverse people and their cultural knowledge into the struggle for social justice.

By way of example, I turn to Spriggs’ (2008) discerning discussion about Ben Jones, an exemplary visual artist of the Black Arts Movement. According to Spriggs, Jones’ art represents the “liberation aesthetics” that characterized the Black Arts Movement. Additionally as Spriggs rightly affirms, Jones’ art, then and now, is indicative of his commitment to excellence and to the serious enterprise of producing art that conceptualized African-derived epistemologies, visual narratives and standards of beauty. Prophetically, Jones freed himself from the limitations of stretched rectangular canvases transforming how Black Art conveyed the need to 1) strive for self-realization and spiritual decolonization; 2) disrupt misconceptions and misdeeds attending the “tenacious social traditions anchored in the complexities of race, identities, color, gender and sexual issues; and 3) illuminate a more accurate story about the “inherited legacies” of African people living in America (p. 23).

Spriggs (2008) also contextualizes Jones as emblematic of the inherited legacies of the Black Arts Movement. Ben Jones had been a student of Hale Woodruff, an icon of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and of the social realism style of the 1930s and the WPA mural projects of the 1940s. Early in his career, however, Woodruff was introduced to classic African art, “the art of his people” (see Henderson & Bearden, 19). Also benefitting from study abroad, Woodruff painted through several eras including post-war abstractions, although Erika Doss (2002) asserts his accomplishments in this style are largely forgotten (p. 135). Still Woodruff’s work prevails as evidenced in the woodcut Going Home (1935), and his mural series, The Amistad Mutiny (1938-9) and The Art of
the Negro. He consciously incorporated African-derived motifs into his work, and dramatically rendered the black body as richly endowed and sinewy successfully conveying African agency through modernist techniques.

Ben Jones, on the other hand, though conversant with the modern realist style takes a different approach to rendering African subjectivity and agency. He literally deconstructs the black body into parts. His ground-breaking installation “Head and Arms” (1970) explored the Black body’s estrangement in American society, even as it asserted its continuing viability as African. Jones eschews narrative realism for a hyper-realistic strategy to interrogate the limits or limitlessness of normative African identity. Through different methods, both Jones and Woodruff turn our attention to contemplate the value of African life in America.

Jones troubled the notion of “Black is beautiful” by dissecting the body even as Woodruff had made the body more whole, more viable. As Woodruff works to recover African history Jones troubles the notion of African identity. Their works, equally adept and visually compelling, suggest that both drew upon the African American everyday and the African continuum for inspiration. Surely, Woodruff’s words guided Jones as well: “…in our efforts to create a black image and to assert our quality, our character, our blackness, our beauty, and all that, the art form must remain one of high level” (Dunkley, 2006). One has to wonder that if not for their African content and the racial climate in which they worked would art historians been more likely to explore not only the biographical ties but also their conceptual links as well.

By making such links art educators can better equip art learners with the knowledge and skills to discern variations and developments in Black Art. In their own
way, Woodruff and Jones challenged prevailing concepts and chose to, through “body reasoning” construct new ways to construct meaning around the corporeal black body at the intersections of Euro-American and African-derived ideas (Oyéwùmi, 1997).

Moving forward drawing other linkages, there are observable connections between the African-centered strategies of Ben Jones and the sculptures of Renee Stout. Like Jones, Renee used her own corporal body as the model to produce the life-size sculpture entitled *Fetish No 2* (1988) (see Harris, 1993, p. 130). Whereas Jones dissects his body into arms and heads; Stout reproduces her whole black body intact. Both artists used constructed the body forms to dramatically focus themselves as the center of mediumship and the subject capable of power, transformation, protection and celebration (Harris, 1993; Jones, 2008). Both Stout and Jones use their own black bodies to reclaim, reinterpret and reconstruct African spiritual concepts through sculptures. Stout, like Jones, worked from a gendered perspective to examine questions of identity.

This simple narrative is indicative of the gaps in the stream of African American art history. Another assumption of this study is that such connections are not commonly taught because they are not readily available to art educators. Therefore, this study aims to reinterpret the dominant literature that diminishes the merits of *Black Art* while establishing a more accurate knowledge-base which art educators can reference to more deeply inquire into the art and visual culture referred to herein as *Black Art*.

In the Beginning. In the beginning, after the first exhibit of a Black Art exhibition at a major art institute, three related reviews by Hilton Kramer appeared in the Sunday New York Times. Kramer is a conservative critic; and it is safe to say he clearly embraces Western formal art norms and contemporary Euro-American art praxis. Hi area
of expertise is the *Avant Garde*. With a couple of exceptions, Kramer roundly panned he show; and since then his views have been adopted as normative. Summarily, Kramer helped to shape how the media and major cultural and academic institutions would come to regard the art and visual culture of the Black Power era (Patton, 1998). His dismissive tone is reflective of an imperialist but politically-savvy posture. Kramer’s “art reviews” had a powerful impact on the public discourse that either defended or challenged *Black Art*. An analysis of the early writings on *Black Art* by Kramer and others, reveals that these reviews are not neutral, but highly informative and thus convey ideological attitudes of the writer and obviously of the editorial board.

Although art reviews tend to be more transparently subjective than “regular” newspaper articles, the language used to convey taste and opinion can also convey power and status. Kramer’s reviews play established the cultural proximity of African American art and artists to the mainstream art world—a world characterized by elitism and exclusionary practices and controlled by a few White men (Wallace, 2004; hooks, 1996).

Racism circumscribed the lives and possibilities of Black artists during the Black Power era—this is well-known. Despite the political gains of the Civil Rights struggle, Mary Schmidt Campbell (1985) insists that “the waters of the artistic mainstream—critical and institutional—were barely rippled” by the cultural producers of *Black Art* (p. 51). During the turbulent years of the Black Power era, White artists also produced oppositional art that openly rejected and subverted what Campbell calls “the critical mainstream’s insulating aesthetic posture” (ibid). Had it not been for racism and a belief in the superiority of white culture and Western aesthetics and epistemology, *Black Art*
might have been perceived as another dimension of radical art practice as is regularly done with the Feminist movement that emerged in the same era (Farrington, 2004).

The irony here is that even though both Black and White artists, men and women “assaulted the art world’s notion of what was acceptable subject matter in art and what is an acceptable way of making art” (Campbell, 1985). Rather, art education canons tend to champion Pop art, conceptual art, performance art and the art of women, categories of art that all emerged during the tumultuous era of the 1960s and 1970s. Black Art, though produced in the same period is regularly ignored or simplistically considered (Wallace, 1993).

Until recently, with few exceptions evidence of racial beliefs is automatically ignored when the image or art object is perceived to be wholly about White people or produced in accordance with Western art values (Dyer, 1997; Piper, 1996). This was not the case with Black Art. For even though racial identity and race relations were central themes to Black Art, they were not the only themes.

The content and expressive elements that informed and/or were represented in Black Art often contrasted, countered and even condemned the Western aesthetic. These elements influenced and reinforced discursive, cognitive and socio-cultural contexts of Black Art (see Powell, 1997, Harris, 1992 & 1994, van Dijk, 1997).

Groundbreaking research on discourse and race has been conducted by Teun van Dijk (1991 & 2002). Important contributions have also been made by Molefi Asante (2005) and Jacqueline Royster (2000). van Dijk (1991 & 2002) has long troubled the relationship between discourse and racism. He found that discourse plays a fundamental role in the cognitive dimension of race and racism. Without knowledge of racism one
cannot be expected to know how discourse is involved in its daily reproduction (van Dijk, 2002, p. 146). A goal of this study is to show that the early literature on *Black Art* both pro and con also reflected the racial bias of the day. As a weapon of struggle, some *Black Art* as discourse clearly attempted to counter racism, but today is criticized for its racial content by renowned scholars such as Cornel West (1999) and Henry Louis Gates (1994).

Paraphrasing Royster (2000), in order to theorize about the discourse associated with *Black Art* one must consider it is more than an autonomous objectified artifact of education and refinement; but that the discourse was “a fundamentally subjective tool, made meaningful within systems of belief” (p. 43). Thus, Royster implies that without knowledge of race, one can neither understand nor appreciate how African Americans acquired and valued literary and visual literacy to “create whirlpools in the pond[s] of public discourse” (p. 42) in order to disrupt the prejudice and contemptuous dimension of the racist social order of America. Therefore, this study aims to increase racial literacy through *Black Art* (Bolgatz, 2005, p. 1).

Race remains a defining difference and a major barrier to what playwright and actress Anna Deavere Smith has called “our struggle to be together in our differences” (Bolgatz, 2005, p. 1). Through a critical comparative analysis of discourse and imagery this study will advance the notion of racial literacy as a set of social competencies that enable individuals to interact in healthy ways to challenge undemocratic, racist practices. To break taboos, one must understand the cause, context and purpose of the taboo. In this way, students can be ever mindful of avoiding the racial logic that circumscribed the hopes and dreams of far too many American citizens and other people in the world.
In summary and to reiterate the purpose of this qualitative study, African American art history is incomplete and the gaps in that historical stream must be filled. One major gap in the historical stream of African American art is caused by the exclusion and undervaluing of Black Art. It is not uncommon to learn that African American art scholars were first introduced to African American art history during their college years.

Africentricity and Critical Race Theory (CRT) are relatively new postmodern social theories, but useful in this exercise (Asante, 1989 & Stovall, 2005). CRT specifically aims to infuse the contributions of people of color into the curriculum in order to engender anti-racist pedagogy to identify and create an approach to teaching and learning that recognizes interdependencies between groups.

Africentricity can help to locate teaching and learning about Black Art within a context that recognizes that black has become more than a color; and as Asante (1998) points out, blackness is itself a trope of ethics. Asante argues to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classicism, homophobia, patriarchy…and white racial domination (p. 2). Consequently as this study works to recover, reclaim, reconstruct and insert Black Art into the African American art historical stream, it is mindful of the human need to act in one’s best interest; it does not seek to belittle the accomplishments of art beyond the category of Black Art. Rather it chooses to provide the bases for increased understanding of the interconnections and intersections between the arts of various ethnicities.

The histories of Western epistemology and the Euro-American racial hierarchy make this a novel but challenging task. As Africentric scholarship, this study is in agreement with the basic premise that multiculturalism is a worthy school reform.
However, it also recognizes that all too often, multiculturalism amounts to little more than a recognition of difference while typically focusing on culture at the expense of structural concerns such as racism (May, 2002). To this paradigm, Africentricity brings a foundation for empowering the excluded based on full self-recognition of African peoples and their cultures; and contests the cultural hegemony of Eurocentric universality even as it projects the idea of intercultural agency where pluralism exists without hierarchy (Asante, 1998).

**Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study is an example of art-historical narrative approached from an Africentric philosophical perspective. It focuses on the seldom explored art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement in order to fill gaps in African American art history. It specifically illuminates the role the genre of *Black Art* played in the development of Africentric cultural practices such as race reflection through Belief Systems Analysis.

Therefore this study explores the impact of the Black Power concept upon the historical and cultural context of the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement. It therefore aims to provide insights about how these visual artifacts anticipated fundamental assumptions of Africentric epistemologies, such as: 1) self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, 2) diunital logic under girds reality which is at once spiritual and material; and 3) racism is a sub-optimal response to reality.

Art was central to the articulation and fulfillment of the Black Liberation agenda of the 1960s and 1970s--this study examines this phenomenon. The movement embraced a cultural nationalist philosophy and contributed to the formulation of an Africentric
worldview. The visual arts also played a galvanizing role in Black communities around America, particularly the community mural projects. However, the value and significance of *Black Art* has been severely delimited by societal and epistemological racism which situates *Black Art* like Black life as less valuable than the lives and the art of Whites (Ani, 2000; DePillars, 1990; Gilman, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994).

For the purposes of this study, *Black Art* is looked upon as more than simply an alternative view about living in a racialized society—it is specifically about living in a racialized world. *Black Art* is explored here to acquaint art educators with untapped resources useful for eradicating racism from the epistemological domains of art education. By employing an Africentric approach, this study situates Black life and art-making traditions as central to art pedagogy and meaning-making through art inquiry. *Black Art* was and is expressive and informing and capable of bearing more than one interpretation (Hall, 1999). The validity of *Black Art* as a meaningful site for art inquiry and as a referent for interrogating the historical and cultural nexus of Black visual culture is made difficult and problematic by the racial ciphers imposed upon it. The aesthetic and ontological sensibility of *Black Art* has yet to be fully welcomed into mainstream art education curriculums. Today, as art education turns on visual culture, sociopolitical and cultural factors are now seen to be important—as important as they were to the *Black Art* of the 1960s and 1970s.

Stuart Hall (1999) posits that the “meanings of the image…cannot be completed within the text as a self-sufficient entity (p. 309). Here, like *Black Art*, the art object or visual artifact is understood as a single point in a circuit of articulations. Other points on the circuit contribute to understanding the epistemological suppositions which produced
Black Art and gave it meaning for its time and for today. From an Africentric philosophical perspective, this study resurrects the circuits of articulations that not only produced and defined Black Art; but also those opposing circuits that delimit its value.

**Chapter Summary.** Traditional art curriculums generally ignore the relationship between African American art of the 1960s and 1970s and the Black Arts Movement. Experience indicates that the Black Art of this period is categorically, but erroneously, reduced to be social protest art.

The central purpose of this study is not only to bring attention to the art objects and art-making strategies of African American artists who participated in an array of world making projects during the Black Power era; but also to redress the sociopolitical, cultural and historical significance of that era. Black Art is viewed here as a culturally-rich conceptual framework for implementing liberatory education, this study advocates for the potential of art to that is reflexive, multidimensional and trans-disciplinary approach to, this study is designed to enable art educators to responsibly transform the curriculum to represent a more inclusive and instrumentally-sound body of knowledge about the recent and inherited legacies of African American art history.

Chapter One presents an overview of the research including a background to the study, the purpose and significance of the research, and definitions of key terms. Chapter Two discusses Optimal Theory and the Africentric Worldview as a basis for disrupting elements of racism in art education by exploring the interconnections between race, knowledge and power through the study of Black Art and the Black Arts Movement. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach for the study including data collection and analysis. Chapter Four offers a brief literature review highlighting the
historiography of African American art writing that focuses on the connections between 

*Black Art*, Black Power and the Black Arts Movement. Chapter Five explores the 
historical racial bias behind art education and looks at race–related issues in art 
education today, underscoring how art provides unique opportunities to dismantle racism 
as did the art and visual culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter Six summarizes how the 
study of *Black Art* can benefit art education particularly to disrupt the either/or racial 
binary.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Africentric, Afrocentric or African Centered Approach.**

Africentric, Afrocentric or African-centered approach are interchangeable terms 
representing a quality of thought and practice which represents and reflects the life 
experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of 
analyses. Afrocentricity, as originally conceived by Molefi Asante (1980) especially 
seeks to relocate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to 
eliminate the notion of marginality, what Asante calls the illusion of the fringes.

**Black Aesthetic**

The Black Aesthetic of the 1960s and 1970s had an inextricable sociopolitical 
dimension that fulfilled the wholistic objectives of a Black struggle. The concept of 
a black aesthetic emerged from and spoke directly to Black people. It celebrated 
libratory thinking, self-determination and self-knowledge. Larry Neal (1972) 
suggested a black aesthetic generated art that opened Black people up to recognize
beauty and ugliness within in order to correct behavior and to live a better life, embracing justice and truth. Neal’s ideas are inherent in Myers’ Optimal Theory.

**Black Art**

*Black Art* as italicized here, specifically refers to the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power era of the 1960s and 1970s. In its broader original context Black Art was the generic name given to all cultural expressions including literature, plays, and music, as well as objects of art and visual culture produced by Blacks. Therefore, to be Black Art, the work was produced by, for and about the Black and/or African experience. Calling for art to be functional, collective and committing, cultural nationalist Maulana Karenga issued an edict establishing new parameters for assessing how art served the Black struggle. Some Black artists joined mainstream critics protesting Karenga’s ideas. Of particular interest here is art that represents Black and African-derived aesthetics.

**Black Consciousness/Consciousness-raising**

Black Consciousness related to having a heightened understanding of “black identity as the soul of a new radicalism” (Joseph, 2006, p. 3). Consciousness-raising occurred through study and practice for the purpose of improving the life chances of Black people.

**Black Studies**

Black Studies is an academic discipline that is also known as African American and African Studies, Africana Studies, Pan-African Studies Black or World Studies. Manning Marable (2000) provides the following useful definition of Black Studies:
The concept of Black Studies is rooted in the black intellectual tradition which is characterized as being descriptive, corrective and prescriptive in nature. However, it this does not mean that Black studies was intended to be simply the scholarship of intellectuals who just happened to be black, nor was it research about the black experience by just anyone of any random ethnic background and ideological bias. In addition, it was never intended to be a sub-category of some race-based ideology but a critical body of scholarship that sought over time to dismantle powerful racist intellectual categories and white supremacy itself.

**Diunital Logic/Diunital Thinking**

Diunital or “both/and” logic reflects understanding of the interconnectivity between all phenomena, real and spiritual. W. D. Wright (2002) argues that diunital organizational logic is at the heart of what he describes is Black cognition. In Optimal Theory, Myers (1993) defines a diunital mode of thinking as more optimal than either/or or dualistic thinking which promotes hierarchies and fragmentation. Diunital conveys the notion that diverse realities interact and they are not always contradictory.

**Race-Consciousness**

Race-consciousness is a veritable fact of life in the USA. Thandeka (1999) argues that race and the abhorrence of difference are first reproduced through intimate socialization between caregiver and child. She insists that white children are the first victims of racism as they are trained by their caregivers to be ashamed of being less than white. She further maintains that white experience has a dimension of shame that reflects “the failure of the self to live up to its own
ideals” (p. 108). Blackness emerged in counterpoint to whiteness. A doll test akin to the one conducted by Kenneth Clark in association with the 1954 Brown Decision was attempted in 2006. However informal, this test revealed that black children continue to see blackness as ugliness and badness (Edney, 2006).

**Racism**

Racism is a system of advantage based on race where whites have a distinct advantage within the Western social order, even if Whites do not embrace overtly prejudicial thinking (see Tatum, 1997). W. D. Wright (1998) adds that racism imposes a sense of alienation as it discriminates and segregates solely on the basis of skin color.

**Racial Logics**

Race is a powerful determinant that can influence one’s sense of self and subjectivity. It can also influence how visual artifacts are understood and appreciated. Black art images are frequently met with reductive bias because blackness has historically been considered inferior racialized material, while the racial category of whiteness is just the opposite (Dyer, 1997). Often unknowingly art educators may apply visual logics in ways that are influenced by or reproduce race when interpreting art objects. Black art is often burdened as a racial signifier. As such, these objects might be disturbing as memoro-historical sites, capable of engendering feelings of dread among art educators. Such feelings would not likely inspire interaction with Black Art unless directed. Racial logics function at various levels; ranging from severe, abject racism to the supposed guilt-free color-blind level. Race consciousness and racial logics are interrelated and can be subtle and
hidden or overt, ranging from 1) an *identity/awareness level* about race as difference; 2) a *victimological level* about race as delimiting; or 3) a *transperformative level* that is radically knowledge-driven designed to understand formations and influences of racism and/or race. Racial logics is also predicated on the notion that, assuming Arthur Efland (2000) is correct, art in Western societies is not merely about itself; but also represents society outside of art—often the everyday social world (p. 77’). To understand the ways racial logics influenced the visuality of *Black Art* promises to help today’s art learners dismantle the destructive power of racialized meaning that consumed the everyday of the 1960s and 1970s.

**Visual Culture**

Anything visible is a potential object of study for Visual Culture; however from the standpoint of art education, especially from an African-centered perspective, there are some distinctions between works of art and other types of visual objects. From an African-centered perspective, the worthiness of a visual object or practice or performance depends not only on its inherent qualities, but also on its place within the context of the whole of culture, and how it performs within that culture. The art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement was wide-ranging and represents a shift in knowledge content domains including text to imagery. Black Art and visual culture as applied here ranges from the traditional art forms of painting and sculpture as well as attire and adornment, and performance and community-based arts activities such as murals and more.
**Visual Logics**

Visual logics refer to the beliefs and practices that inform visual discourses. In art education these include formal qualities, descriptive content, expressive feature, symbolism, contexts, aesthetics, etc. Racialized meaning has and continues to influence visual logics, the way in which we see and interpret phenomenon.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RE-COGNIZING BLACK ART

By telling the stories about your past—both your own family history and your wider African and African American heritage—you have helped tell all our stories, and by chronicling injustices and problems of our current world, you underline our obligations to each other (Lucille Clifton, 2005).

Theorizing the Visual Domain of a Racist Society

Black Art provides an untapped river from which to garner meaningful and stimulating interdisciplinary libratory arts-based teaching and learning prompts. Like other peoples in other eras, the Black Arts Movement was a time when Black cultural producers and intellectuals conceptualized a new arts paradigm based on a major philosophical shift in how the dreams and realities of Black people needed to be re-envisioned and communicated.

The paradigmatic shift that produced Black Art also foregrounded the transdisciplinary focus of Black Studies. Both were motivated by the need to re-interpret phenomena by integrating sociological, historical, literary, musical and cultural knowledge to convey the singularity of the African American experience.
The cultural producers of the Black Arts era expanded the visual domain to contest the marginalization of African American cultural knowledge. Not confined to stretched canvas of pedestals, Black artists questioned the exclusionary dominance of American mainstream culture and resisted its hegemonic Eurocentric focus. Toward this end, Black visual artists generated an autonomous visual language that consciously invoked aspects from their African heritage along with Western ideas.

To understand Black Art more fully, one must not only recognize but also appreciate the common currents that flowed through the histories of Black people in the USA and in oppressed or colonized societies. Beverly M. Gordon (1994) names these six common currents—self-help, self-reliance, service, economic autonomy, political power, and nationalism. Black Art relied on ‘new’ sets of African-centered values to address these currents. Visual artists joined other cultural producers to construct new meanings reflecting a re-evaluation of past, present and future lives of Black people.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how these various currents require a convergence of theoretical frameworks to shed light on the complex issues intersecting through the genre of Black Art. Therefore, this chapter charts the intersecting theories that gave meaning to Black Art and those that support a proper analysis of the genre and its significance. For example, to address the marginalization of African American cultural knowledge it is necessary to integrate Critical Race Theory and Africentric theory in order to properly assess and interpret or “reCognize” the central role of art to impoverished Black communities. Then, to explore the epistemological paradigms of Black Art, Critical Discourse Analysis informed by optimal theory can provide a sound basis for reading the historical and cultural and sociopolitical realities of Black Art.
Since this study is intended to transform how Black Art is generally known today, it is necessary to confront racism head-on as it was a defining social factor and aesthetic concern during the Black Arts era. By facing racism head-on, art education is better suited to contribute to the building of healthy communities made up of strong and discerning individuals. Black Art provides a novel site from which to address racism and inequities; and it will be shown that Black Art played a critical role in weakening the shackles of racism from the minds and hearts of Black people. However, Black Art disturbed the countenance of Whites who were more accustomed to denying their complicity in the re-production of racism than in constructively engaging Black Art as viable discourses aimed at improving their lives and others (Patton, 1998; Wright, 1997).

Racism and Art. This analysis acquaints contemporary art educators with the fundamental thought processes and ideologies that strengthened Black Art’s capacity to tackle white supremacy and counter notions of Black inferiority. This study is predicated on the belief that by studying Black Art today, art educators and their students will gain new insights and understanding of the value of Black Art within its historical and sociopolitical context. In addition, this knowledge will serve as a basis for continuing to dismantle the remnants of racism, which remains a significant problem in educational research and in contemporary society today (see Bolgatz, 2005; Morrison, 1992; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Schmidt, 1985; Thandeka, 1994).

Although the racial landscape has improved since the 1960s and 1970s; racism has continued to flare its ugly head. Noted psychologist Beverly Tatum (1997) explains that racism is more than simple prejudice, that in fact it is “a system of advantage based on race” (p. 7). Tatum further clarifies that racism is not only a personal ideology based
on prejudicial racial beliefs, but as a basis for organized oppression, racism constitutes a system defined by cultural messages, institutional policies, practices and individual, group and societal beliefs that guide actions.

Indeed, to accomplish the qualitative aims of this study it is critical to acknowledge that racial bias is present within contemporary as well as in traditional art-based epistemologies. While it is imperative to acknowledge that racism informed the internal and external dimensions of Black Art, neither Black Art nor the African-centered ideologies that informed it were designed to oppress another people, but rather Black Art was generally focused on enlightening its target public.

Therefore, like Black Art, this study emerges from theoretical positions that both seek to eradicate racism while providing methods for understanding how racism really looks and works. Black Studies and Africentric research are relied on to both understand the phenomenon of racism as a barrier that must be overcome to recover the missing stories of African American art history. Black Art provides the visual codes for understanding and interpreting the Black Arts Movement, and other stories. To properly assess Black Art one needs theories that speak from within the genre

**Africentric Research Paradigm**

Africentricity is at once an outcome of, a response to, and a remedy for the difficult times that constituted the Black Arts Movement. It is also fundamentally founded upon the concept of a consciousness of victory. It will be shown that Africentricity linked to optimal theory provides viable paradigm for race reflection and personal development through critical thinking (Milner, 2003; Myers, 1993).
As conceptualized by Molefi Asante (1998), Africentricity is a holistic philosophical perspective especially useful as:

a metatheory or paradigm…a conception that includes a multiplicity of theories: as such, it allows us to develop better interpretations, fuller understandings, and more effective articulations of the meaning of human goals and interactions…A metatheory, then, is the product of decision rather than discovery, and it is justified by the theories that are consonant to it (p. 45).

As a metatheory, Africentricity can necessarily accommodate a multiplicity of theories and thus insure that this qualitative inquiry into Black Art and its significance is thoughtful, valid and wide-ranging. Therefore this study must interweave selected art-based theories through the Africentric metatheory paradigm in order to produce a multi-layered analysis of the spiritual imperative of Black Art in light of its era-specific as well as its inherited historical, sociological, and cultural contexts.

Flexibility within Africentric Thought. “Africentric,” “Afrocentric” or “African-centered” are interchangeable terms representing a quality of thought and practice which, in ways not common to Western epistemological traditions, places the life experiences, histories and traditions of people of African ancestry at the center of analyses (Madhubuti, H. & Madhubuti, S., 1994). While Asante (1980) is credited with conceptualizing Afrocentricity; he acknowledges his indebtedness to earlier Black American, Caribbean, African and Pan African intellectuals, including Cheik Anta Diop, Booker T. Washington, W.E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Fundamentally, however, Afrocentricity at its core “seeks to re-locate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes” the positionality given meaning by its marginality (available at www.asante.com).
To fully understand this conceptualization of Afrocentricity or Africentricity, which is the term preferred for this study, one must also understand the linkages between the Black Power phenomenon, Black Cultural Nationalist ideology, and the Black Studies Movement. Black Power ushered in a new more radical conceptualization of collective Black subjectivity. Demonstrations of collective Black agency were celebrated to counter the “five hundred years Africans have been taken off of their cultural, economic, religious, political, and social terms” only existing primarily on the periphery of Europe” (Asante, available at www.asante.com). Because of this, Molefi argues, Black people have sometimes found themselves to be complicit in carrying out anti-African racism born of Western triumphalism. In other words, the state that achieves this triumph is cryptically described by bell hooks (1997) as a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Black Cultural Nationalism provided another dimension of the victorious consciousness that characterized Black Power and informed Black Art. Thus, cultural nationalist ideology expanded the popular notion that “African Americans possessed a distinct aesthetic, sense of values, and communal ethos emerging from either or both, their contemporary folkways and continental African heritage (Brown, 2003, p. 6).

Black cultural nationalism promoted a sense of collective responsibility and a self-authenticating ethnic identity among African-descended people; and was essentially a practical expression of Kawaida theory. Conceived by Maulana Karenga and celebrated by the playwright and author Amiri Baraka (1972), Kawaida began to attract and influence a wider public with the publication of The Quotable Karenga in 1967, a summary of the teachings of Maulana Karenga written by Clyde Halisi and James Mtume.
In *The Quotable Karenga*, Halisi and Mtume (1967) presented the basic tenets for reconceptualizing how one understood the arts, revolution, politics, and religion, as well as cultural nationalism and more. These tenets provided an alternative value-laden template by which African Americans could reconstruct their lives in contrast to Euro-American mores. Baraka thus described Kawaida theory as “the measure of a ‘better’ life” (p. 140), Although Baraka would emphatically denounce cultural nationalism in the early 1970s; initially he embraced Karenga’s conceptual framework and led the way for the cultural nationalist focus of the Black Arts Movement (Brown, 2006; Woodard, 1999).

By 1971, Baraka would criticize nationalists as being “drunk with the rhetoric of revolution” (Woodard, 1999, p. 188); and encourage Black people to gain greater political and economic control over their communities and schools. Baraka argued that Black people “must learn to build houses and how to acquire the land necessary to build houses…and get hold of the political power necessary to affect his dynamic, now” and added that “the most revolutionary Africans…will be those who can deliver goods and services…” (ibid, p. 188-189).

Still, Kawaida must be credited for formally introducing the Nguzo Saba, the Africentric value system that formed the basis of Kwanzaa, the annual African-based celebration created and instituted by Karenga in 1966 (Brown, 2006). It will be shown that the Nguzo Saba and cultural nationalist ideology informed Black artists then as now.

Kawaida theory also informed Molefi Asante’s construction of Africentricity, as it encouraged Black people to make valid connections with their African heritage. Like Karenga and Elijah Muhammad with the Nation of Islam before him, Asante advanced
the notion that “a people can change the ethos [or collective personality] by which they are known” (Asante, 1980, p. 25). Black folks looking to change their mental and psychic states of being turned to the writings of Baraka, Franz Fanon (1967), John Henrik Clarke, Karenga, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963 & 1968), Malcolm X (1964), and of course W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) and others. Many revolutionary-minded people also looked to Elijah Muhammad’s 1967 book *How to Eat to Live*, which foregrounded the contemporary whole food revolution and encouraged Black people to make better dietary choices.

These and other intellectuals and spiritual leaders revolutionized how Black people envisioned themselves and functioned in a racist society. Their concepts informed *Black Art* and provided the foundation upon which Molefi Asante (1980) conceived of Africentricity as a new self-help ideology within the academic arena. Asante (2000) conceived of the Africentric idea to direct the “relocation of subject-place in the African world” (p. 197), and focus Black Studies.

Africentricity thus filled an intellectual void and established itself as a methodology to bring about fundamental referential changes in the African community (Mazama, 2000). Designed as a cohesive, holistic theoretical perspective, Africentricity is “a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives dominate” (p. 2). It is a theoretical perspective that directs researchers to place African needs and issues at the center of any analysis of African phenomena.

Fundamental to Africentricity is belief in the “unity of being” and the “complementarity” of opposites (Mazama, 2002 & 2003).

Edwin Nichols argued that complimentarity was an African concept in his groundbreaking 1976 study *The Philosophical Aspects of Cultural Differences* (Myers,
In this study, Nichols also introduced the concept of “diunital logic” or “both/and” reasoning; as opposed to the either/or, hierarchal, binary reasoning characteristic of cognitive and epistemological traditions of the Western worldview. Nichols suggests diunital logic is intuitively grounded in the union of opposites and is more typical of African cognitive and epistemological traditions.

W. D. Wright (2002) extends this notion through ideational guidance of Black cognitive behavior wherein “all aspects of reality, whether oppositional or not, similar or different, are individual aspects of reality that have their own properties or dimensions and their own integrity” (p. 114). In other words, the concept of diunital logic is fundamental to the notion of the Africentric worldview in that multiple realities are recognized as manifestations of individual realities that all linked. Each and all aspects have their individual and intrinsic realities and work together within a larger reality made up of individually equal intrinsic qualities that interact to manifest as wholeness.

This sense of wholeness is based on the interconnections and interactions within and between individual parts is fundamental to the Africentric worldview. In Nichols’ comparison of Africentric and Eurocentric worldviews, diunital logic spoke to concepts “interrelated and interconnected through human and spiritual networks” (Myers, 1993, p. 13). Sharing insights about Africentricity, poet and educator Haki Madhubuti explains:

Africentricity is therein the intellectual and philosophical foundations upon which people of African ancestry should create their own scientific and moral criterion for authenticating the reality of African human processes. It represents the core and fundamental quality of the “Belonging” of [or to] African ancestry (Madhubuti, H. & Madhubuti, S. 1994, pp 7-8)

Focusing on different aspects, painter, art historian and art educator Michael D. Harris (1992) suggests:
Africentricism is not an attempt to impose an African world view upon others, nor is it an attempt to develop Black supremacy. Rather, Africentricism proposes that people of African descent or cultural orientation center their view and evaluation of the world within their own historical and ontological framework (p. 306).

Africentricity like Black Art is expressed in many ways but, and as Ama Mazama (2000) poignantly demonstrates, Africentricity like Black Art was also misinterpreted. On this point, Harris (2003) provides additional insight responding to a 1991 Newsweek article entitled African Dreams:

Africentrism has been described in Newsweek magazine as “a movement that uses scholarship to forge a distinctive view of the world, one in which Europeans and their white descendents no longer occupy the central and exalted position…However, the Newsweek article states that Africentrism proposes, in effect, “the creation of a separate history for and by black Americans,” which the authors called “intellectual apartheid”. This is incorrect (p. 306).

Still as theory and practice Asante (1991) maintains Afrocentricity calls upon researchers to investigate African people as subjects rather than as objects at the fringes of the European experience. However, a popular criticism is voiced by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) when she laments that Africentric scholarship often relies on biological notions of ‘race.’ Collins, a scholar of Black feminist, nevertheless argues that the Africentric worldview has value in that it responds to and uplifts self-conscious Black struggle, especially in a society that denigrates African ideas and people.

Similarly, Mazama (2003) (Asante’s ideological compatriot), stipulates that Afrocentricity when applied to “textual analysis places discourse within a historiography that dismisses Eurocentric and racist claims of African ahistoricalness and inferiority” (p. 29). These views are the same that informed Black Art however informally.

Locating the Researcher in Africentric Research. To properly conduct Africentric research, Asante encourages researchers to first define their own “cultural address,
location, or place,” as well as to be cognizant of the location[s] of others involved in the project as well. This concept of location is echoed by feminist scholars who embrace standpoint theory; and in some ways, echoes the propensity for reflective thinking that John Dewey spoke of in 1933 when he argued: reflection “emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity” (Milner, 2003, p. 174).

Within an Africentric orbit, there is no separation between the investigator/subject relationships (Asante, 1990). Self-examination is a critical aspect of Africentric research processes and epistemologies. This approach calls for transparency to self/subject/object re-positioning parallels feminist research strategies that foster strong reflexivity, standpoint theory and strong objectivity (see Brooks & Hesse Biber, 2007).

Drawing correlations between the Africentric idea of location and standpoint, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) makes the point that “the Black women’s standpoint from an Africentric perspective rejects either/or dichotomous thinking,” opting instead for the interdependence of thought and action, because “such self-defined standpoints can stimulate resistance” (p. 28). Black Power and the Black Arts era attracted criticism from Black women scholars, artists and activists. While they too fought for Black liberation, they argued that the movement’s male-dominated leadership wrongly perpetuated a subordinate role for women. Toni Cade [Bambara] (1970) rightfully points out that there was no evidence that African women who ran marketplaces, fought in wars and governed whole nations had in any way degraded their men by being strong and articulate (p. 104). It is interesting that most of the recent writing on the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement has been undertaken by women, many of whom also embrace feminist ideology.
Numerous women artists participated fully in the Black Arts Movement. But later, some Black women found it necessary or determined that better opportunities would arise by aligning their allegiances with the Women’s Art Movement that unfolded after 1968 (Collins, 2006; Farrington, 1999, 2004; Patton, 1998). These sorts of shifts proved to be conflictual to a degree but they also underscore the need for clarity in terms of one’s cultural address, location or place. In other words, Africentricity fosters a need for transparency in research—wherein the researcher consciously acknowledges her personal biases, views and positionality in relationship to others; and particularly to those who are the subject of the research (Mazama, 2003; Modupe, 2003).

Africentrically, research is represented as an intimate enterprise. Linda James Myers (1993) introduces another level of transparency by correctly advocating that the researcher locate one’s position within a spectrum ranging from optimal to sub-optimal. In this way Myers (1993) suggests, “power becomes the ability to define reality” whereby “the optimal view posits human consciousness as the indisputable determinant of a universe known to us by direct and immediate self-knowledge” (pp. 92-93).

This act of locating one’s place and cultural address is only effective with honest self-examination—the sort of reflective thinking needed to clarify one’s position in respect to prevailing domains of power and accepted knowledge canons. Myers (1993) reflexive thinking process called Belief Systems Analysis (BSA) facilitates and manages Asante’s location analysis.

**Optimizing Africentricity for Reflexive Belief Systems Analysis (BSA).** Myers (1993) argues that through BSA, the researcher/learner is encouraged to continuously reflect upon their “beliefs, values and the orientation of mainstream culture” (p. 77).
Fundamentally cognitive, in the it requires conscious action, BSA is “holistic in orientation, [as Africentric practice,] BSA does not separate the cognitive from the unconscious, affective, behavioral, optimal, cultural, feminine, or the metaphysical” (p. 75). BSA seeks to strengthen one’s sense of self-worth and increase understanding of “the realization of being as a manifestation of an infinite positive power” (p. 77).

A reflexive approach to research has been especially popular among feminist scholars such as Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2007), Collins (1990, 2000) and Patti Lather (2000), but has also been critically important to Africentric scholars (Asante, 1980; Modupe, 2003). Reflexivity has also been important aspect of the Black intellectual tradition which has fundamentally been a descriptive enterprise reflecting an insider’s perspective based on the realities of black life and experience from the point of view of Black people themselves (Marable, 2000). To paraphrase Manning Marable (2000), the shapers of the visual domain of the Black Arts Movement like the Black intellectual was a reflexive participant/observer seeking to make meaning from the subjective truths of Black people’s collective experiences.

Africentricity fosters transparency and reflexive self-analysis in research in part, by acknowledging the threat and presence of racial bias in the researcher and/or in the research epistemology. Transparency and reflexivity is critical to establishing and maintaining authenticity in Africentric research (Modupe, 2002).

Optimal Psychology theorist Myers’ (1993) professes quality research is first and foremost rooted in self-knowledge. Self-knowledge within an optimal Africentric worldview is directly linked to the collective good. In this regard, Myers (2003) links the perspective of Africans in America to those of the First Americans or the indigenous
people of the country. Belief systems analysis is a process whereby the individual and the collective can engage in reflexive thinking to move from a “sick” state of oppressed minority to one of holistic health and wellness for the common good.

Myers (2003) optimal healthy outlook is one that organizes and integrates knowledge across specialties and sub-specialties. This approach to synthesizing and integrating knowledge turns the heart and mind away from externalized socialization process to more inward considerations and concerns for advancing personal as intricately connected to the common good. In optimal thought “unity consciousness is the highest stage of development” (p. 32).

Thus the “proper consciousness of correct awareness according to the structure of the [Optimal Africentric] conceptual system [is] based on harmony and order” (p 13). For Myers, this mode of reasoning exemplifies diunital or “both/and” logic and confers interconnectivity between all phenomena real and spiritual. W. D. Wright (2002) argues that diunital organizational logic is at the heart of what he describes is Black cognition, which he unfortunately delimits as a horizontal and not a perpendicular or hierarchal mode of thinking. A diunital mode of thinking is not dualistic because it is based on the notion that “realities interact and they are not always contradictory.”

The diunital thinking of Africentricity is a similar to the flexible, improvisational nature of what Wright (2002) has defined as Black cognitive style or Black cognition. Wrights concept is similar to cognitive flexibility as defined by art educators Arthur Efland (2000) and Georgiana Short (1997). Because they associate flexibility in cognition with “ill-structured” processes, Efland and Short resort to what John T. Chissell (1994) describes as thinking derived from a “sick care” system of analysis.
Here, ill-structured refers to the difficulty learners have in transferring factual information to real life circumstances. In other words, according to Efland (2000) “cognitive flexibility is a quality of mind that enables learners to use their knowledge in relevant ways in real-world situations [involving] on the part of the learner to represent knowledge (concepts, ideas) in multiple ways” (p. 82). Teaching and learning within a cognitive flexible environment is “multidirectional, involving the formation of multiple perspectives” (ibid.).

Cognitive flexibility theory recalls Wrights (2002) diunital logic and serves as the basis of W. E. B. Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness, “a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that on in amused contempt and pity” (quoted in Holt, 1995, pp. 1-2). Thomas C. Holt (1995) also finds similarity in Frantz Fanon’s analysis of needing to remain whole despite that imposed a “multiply fragmented” sense of the blackness wherein “the Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of Whites (p. 2). Franz determined that Blacks encountered difficulties in the development of their bodily schema because the racist oppressive hierarchies to which they were submitted made it difficult for them to experience wholeness and to “compose a sense of self” a whole physical body integrated in and with nature, space and time (ibid.). But it is this very cognitive dissonance, a result of living on the margins of the mainstream that has shaped Black thought and Black intellectual traditions; and the development of the Black Arts Movement.

The outbreak of the 1960s, the third major political upsurge by the African-American people in a history of continued struggle for the equality and self-determination, also gave rise to an arts and cultural movement (Baraka, 1991, p. 152).
The goal of the Black Arts Movement was to produce art that was recognizably African American, mass-oriented, direct, understandable, moving and political, and revolutionary in its ability to be transformative. Black Art challenged society and as such challenged the “philosophical, aesthetic, and institutionalized superstructure of the society;” and “especially challenged the ‘whiteness’ of art as posited by a white supremacist society” (Baraka, 1991, p. 152). This transformative role of Black Art was also an effort to alter life on the margins, the places where Blacks resided.

Sylvia Wynter, the literary theorist and cultural critic, optimizes marginal positionality when she argues that life on the margins and constructions of otherness can offer a perspective advantage—an advantage that speaks to “the way that not being positioned in the center allows for ‘wide-angle’ vision” (in Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 407). This ‘wide-angle’ advantage, according Ladson-Billings (2004) “is not due to an inherent racial/cultural difference but is the result of the dialectical nature of constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the normative boundary of the conception of the Self/Other” (ibid.). This wide-angle sense of being, seeing and knowing is at the heart of “an epistemic project [that] is more than simply adding on multiple perspectives or ‘pivoting’ the center; rather, this liminal position or point of alterity attempts to transcend an either/or epistemology” (ibid.).

Ladson-Billings (2004) further the importance of recognizing “alterity is not a dualistic position” but one reflecting “multiple and equally partial standpoints that are either valid or inexorably ranked hierarchically” (ibid.). Those who occupy this liminal position tend not to move from the margins to the mainstream center, because they
understand that it tends to be sub-optimal and corrupting. So, even though subordinated groups learn the ways of the dominant group, they often prefer to remain outside of it.

To understand the nexus of the historical and cultural contexts of *Black Art* which came into being at a time of insider/outsider discourses, one needs to embrace the wide-angle view of the liminal perspective because it can reveal the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the subjugated or marginalized other. Margins and mainstream centers are constructed to maintain power relationships that continue to disadvantage those locked out of the mainstream.

Because *Black Art* in many ways represented a critique of the mainstream and a preference to stay outside of it, it was dishonored, dismissed and demeaned as insignificant to the mainstream. Little if any consideration was given to how *Black Art* served the marginalized Black population.

In this way, the wide-angle liminal perspective is similar in nature to the both/and character of diunital logic and cognitive flexibility thinking. The wide-angle view portends an inherent intuitive consciousness of victory—a transperformative state of mind and readiness to demonstrate, despite the odds, mastery over one’s spirit, mind and body to perform seamlessly between differing sets of conditions. One will find an interesting analysis in the work of Maurice Stevens’ (2003) who introduces the idea of trans(per)formative pedagogy as a method for questioning and re-negotiating cognitive and psychic/social interpretations of identity, subjectivity and agency. Stevens calls for a “trans(per)formative cultural performance;” one that has the capacity to influence how one thinks and “reproduce[s] something other than old insider/outsider politics” (p. 28).
**Competing Epistemologies.** Ladson-Billings (2004) defines epistemology as follows:

…the concept of epistemology is more than a “way of knowing.” An epistemology is a “system of knowing” that has both an internal logic and external validity. This distinction between an epistemology and “ways of knowing” is not a trivial one…The claim of an epistemological ground is a crucial legitimizing force...linked intimately to worldview…worldview and systems of knowledge are symbiotic—that is how one views the world is influenced by what knowledge one possesses, and what knowledge one is capable of possessing is influenced deeply by one’s worldview. Thus the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their worldview (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 399)

In terms of epistemology, the Africentric view as defined by Myers (1993), affirms that since self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, this way to knowing is based on an internal process as opposed to the external rational process of counting and measuring. In Africentric epistemology, knowledge is acquired “through symbolic imagery and rhythm” and where “all is symbolic of spirit manifesting when harmony and balance are present” (p 13). Ontologically speaking, within the Africentric worldview one seeks balance between the spiritual and the material. Ladson-Billings (2004) contrasts this with the materiality of hegemony that is enfolded in the Western/Euro-American worldview, which has long “claim[ed] to be the only legitimate way to view the world” (p. 399).

During the Black Arts Movement, artists and others were also inspired by African liberation movements against the long arms of colonial powers introduced other concepts such as *Ubuntu* or the notion, “I am because we are.” Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004) explains that this translation of *Ubuntu* means “the individual’s existence [and knowledge] is contingent upon relationships with others” (p. 398); an idea diametrically
opposed to the famous declaration made by Rene Descartes, who as the father of Western philosophy, declared “I think therefore I am.”

Myers (1993) considers this Descartian kind of thinking as fragmentary and based on externalized gratification. Ladson-Billings (2004) considers Descartes’ view to be deeply ingrained in Western thought and the dominant Euro-American worldview; and epistemological traditions, which she suggests are historically “effectively aggressive” (p. 399). Myers also claims this Western/Euro-American point of view enables oppression, subjugation, racism and anger because its sphere of caring is short-circuited.

Ubuntu, on the other hand, mirrors what Myers (1993) has described as the interconnected “unity that contains and connects all things” (p. 24). Ubuntu is descriptive of the African-centered worldview that began to crystallize during the Black Power era. Like Ubuntu or the Bantu sentiment of “I am because we are” the Africentric worldview fosters a “collective identity of being one with the source of all good.” In fact, ubuntu is a core value of the optimal Africentric worldview conceptualized by Myers to foster a sense of self that includes “all of the ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature, and the entire community” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 399; Myers, 1993, p. 13). This opposes the Western “individualized ego/mind” so indicative of the conflictual dualities commonplace in American society during the 1960s and 1970s.

If Ladson-Billings is correct in placing Descartes at the core of Western thought, then Descartes also represents what Myers (1993) defines as sub-optimal, or in other words, a distorted illusion of the optimal, where survival requires aggression to obtain limited resources. In the externalized, materialist, sub-optimal view, human worth is fragile and diminished equal only to the material things we own.
Conversely, the optimal or ideal Africentric worldview represents a different logic, one wherein the cultural logos (i.e., internal logic) or what Marimba Ani (2000) calls the *asili*, is characterized by a “unity that transcends all opposites” (Myers, 1993, p. 24). Ani (1980) elucidates the differences between the African and Eurocentric epistemologies when she points out: “African epistemology and its attendant view of the essence of the human brings us closer to a phenomenological approach to learning, which recognizes a that “soul-force” compels Black survival, and opposes the Western notion of “objectification” as the valued mode of acquiring knowledge” (p. 34-35). Ani underscores these points with a quote from Carlton Molette (1973)

The Afro-American aesthetic does not operate on the characteristically European assumption that all human behavior is either rationally motivated, resulting in elevated behavior, or emotionally motivated, resulting in base behavior. The Afro-American aesthetic places a very high value upon emotionally motivated behavior; or another term that might be used to describe it…would be spiritually motivated. (in Ani, 1980, p. 35)

**Interrogating Black Art as a Discourse of Possibilities.** It is impossible to separate word and text and form and collective mission when engaging *Black Art*; therefore it is imperative to analyze the literature that informed the genre as well as the content and intent of the art objects. A major opinion about African-American art and visual culture during the 1960s and 1970s is that art-making and cultural production was pressured to adhere to a finite set of criteria. To weigh the veracity of this opinion, and more to the point, to examine for whom this opinion rings true, requires analyzing and comparing the discourses that not only informed *Black Art* but also the critical and historical discourse about it.

Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which
provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. (Hall, 2002, p. 6).

Looking back on the major thrust of academic discourse during the 1960s, critical theorists Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2004) suggest it frequently concerned the ways disciplines were replicating forms of Enlightenment domination and Western Capitalism. These were clearly the reasons why students in the USA and France rebelled against the academy. From their rebellions and criticisms emerged a “discourse of possibility,” a discourse that not only focused on “the social construction of experience” but also on the need for “a reconstruction of the social sciences [that] would eventually lead to a more egalitarian and democratic social order” (p. 435).

While discourses of possibilities were being fashioned within the academy, it is not likely that African Americans were involved because few were members of the academy at that time—remember these were the days before Black Studies. Therefore, Black liberation discourses were largely formulated outside of the academy. It is only recently that scholars such as Woodward (1999), Joseph (2005) and others have revitalized interest in the Black Power era and valorized its discourses and accomplishments. These scholars fundamentally agree with Kincheloe and McLaren (2004) that possibility thinking was keen during the 1960s; but include such thinkers as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, Maulana Karenga, Stokely Carmichael, Amilcar Cabral, among others who introduced new concepts for being African in the contemporary world.

Specifically in the arts, Donaldson (1980) observed that it was not until after the Black Arts Movement and the advent of Black Studies that African-descended artists and
scholars significantly increased their numbers in art-based disciplines. However, it is likely that African American scholars did not make major contributions to the “discourse of possibilities” at least not until after the late 1960s and the implementation of Black Studies programs.

**Art as Discourse, Discourse as Art**

*Unlocking the Historical and Cultural Nexus of Black Art.* The Africentric metatheory is the foundation from which this study proceeds to unlock the historical and cultural nexus between the discourse of possibilities and the institutionalized dimensions of racism that were the target of Black Art in the 1960s. A critical analysis can also help to explain the continuing isolation of Black Art. It is vital that analyses keenly focus on the dynamics of racism as one of the central issues boldly addressed by the genre and as a central factor in their misrepresentation (Goings, 1984; Hall, 2002; Harris, 2003). While today it is quite plausible for James Smalls (1998) to argue that race as both experience and idea “has taken on cult status in our contemporary moment” (p. 2); this was not so in the 1960s and 1970s when race and racism constituted formidable barriers between Black and White people; which contributed to short-circuiting cross-cultural discourse and communications between all people.

The basis for approaching this study of art as discourse is strengthened by van Dijk’s (1993 & 2002) view that discourse is one place where racism resides and continues to be surreptitiously reproduced. Having dedicated more than 20 years to the study of discourse and racism van Dijk is well able to argue that “elite discourses,” particularly in contemporary information societies, are designed to foster positive self-presentations of the majority population while generating negative presentations of those
they deem as others (p. 158). To his credit, van Dijk boldly insists that only with knowledge of racism can one know how discourse is involved in its daily reproduction. And so it follows that without knowledge of race and racism, one cannot know Black Art.

Discourse can be either a particular communicative event or a collection of discourses such as art educational or Africentric discourse (van Dijk, 2002). Hall (2002) reiterates Foucault’s discourse theory which indicates that “discourse is about the production of knowledge through discourse, and since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect” (p. 44). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory’s interdisciplinary lens “offers broad, multidisciplinary, multicultural and socially-relevant methods for exploring human language [usage], cognition, communication and interaction” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 32). Nothing has meaning outside of discourse (Hall, 2002, p. 45).

Therefore, this study compares relevant discourses to determine how effectively they worked to either give or deny meaning to Black Art meaning, and to reveal who is served and who is hurt by the meanings and knowledge constructed in the early discourse on Black Art. Drawing again upon Foucault’s constructionist concepts, Hall (2002) provides insightful strategies to explore the cognitive value of discourse and meaning:

Discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time (what Foucault called the episteme), will appear across a range of texts, and forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society. However, whenever these discursive events refer to the same object, share the same style and support a strategy…a common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern…the common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern…then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation (p 44).

Hall’s interpretations of Foucault’s discourse theory guides the analyses undertaken here to revise how Black Art is known and valued. Herein, Black Art is a
discourse of power and representations of knowledge and truths from beyond the exclusive domains of the Western-Euro-American context. Given the historical, cultural, sociopolitical and economic realities of the Black Power era, understanding the role of context in relationship to power and knowledge is critical to re-valuing Black Art as a multifaceted prompt for teaching and learning that directly engage students with difficult topics like racism, racial hierarchies, and the inherent elitism of the ethics of high modernity, prevalent in Western, white-dominant cultures during the Black Power era (see Hall, 2002; Hassan, 1996; van Dijk, 2002).

The particular conditions that produced the Black Power era provide the context, the specific historical moment that cannot occur at any other time or place; and as such Foucault’s theory that directly connects discourse to power and knowledge is a useful way to bring attention to ways students can help untangle knowledge from institutionalized racist institutions. Learning about Black Art can illuminate how “knowledge about and practices around all subjects is historically and culturally specific—a notion that counters the modernist idea of universals” (Hall, 2002, p. 47).

But more to the point, the clear purpose of this study is to argue that teaching and learning about Black Art can benefit art education, this theoretical discussion is intended to re-represent or reCognize Black Art in order to reveal its potential for deeply engaging art as: 1) community-oriented sites for liberatory education; 2) epistemological signs and symbols; 3) historical signifiers of racialized discourses; and 4) discursive formations of new art forms. As historical signifiers of racial discourse, Black Art shifts meaning across the black/white binary. On an international level, Black Art can offer unique opportunities to explore and compare the role of race in various places and times.
Critical Race Theory through an Africentric Lens

Racism, like whiteness, is often rendered invisible. CRT helps to make racism visible. Specifically, CRT helps to reveal how the dominance of white power and authority that not only affects people’s lives; but is also implicated in the criticism and knowledge on Black Art. Thus, CRT provides useful methods to interrogate and compare how the different ways Eurocentric and Africentrically-informed epistemologies deal with the very subject of race and its intimate intersections and trajectories with and through a growing list of differences, including class and gender.

In applying CRT, this study responds to ideas advanced by Hall (2000), Michael D. Harris (2003), Holt (2000), Ladson-Billings (2004), Myers (1993), Scheurich and Young (1997), Stovall (2005), Wright (1998) and others who call for responsible research to squarely address the intersections of race and racism in the development and representation of knowledge and in research epistemologies. Stovall (2005) and other CRT educational scholars push for researchers “to spend more time on community-based educational efforts” and “less time on abstract theorizing” (p. 199).

Here, Black Art is an appropriate vehicle to promote these ideas as it was practical, collective and community-driven. Thus, this research considers vitally important the need to revisit and compare the consciousness-raising dimensions of the Black Liberation and Black Arts Movement as foundational to the development of Africentricity and the current range of scholarship associated with the Black Studies phenomenon. While this scholarship emerges out of the historical experiences of African people in the contemporary world; in no way is it to be understood as limited to only interpreting their experiences in isolation from others.
Therefore, it is important to restate the idea that because the philosophical approach to this research is African-centered it necessarily disagrees with positions taken by the public intellectual Cornell West who echoes Scheurich and Young (1997), when he roundly discounts Afrocentricity as essentially a “gallant yet misguided” race-bound approach to meaning-making. African-centered thought, as it emerged out of the Black Arts and Black Liberation Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, is wrongly characterized as not being open to internal and external criticism. Resisting the wholesale embrace of Eurocentric art standards and cultural policies as inherently oppressive and diametrically-opposed to the full realization of African cultural identity (see Carruthers, 1999, pp. 187-196).

The Western worldview is appreciated for engendering much advancement; however, it is also understood here to be composed of suboptimal components. As a cultural imperium, the Western worldview has been reluctant to grant significance to Black cultural production other than music—a matter addressed by radical scholars like Baraka (2000), literary critic Toni Morrison(1993), feminist scholars like Lisa Gail Collins (2000), and cultural critics bell hooks (1996) and others.

CRT challenges the tendency to adopt as the starting point for Black cultural heritage, the dehumanizing epic of American chattel slavery. As applied from an Africentric philosophical perspective, CRT imposes the need to reconsider, for example, the invented Sambo icon and how it remains a negative stereotype within the Western worldview, ever-registering primitive status to African people. However, within the African worldview, the longevity of the Sambo icon is verifiable evidence of the West’s historic inattentiveness to details in African life. Historical records like bills of lading and
population census reveals that Sambo was likely a mispronunciation of honorable West African names like Samba or Simba or even Sambo—proper names supplanted by the *Maafa* to cancel out African history and culture.

Art education research has been rather dismissive of racism and related topics of Black aesthetics and *Black Art*. CRT provides a new perspective from which to bring race into the center of interpreting the new socioeconomic, cultural and global forces that are restructuring, not only the lives of African Americans, but of Euro-Americans as well (see Chalmers, 1992; Desai, 1996; Marable, 2000). The reluctance to interrogate racial dimensions of art meaning and related institutional practices has contributed to the gap that exists in African American art history.

The Sixties and the Seventies were exceptional periods of social upheaval in the USA and in the world. The racial paradigm that operated then was clearly split along black or white racial lines. This racial binary sharply circumvented sociopolitical opportunities and the human rights of African people in general. The need to liberate one’s self and one’s group from oppressive and delimiting paradigms was widely embraced as the Civil Rights Movement, African Liberation Struggles and other anti-colonial movements as well as the Women’s Movement in Europe and the USA.

These quests for freedom introduced new evaluative cultural norms into a resistant visual arts discourse. Recent studies by Lisa Collins and Natalie Margo Crawford (2006), Lisa E. Farrington (2004), Frieda High (1997); Peniel Joseph (2005), Nadine Pinter (2006), James Smethurst (2005), James Van Deburg (1992) and Komazi Woodard (1999) provide new interpretive paradigms that may lead to shifts in how art education deals with *Black Art* and understands African and Black aesthetics.
Expanding the Discursive Terrain with CRT. Building on a legacy of Black self-determination for radical change, Ladson Billings and Tate (2006) seek to disrupt the nexus between emancipation and racism. They make a cogent argument for the unfortunate dilemma that race, unlike gender and class, remains untheorized except as a sociological construction (see also Hall, 1980; Omi & Winant, 1994). While the significant contributions multiculturalism has brought to education, it has been unable to eradicate racialized discursive formations in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate recognize the centrality of race and racism in American schooling and American life, and attempt to” theorize race and to use it as an analytical tool for understanding school inequity” (p. 11), because simply,

Theory then is a set of knowledges…Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whiteness and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space (Anzaldúa, 1990, in Yosso, 2006; emphasis in original).

Since the late 1990s Ladson Billings and Tate (1999) have explored the possibility of applying Critical Race Theory (CRT) to educational history, praxis, and curriculum development. CRT emerged in the 1970s to contest the inherent racial bias in the American legal system. Ladson-Billings and Tate join such scholars as Derrick Bell (1987, 1992), Adrienne D. Dixson (2006), Kevin Brown (1995) and many others who attest to the versatility of CRT as a powerful explanatory tool with which and through which to articulate the silenced racial dimensions of society and its discourse. The work of educational scholar David Stovall (2005) joins this chorus of sterling voices who have
reframed critical race theory to resolve the persistent racial inequities that continue to delimit the potential of public education.

CRT directs analysis of educational practice to counter deficit curriculum models, ineffective instruction, and assessment measures that unfairly weigh what students don’t know based on dysfunctional instruction rather than on what students do know despite dysfunctional instruction (Stovall, 2005). The tools of CRT effectively challenge erroneous assumptions, negative stereotypes and the notion of race-neutral or color-blind perspectives. Critical race theorists argue that the official school curriculum is a culturally-specific artifact, one that fails to be effectively culturally-relevant for the diversity of citizens who inhabit the planet. In addition, CRT scholars also insist a bond exists between law and racial power (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Conceived as a “weapon of struggle,” CRT is fundamentally a “theoretical construct that incorporates the concept of intersectionality” to unravel “the layers of social hierarchies [and] to determine how the interactions of each hierarchy influence the dynamic of another” (Stovall, 2005, p. 207). Accordingly, CRT makes space for the forgotten voices of African American educators who are “often excluded from the discussion of educational issues” (Morris, 2006, p. 129).

CRT has challenged scholars to venture “outside the box” to forge alliances across disciplines. It opens the art historical discourse to the stories and experiences of the visual cultural producers of the Black Arts Movement, individuals and groups whose voices and viewpoints were generally ignored. To correct this, CRT returns attention to the unresolved issues waged by the Black Struggle against the subtle and hidden forms of
institutionalized and epistemological racism. CRT is thus a poignant platform from which to interrogate mainstream art discourse.

When applied from an Africentric perspective integrated with Optimal Conceptualization and focused to make CDA relevant, CRT viably drives inquiry by:

- Calling into question ideologies of the beautiful that have historically been defined by, for, and, for the most part, against black people (Mercer, 1994);
- Challenging the limited boundaries allotted to the art and visual culture of the visual artifacts and visual artists of the Black Arts Movement; and
- Promoting the capacity of art learning processes to foster optimal belief systems and enhance the desire for self-knowledge.

This study draws upon the discourses of the Black Arts Movement, those that gave Black Art meaning and those that condemned its meaning, and highlighting not only the ideas that inspired Black Art; but also the ideas that denigrated its significance, this discussion promises to present new ways to integrate Black Art objects into the art education curriculum. Black Art is reconstituted as more than a simple counter narrative.

Conclusion

Racial reflection is integral to rooting out the historical and cultural nexus of Black Art. Then as now, racism reveals itself through personal or societal actions as well as through research epistemologies. Africentricity provides cultural contexts for achieve the sort of social reconstruction that can strengthen and enlarge multicultural art and visual culture education (see Chanda & Daniel, 2000; Hicks, 1997; Milner, 2003).
For the average art educator who as Sleeter (2000) and Milner (2003) profess, will likely continues to be a white female from a non-blended community, to relate more fully to *Black Art*, Myers (2003) would encourage art educators to “acknowledge what has actually happened, both good and bad, and discover and learn to master the lessons that both experiences bring” (p. 34). To accomplish this, Myers has insisted that even through research one should “seek knowledge of one’s essence, or true self, and spiritual connection to the universe” (ibid.). In this way, the reflexive processes of BSA enable teachers and learners to “recognize that perceptions, thoughts, feelings, choices, and behaviors are largely determined by cultural orientation” and to preferably choose “those actions reflective of the substance of a cultural tradition which seeks knowledge, wisdom and understanding” (ibid.).

Myers (2003) optimal conceptualizes challenges educators to stand for choices, decisions and actions that are in line with representations of truth, justice, and righteousness, key aspects of the principles of Maat, the ancient African (i.e., Kemetic) system of self-governance for the common good (Chissell, 1994). The symbols associated with these concepts were used as artistic elements in the paintings of such Black Arts Movement artists as the New York-based artist Abdul Rahman. The ideas of Maat also informed the music of Pharaoh Sanders, the saxophonist who, in the spiritual tradition of John Coltrane, produced one of the era’s definitive albums called *Karma* in 1969 (see Benston, 2000). These artworks fostered what Myers argues is a reaffirmation of the self as multidimensional and fluid. As a reflexive idea, this notion gives meaning to one of Myers key tenets that “all is spirit individually and uniquely expressed, and we are unified with all creation, sharing its essence” (p. 20).
In addition to racial reflection other personal actions are needed for deep inquiry into difficult and unfamiliar art. Chanda and Daniel (2000) and Villeneuve and Erickson (2008), as well as Barrett (2000), Gordon (1994), and Short (1997) agree that oversimplification and erroneous readings of art can result from superficially engaging with the formal and contextual aspects of the art object. They recommend personal actions that not only deal with the formal art object itself; but also with its contexts and intents in relationship to its larger sociopolitical, cultural and historical realities.

This confluence of Africentricity, critical discourse analysis, critical race theory and optimal conceptualizations encourages learners to draw connections between various perspectives as they are all interconnected and interact upon one another. This sort of thinking will help to reverse the reasons why *Black Art* is precisely unfamiliar as they directly engage art learners with the genre’s contextual realities and historical significance. These theories support reflective judgment in order to bring about deeper understanding of art through life and a clearer understanding of one’s personal beliefs.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Methods

The purpose of this research is to reclaim and recover the historical and cultural merits of Black Art to enhance teaching and learning in art education is a viable has been wrongly dismissed as race-based discourse. This dismissal has produced gaps in the narrative of African American history and fostered misunderstanding about the cultural heritages of contemporary art that happens to be produced by African-descended artists and others today.

This qualitative study is considered “library research” because the data base is a derived from published works of various types concerning the arts and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement, racism and related issues in art education. Multiple methods are employed to identify, describe, evaluate and compare the data. The analytical categories used to determine the relevance of the analyzed data is formulated within the theoretical framework of this study. produce an appropriate historical inquiry into the literature on Black Art and the issues surrounding it. This is then filtered through an Africentric philosophical perspective in order to reposition the genre of Black Art

Basically, the methods are descriptive and comparative in that they identify, describe, compare and evaluate data. The key methods used to drawn from and/or
informed by these various theories to demonstrate how best to analyze the artistic, aesthetic, sociopolitical and cultural aspects of Black Art. These four areas form the basis of inquiry into Black Power and the Black Arts Movement, the genre of art and visual culture referred to herein as Black Art. This study aims to reflect the diversity and exceptionality of movement.

To address the issue that Black Art is overlooked and/or undervalued in art education, this study presents an overview of recent scholarship emerging from Black Studies and related fields. Black Art necessarily raises questions about race and behavior. This study aims to evaluate the legitimacy of Black Art as a viable site of knowledge, with particular value in how it can stimulate discourse and learning about racial formation, race, raciality and racism.

To unravel the racial codes embedded in the history of art education and in the visual artifacts this study briefly revisits the racially-inscribed origins of the discipline and examines recent efforts to disrupt the exclusionary dominance of Eurocentric thought and aesthetics so convincingly described by Debra Ambush (1993), F. Graeme Chalmers (1992), Jacqueline Chanda (1993), Elizabeth Manley Delacruz (1995 & 1996), Murray De Pillars (1990), Depti Desai (1995), Phoebe Dufrene (1994), Elizabeth Garber (1995), and others. After establishing this background it is also important to look at how new thinking about race in this age of identity formation- awareness and representation is impacting art education curriculum content.

Drawing heavily on studies by scholars associated with the field of Black Studies, this research demonstrates how Africentric scholarship has benefited art education and continues to be a source of knowledge and methods art educators can integrate into their
lessons to enable art learners to challenge Eurocentric epistemologies defined as racially-biased and sub-optimal (Ambush, 1993, Ladson-Billings, 2004; Myers, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997).

In order to provide content ideas and strategies to help art educators fill the gap in the stream of African American art histories, this study highlights key facts about the available literature on the Black Arts Movement. By using a holistic approach, this study aims to restore understanding of the healthy dispositions African Americans experienced during the Civil Rights era and the Black Power Movement.

By integrating CRT with CDA from an optimized Africentric philosophical perspective, *Black Art* can be more fully critiqued and interpreted as contemporary art, which has become increasing socio-political theme-based work, collaborative ventures, hybrid art forms, re-contextualized site-specific installations, and interactive cyberspace projects (Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008). Apart from the cyberspace component (unless one considers the intergalactic works of the performance artist Sun Ra), this study will show that these descriptors were the same reasons art-world leaders used to condemn *Black Art* so bitterly.

H. Richard Milner (2003) believes that “teachers’ reflective thinking could be essential in leading them [and their students] into deeper understanding around issues that might otherwise be ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, misinterpreted, or unsettled” (p. 173). Art educators Pat Villeneuve and Mary Erickson (2008) concur with Milner and infer that through reflective thinking, art educators can track the vicissitude of acquiring new viewpoints that are more appropriate for understanding and interpreting unfamiliar works of art such as those defined as *Black Art*. 
Linda James Myers’ (1993) offers methods for accomplishing reflective thinking through self-corrective, therapeutic cognitive and behavioral acts. Myer’s Belief Systems Analysis” or BSA is a cognitive therapy focused on knowing, awareness and judgment. BSA methods encourage individuals to discern the characteristics of sub-optimal and optimal worldviews and to seek internal gratification rather than external, material rewards. BSA conducted through optimal Africentric analysis is liberating valuing wide participation in the reshaping a healthy, optimized environment. Reflective thinking using BSA helps individuals move away from the fragmented, destructive hierarchical thinking that maintains and reproduces racial bias of the sort Black Art challenged. In fact, BSA as optimal behavior fosters harmony, social parity, truth, justice, righteousness and peace.

As African Americans have assumed a new level of participation at the highest levels of governance in the USA, it is finally possible to begin to see Black Art as another important body of American art that can also provide an “alternative visions” (Pohl, 2002, p. 408). By re-framing the historical and cultural foundation of Black Art from the standpoint of a consciousness of victory, art learners will be able to reCognize Black Art as culturally and historically important (Chanda & Daniel, 2003). Through BSA and the process of reCognizing, art educators will be able to take a broader view of the historical and cultural significance of the images, symbols and signs of Black Art, and the ways in which the genre links the present to the past.

Racism and race become critical determinative sites for meaning construction when inquiring into Black Art. Though the racial dilemma that defined human relationships and access in the USA has changed significantly since the 1960s and 1970s, it remains ubiquitous in American society although in more subtle ways (Holt, 2000;
Wright, 1998). What is blatantly evident is that the Eurocentric/Euro-American worldview dominates and shapes the prevailing social order and subsequently blocks knowledge perceived as emanating from outside of the Eurocentric/Euro-American epistemological paradigm.

The question that drives this research is how can knowledge of the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement benefit art education? A confluence of theories supports this study which is constructed within an Africentric research paradigm (Mazama, 2003). Critical discourse analysis methods tempered by critical race theory guide the critique of the discourses that gave meaning to Black Art; and those that demeaned its significance. Optimal theory directs analysis of this data.

This research relies heavily upon Black Studies scholarship in order to substantiate the usefulness of Africentricity to heighten awareness and understanding of how art serves African Americans. Multicultural art and visual culture education discourse alone has been relatively ineffective as its focus is generally to bring marginalized art objects into the dominant, White-oriented art discourse.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and discuss research related to Black Art focusing on discourse circulating between 1963 and 1973 and more recent scholarship much of it generated by Black Studies scholars whose research was published between 1990 and 2008. Though this period seems extensive, the literature is very limited though produced by individuals of diverse races and theoretical stances. Additional research will be needed to interrogate artists and analyze the art objects and the specific ways Black artists produced and used visual in service to the struggle.
**Assumptions**

The assumptions that direct this qualitative study are:

1. The African American art historical narrative is incomplete.

2. *Black Art* and visual culture of the 1960s and 1970s represent more than a reaction to the binary racial codes as it profoundly interrogated the intersections of power, class, gender, sexuality, and other differences; and particularly differences in worldview and epistemologies—how we know what we know.

3. Integrated arts activity effectively supported African agency and helped to instigate multicultural discourse and identity politics.

4. African Americans were at their healthiest during the Black Power Movement according to Myers (2003) who also asserts that the then Secretary of State issued National Security Council Memorandum Number 46 of 1978 recommending that “specific steps be taken on the part of appropriate government agencies to prevent unity and inhibit coordinated activity in the Black Movement” (p.29).

5. *Black Art* facilitates understanding of Africentricity as African-centered epistemology in relationship to Eurocentrism and Euro-American ways of knowing and viewing the world to shift existing racial paradigms.

**Data Collection**

The data used for this qualitative library research include chapters and journal articles beginning with art education research on African American art history, the Black
Arts Movement and race as category of difference. Documents gathered for analysis include publications and catalogs from the Black Arts Movement; art reviews including several “letters to the editor” and guest columns concerning the 1970 Black Art show at the Boston Museum of Fine Art entitled *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston*, which is used as a case study to examine racialized discourse and the implications of alternative epistemologies and worldviews.

**Limits of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to bring attention to the continuing ways racial-bias is reproduced through art education. It primarily focuses on the ways art and visual culture were employed to raise awareness about the harmful ways racism destroys people’s lives and obstructs the ability of individuals and groups to work collectively to improve and beautify the world. racial dynamics associated with the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement. In fact, this study is motivated by the influence of one major White art critic, although it privileges the views and voices of African American artists and intellectuals with some relationship to the Black Arts Movement, Black Power or Black Studies. It is hoped this study encourages further investigation of the art and visual culture of the Black Arts Movement particularly in pursuit of ways to dismantle the racial hierarchies instilled in art education discourse and in the world.
CHAPTER FOUR

THIS IS BLACK ART

Because the Black artist and the creative portrayal of the Black Experience have been consciously excluded from the total spectrum of American Arts, we want to provide a new context for the Black artist in which he can workout his problems and pursue his aims unhampered and uninhibited by the prejudices and dictates of the [white] mainstream (From the Statement of Purpose of the Organization of Black American Culture, in Collins, 2006, p. 287).

Difficult Times Produce Difficult Art

Black Art is difficult to teach! Who even knows what it is? And if we did teach it wouldn’t we simply be reproducing racial bias? White Art is difficult to teach! Who even knows what it is? To identify the art that we teach as White Art would simply reproduce racial bias. That “White Art” addresses universal issues, while “Black Art” (and for that matter all non-Euroethnic art is temporal and finite, reflect unspoken even unconscious biases that invade our judgments and perceptions about art that we know, live with and teach?

These competing ideas are reflective of the struggle that inspired the Black Art of the Sixties and Seventies. Sparked by a heightened sense of urgency, art and visual culture was put in service to struggle. More than a color, blackness represented self-pride,
self-determination and ancient beginnings. As pigment, To end racial oppression and realize the promise of “Black Power,” call for African people to take action for self-determination!

*Black Art* emerged at a time when America was deep in the throes of a political, social and cultural crisis. Black demands for equality that had been growing since the mid-1940s and the end of World War II, would enter a new phase some ten years later with Blacks boycotting public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama for over a year. Led by the Black church and Black clergy, this successful non-violent protest set the tone for what has come to be known as the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Manning Marable (2000) defines this initial phase of the movement as the “heroic phase,” which emphasized legal and political solutions to assuage the plight of Black people suffering in America and in the world. For the first time, the criminal acts of White resistance to Black struggle for change were televised; the world saw the horrific barriers to racial harmony as represented by staunch segregationists like Bull Conners and Lester Mattox, and the offensive acts by water-hose wielding police men and their vicious police dogs attacking non-violent protesters. As students from historically-black colleges assumed larger leadership roles in the struggle for Black liberation from racism, poverty and second-class citizenship, they quickly grew weary of the slow pace of change.

By 1966, the swell for Black Power paralleled the growing anti-war movement commandeered by White mainstream students. The Civil Rights Struggle had made visible the general discontent with the established Western social order, which was
imperialistic and hegemonic by design. In addition, women would also make their demands for equal access to opportunities known.

The call for Black Power ushered in a sense of immediacy. Black artists were in the vanguard of the project to construct a new identity for Black people as proactive and inheritors of a great legacy of contributing to world and to the nation. Haunted by the loss of identity and the absence of cultural memory due to 400 years of being enslaved, Black artists recalled the legacy of early Black freedom fighters like Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Nat Turner. They also tapped into the long tradition of Black intellectualism to reconnect with the words and ideals of such scholars as W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Ida B. Wells, and Carter G. Woodson. They questioned Black existence in America and re-connected with their African heritage through the self-help strategies of Marcus Garvey, Madame C. J. Walker and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. From these convergences cultural producers addressed the need to challenge institutionalized racism and to construct a new Black self. Revolutionary Black artists and intellectuals emerged to founded the Black Arts Movement and produce Black Art Visual artists, as individuals and in cooperatives like Afri-Cobra in Chicago and Weusi ya Sanaa and Where We at Black Women Artist in Harlem began to construct a new Aesthetic informed by Black indigenous music and African concepts.

The Black Arts Movement was a critical force largely responsible for barring its entry from the canons of Art Education. The art historical record on African American or Black art tends to jump from the romantic portraitist and landscape artists of the 19th Century to the Harlem Renaissance of the mid-1920s through the 1940s; to the
controversial contemporary works of such artists as Kara Walker, Michael Ray Charles, Renee Cox, Kerry Marshal and others.

This thesis focuses on the constituent factors that cause and sustain the gap in the art historical record where the years and cultural production of the Black Arts Movement should be. It is my contention that this gap holds keys to understanding the deep-structure dissonance within the Western/Euro-American epistemological project that tolerates racism and situates *Black Art* as overdetermined and “difficult” (see Barrett, 1994; Chanda & Daniel, 2003; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008)

Drawing on Optimal Theory as introduced by Linda James Myers in 1988 (1991 & 1993), this study represents *Black Art* as critical articulations of human subjectivity produced with a keen sense of social responsibility dedicated to achieving freedom, justice and equality at the level of the “everyday.” Art-making in multifarious formulations was made a means to consolidate and/or transform the self that acted in the world that acted upon it (see Holt, 1995). Art-making and art appreciation became practical methods of fostering self-knowledge, linking those who had been deprived of history to an ancient genesis of African agency and accomplishment. largely symbolic ways rather than theoretically responsibility engaged with a spiritual/material self driven to acquire and represent self-knowledge as the basis of all knowledge. From this foundation emerges a self within aesthetic and typological features explored within the genre of *Black Art*, features that have unfortunately eluded the art historical record. Optimal Theory brings into clear focus the need to more deeply interrogate the contest between what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004) calls racialized discourse and ethnic epistemologies. *Black Art* challenged the dominant discourse on blackness and the role of
the artist, especially in relationship to the Black publics who were seldom considered by the major mainstream historically white cultural or academic institutions.

Optimal Theory provides an appropriate frame within which to explore the conceptual and aesthetic dimensions of the Black visual culture of the 1960s and 1970s represented here as Black Art. It provides criteria by which to determine the nature of the philosophical assumptions and art-making principles and processes of those Black artists who championed African identity and/or the resilient spirit of Black people. Although the Black Arts Movement is assigned a limited few years of life; start and ending point in various ways and degrees, At the level of theory, this study equates the deeper endeavors to identify the ways in which Black Art was in large part a way to achieve optimal conceptualization, which is designed as Africentric praxis, as a critical Blacks were basically outside of Euro-American pean or

It is not uncommon to read that African American artists and art historians did not learn much about African American artists in school. By way of example, Sharon F. Paterson, author of the acclaimed survey text African American Art (1998), recalls that it was not until after she took her first university teaching appointment that she realized she was ill-equipped to teach a class on African American art. Patton states: “All of us young black art historians at mainstream universities were studying everything except black (including African) art” (p. 11). Floyd Coleman, chair of the art department at Howard University, makes a similar claim. Considering African American art, then and now, Coleman (2003) posited: “Coming from rural Hale County in Alabama’s “Black Belt,” I had no formal exposure to art or art history until entering Alabama State College…” (p. 23).
Surely, as multicultural art reform and the expansion of art’s domain to include visual culture education, one might conclude that students are more likely to be exposed to African and African American artists today. However, the historical narrative that art educators draw from is incomplete concerning African American art history. The history of African American art is the wary victim of the pathology of racism and the general discomfort that attends talking about race and racism.

Recognizing this shortfall in the historical record on African American art, scholars are increasingly mining the archives to fill the gap in the record, writing especially about *Black Art*, the art and visual culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Because this genre is directly linked to the Black Power phase of the civil rights struggle, *Black Art* continues to be victimized by the racial paradigms it fought against. This study theorizes that on some level, the genre known as *Black Art*, a raced and self-named body of art, may have been reactionary. But beyond the moment of reacting to an oppressively racist environment, *Black Art* helped to expand the social orientation of the art-making process and the civic role of the artist to furthering access to democracy. Thus *Black Art* consciously rallied against the notions of “art for art sake” shunning individualism for collectivism. *Black Art* effectively joined aesthetics to activism, foregrounding postmodern interests in identity and representation; and the upsurge in community art.

The question then is how can knowledge about the times and visual artifacts of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s benefit art education? To address this question this study must explore the problem of the racial logics that supports the absence of knowledge of *Black Art* from the art historical record.
Black Art emerged at a time when America was deep in the throes of a political, social and cultural crisis. Black demands for equality that had been growing since the mid-1940s and the end of World War II, would enter a new phase some ten years later with Blacks boycotting public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama for over a year. Led by the Black church and Black clergy, this successful non-violent protest set the tone for what has come to be known as the modern Civil Rights Movement.

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By 1966, the swell for Black Power paralleled the growing anti-war movement commandeered by White mainstream students. The Civil Rights Struggle had made visible the general discontent with the established Western social order, which was imperialistic and hegemonic by design. In addition, women would also make their demands for equal access to opportunities known.

The call for Black Power ushered in a sense of immediacy. Black artists were in the vanguard of the project to construct a new identity for Black people as proactive and
inheritors of a great legacy of contributing to world and to the nation. Haunted by the loss of identity and the absence of cultural memory due to 400 years of being enslaved, Black artists recalled the legacy of early Black freedom fighters like Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Nat Turner. They also tapped into the long tradition of Black intellectualism to reconnect with the words and ideals of such scholars as W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Ida B. Wells, and Carter G. Woodson. They questioned Black existence in America and re-connected with their African heritage through the self-help strategies of Marcus Garvey, Madame C. J. Walker and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. From these convergences cultural producers addressed the need to challenge institutionalized racism and to construct a new Black self. Revolutionary Black artists and intellectuals emerged to found the Black Arts Movement and produce *Black Art*

Knowledge about the Black Arts Movement has largely focused on the outstanding body of early literature that helped to define, develop and direct the movement. Like Black Power, Black Arts Movement was inspired by the direct action of the church-led protest marches in the South, as well as Malcolm X’s bold indictments against American racism, and the fiery poetry and plays of Amiri Baraka (then known by his “slave-name” LeRoi Jones), young Black students at predominantly white institutions of higher learning demanded culturally-relevant courses.

Through Black Consciousness, Blacks from throughout the African Diaspora sought out opportunities to explore the possibilities of freedom within a new world order. With Black Consciousness came new efforts to consciously and visibly alter (to the extent felt possible) the community environments in which the majority of Black people were corralled. In 1970, the noted Christian theologian James H. Cone considered Black
Consciousness as expressed in Black Power significant libatory aspects of the black community. Further suggested that both Black Consciousness and Black Power were “as old as black slavery;” and reflective of pre-Civil War theologians who refused to embrace “an interpretation of Christianity that was unrelated to civil freedom” (Cone, 1970, p. 49). Black Consciousness called into question the “American Dream.” The notion of new political possibilities and cultural articulations was embraced widely during the Black Arts Movement—a multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional cultural movement that Frieda High (1997) suggests was pivotal to the postmodern turn ().

Increasingly, scholars have access to published works Black, and African and African American scholars are able to demonstrate their erudite skills and ability to weave language with authority. Hearkening back to the wonderful words and sacrifices of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. a scholar and visionary, Harvard graduate and the means to question, research and publish studies on social and cultural issues processes and to. As motivating as Black Art and the Black Arts Movement was to Black visual artists, it also motivated other artists who perceived themselves as pushed beyond the margins of the mainstream White male-dominated art world (Collins, 2006; Doss, 2002; High, 1997).

The most prominent corollary art movement to that parallels the Black Arts Movement is the Women’s Art Movement; however, Frieda High (1997) sheds light on the exciting correlations between and the Chicano Art Movement and the Black Arts Movement. In the visual arts, these linkages are primarily currently being recovered by women, possibly feminists, but certainly forward-thinking scholars who are building historical anchors between two disparate moments in time. Notable women in this group include Frieda High (1997) and Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (2006).
Contemporary art, argues P. Villeneuve and Mary Erickson (2008) is difficult to teach because it is so complex and often concerns social. Absented from major art historical survey texts until recently, *Black Art* is not as reliable acronym most For some of us who experienced and supported the production of visual art during the Black Power Movement, *Black Art*, i.e., black visual art production, was a beacon light guiding us to something One of the most maligned eras of art production were the 1960s and 1970s. Neither Minimalism or Conceptual art fared as well. This study is intended to explore the epistemological differences implications of engage the art historical discourse about the visual culture of the Black Arts Movement, not solely out of nostalgia but rather to use it as a frame of reference for expanding the notion of contextual analysis. Both insider and outsider discourses, pro and con, have shaped how we know the aesthetic life and the socio-cultural and political significance of the Black Arts Movement’s visual culture. By comparing and analyzing these discourses, the cultural logic of the movement will be revealed.

This study has presented critical ways to look at the dominant paradigms of Art Education to identify ways art educators and learners can benefit more fully from engaging *Black Art*. I approach this work from the vantage point of “Asantean” thought or Africentric philosophical perspective (Modupe, 2000, p. 67). And finally, I draw my conclusions from within the larger context of Optimal Theory (see Myers, 1993) in order to express what I argue requires acts of agency, personal engagement, a holistic sense of interconnectedness and harmony.

It is clear, given the on-going saliency of race in American society, *Black Art* first and foremost reads as racialized subject matter. This study does not turn away from this
fact but rather embraces it in order to challenge “the hegemonic structures ([and signs] and symbols) that keep injustice and inequity in place” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 421).

This research then must necessarily expose the ways race-consciousness has influenced Art Education. Since its founding, Art Education has moved from what F. Graeme Chalmers (1992) has described as racist origins to a field that prides itself in exploring novel strategies to interrogate sociopolitical themes like social justice, identity, and equity (see Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008)—themes that were important to the makers of Black Art.

Postmodern ideas like “unpacking Eurocentrism,” “deconstructing whiteness” and dismantling negative stereotypes are popular themes in the academy and have found their way into the growing discourse on art and visual culture. This study will also compare how these issues were explored in the visual culture of the Black Arts Movement in relationship to the ideas espoused in the postmodernist works of Homi Baba, (1999), Kerry Freedman, (2003), Kenneth Goings, (1994). Salah Hassan & Iftikhar Dadi (2002), Michael D. Harris (2003), bell hooks (1992), Stuart Hall, 1997; Kimberly N. Pindar (2000), Alan Read (1996) and others.

As noted above, race relations are a defining factor in the social history of Black Art (Baraka, 1970, Collins, 2006; Jones & Neal, 1968; Smith, 1985). And while race remains a salient fact of contemporary society, how racial beliefs present themselves is different today than in the 1960s and 1970s. The hardened boundaries of de jure and de facto segregation have softened and become more transparent, but have not evaporated. According to Marable (2000)
racism and the racial crisis…have been shaped by both organic and conjunctural social processes that have produced dramatic changes in the nature and scope of racial ideologies and significant changes in the social relations of ‘dominant and subordinate’ social groups who recognize themselves in terms of ‘race’ (p. 34).

Concerned about how the remnants of the racial crisis manifests in the classroom, H. Richard Milner (2003) developed a practical guide for incorporating race reflection in cultural context. Milner argues that when practicing race reflective thinking in cultural contexts, educators will be more alert to the subtle as well as the obvious educational issues associated with race, specifically the “endemic and engrained perceptions and realities that exist in education as a consequence of one’s skin color.”

**Black Art as Difficult Art**

Given its name and content, and because it reflects the troubling social, cultural and political climate of its time, *Black Art* is likely perceived to be a “difficult” subject (see Barrett, 2004; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008). This leads one to ask, what makes it a difficult if the art is simply about African American life? Why do Black art objects about Black subjects and issues raise Since its development, *Black Art*, the genre is read as Identifiably Black art images are often looked at only racialized material. Black art is seldom allowed outside of the role as community voice and moral champion. Why This point is borne out by the art historian James Smalls (1994) who explains that a central theoretical problem facing African American art inquiry is the difficulty to determine how to approach it for instructional purposes. The key question then is should African American art history be approached as an assimilationist or a separatist project?
Identifiably Black art images are often looked at only racialized material. Black art is seldom allowed outside of the role as community voice and moral champion.

This makes it even more reason that Even so, *Black Art* warrants fresh consideration as a vehicle through which to explore ways to negotiate challenging problems that impact our lives today.

*Black Art* is the contested symbol system of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s--the visual culture of Black Power. It represents a large and diverse body of visual art and artifacts but has generally been obscured in the art history record; and is obviously undervalued as art education content.

*Black Art* is frequently categorized as protest art or social realism (Collins, 2002; Patton, 1998; Pohl, 2000; Powell, 1997; Farrington, 2005). Closer scrutiny reveals that the genre of *Black Art* is in fact a range of dynamic and diverse cultural artifacts. To categorize all of *Black Art* as protest art or social realism is to do the diverse genre a disservice.

During the sixties and seventies, the White/mainstream art world had little if anything to do with pleasing Black audiences. *Black Art*, on the other hand, sought to build an intimate relationship with its Black public. Black visual artists were also involved in or supportive of the Black Liberation Struggle, the final phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Demanding access to mainstream art venues, Black artists collaborated with others to protest the elitism of major museums. They also produced work that directly addressed the social justice, anti-war and women’s rights themes. In this regard, many examples of *Black Art* were actually produced to serve the aims of the Black struggle for freedom, justice and equality, the Women’s Movement and the
Students’ Anti-War Movement. This segment of *Black Art* is rightfully labeled “protest art,” and Black protest art had its own social value, as David Stovall (2005) points out: “protest has been crucial to the development of constructive responses to the vestiges of racism” (Stovall, 2005, p. 197).

**Black Art as Racial Discourse Prompt**

Race is likely one of those subjects the prominent art educator Terry Barrett (2004) would categorize as “difficult” (p. 741). In art, according to Barrett, teachers “unfortunately and unnecessarily” are likely to self-censor difficult art content and thus prevent their students from exploring important issues. Barrett’s analysis arises from his experience with introducing the controversial oeuvre of Robert Mapplethorpe to 12 high-school students and their teachers.

Noting that “difficult” is a relative term; Barrett suggests that before tackling difficult art objects or topics, art teachers ought to first “become comfortable talking about what might be perceived as uncomfortable [or difficult] images if they plan to use such images with their students” (p. 741). This study aims to do just that, to provide art educators with a way to comfortably integrate *Black Art* into their curriculum in ways that reveal the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical dynamics that went into its creation, significance and aesthetic content; as well as its subsequent burial beyond the canons.

Identifiably Black art images are often looked at only racialized material. Black art is seldom allowed outside of the role as community voice and moral champion. Except for some recent exceptions where blackness is made a vehicle for exploring larger social and personal “postmodern” issues; almost automatically, Black art or the blackness of images in art is made a racial signifier that has little life beyond the burden of needing
to challenge and contest the dominant historical, sociopolitical, and cultural power relationships in Western society. Though the genre of Black Art consciously assumed this role in part; racialized content was not all it was about. Much of the art that has gained popularity today for troubling the complexities of race and identity and gender issues owe much to those artists of the Black Arts Movement who have been barred form the curriculum because they proved to “difficult” to read. White art, which is the dominant art upon which the canon is constructed includes a host of work some more inviting than others. However, the point is generally, none of these works no matter the content are subject to the reductive and dismissive racialized scrutiny which attends Black Art.

Therefore as this study explores the perceptions of Black Art and its construction, it will also use art objects and related theories to examine how race and racial constructions influence art teaching and learning. Art objects and their critics and chroniclers can intentionally or accidentally encode and convey racial concepts and beliefs. Today it is widely recognized that historically whiteness and white privilege have been encoded, reproduced and affirmed through art (Berger, 2004; Dyer, 1997; hooks, 1995, 1996; Pasteur & Toldson, 1982; Piper, 1996; Quilley & Kriz, 2003; Tobin, 1999; Wood, 2000).

Blackness, unless properly presented can be as unwelcome a subject for African American students as it may be for Euro-American and other students. This is largely due to years of self-censorship which has helped to build and maintain a prohibitive barrier against images of Blackness. In addition, White has not been as readily defined in racial terms as has Black. However, in “Is White a race? Expressions of White Racial Identity, Robert T. Carter (1997), an educator and psychologist, affirms that:
More often than not reference to racial identity in the minds of most people refers to how one thinks about issues of race. The idea usually is applied to people of color. When White’s racial identity is discussed it is done in terms of their political views or in terms of how they view people in other racial groups. Whites while socialized in a racially constructed world, are taught not to be aware of themselves in racial terms.

Carter (1997) goes on to address the psychological significance that race has for Whites, and contends that “white racial identity is a psychological template which operates as a “world view” and serves as a filter for raced-based information” (p. 199).

As is evident in the need for this study, “as a social construction, whiteness gains its meaning from its encounters with non-whiteness” whereas the opposite is true with blackness. The negotiations and definitions of “whiteness” and “blackness” have fueled the social phenomenon of race, a phenomenon which Black Art began to confront.

The American white man [woman] today subconsciously still regards the black man [woman] as something below himself [herself]. And you will never get the American white man to accept the so-called Negro as an integrated part of his society until the image of the Negro the white man has changed, and until the image of the Negro has of Himself [and Herself] is also changed. Malcolm X, Cornell University Debate, March 7, 1962. (Quoted in Willis, 1989)

Black art very broadly to indicate visual art objects that communicate Blackness representing recognizable or explicitly inferred racialized content produced by Africans, African Americans or other African descended people. Although in a British context the term Black art can refer to non-African descended artists and include those disenfranchised from British mainstream art circles—Black art in Britain includes a more diverse population of people like Arabs, Indians and others from former British colonies.

Black art images are generally underused or absent from art education instruction. This disadvantages learners due to the limited scope of knowledge accessible through art
education instruction. Several factors interfere with the fuller use of Black art images and even the use of art objects which convey ‘blackness’.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Arts Movement exploded across the USA. Black artists invented a new aesthetic and a visual language to enhance their sense of self-worth and be self-determining participants in the social and political discourses of the day. The visible dimension of the Black Arts Movement was, by design, conceived to uplift depressed black communities and to instill a Pan-African consciousness. Visual artists spoke directly to a Black public without censorship. Many created work to liberate and arm Black people with critical weapons of struggle.

The Black Art genre consciously promoted conditions to improve the life chances of Black families. Their work openly addressed police brutality, political oppression, inferior schools, inadequate social services, high unemployment and a host of other psycho-social, cultural and economic ills. Often in this regard, while Black Art satisfied the community it served, it consistently opposed Western aesthetics and white privilege. Many artists were also cultural nationalists who perceived themselves as a “nation within a nation” (see Woodard, 1999; & Baraka, 1991, p. 167)

Even though the visual culture of the Black Arts Movement provided a new platform from which Black artists re-defined “difference,” They used their art to attack the causative agents of their plight. The artists both criticized and celebrated being a “nation within a nation” (see Woodard, 1999; & Baraka, 1991, p. 167)

The socio-political and economic realities of Black life framed black cultural production in the 1960s and 1970s; as they had done before and since. When the white art establishment asked the question, what is Black art; Black Art answered declaratively,
ours! Black artists proclaimed their right to forge a new identity based on an African heritage for an American present. The Black Arts Movement supported and was supported by the Black Power Movement which called for se

The Black Art of this era pressed for a new social order by raising consciousness, and liberating people from negative stereotypes. Black Art freed the psyche from racial prejudice. The movement redefined blackness as a fertile site of cultural productivity and fruitful cognitive inquiry--the Black Arts Movement encouraged the creation of art in service to struggle.

The literary, musical and filmic responses to Black Power have been documented. Recent scholarship exploring the use of art as a political tool and aesthetic expression include Gladstone L. Yearwood (2000), Madhu Dubey, (1994), and others.

Black [visual] art—with its vivid imagery and unique and personalized interpretations of the African-American experience—has given American art a conscience and the color, rhythm and spirit it previously lacked…The Black Postmodernism tradition is rooted in the 1960s Civil Rights [Black Power] Movement when large numbers of Black artists broke from the American mainstream and created a new aesthetic language. They introduced complex narratives and African symbolism, imagery, rhythms and vivid color to American art. They took “art to the people” with murals like Chicago’s Wall of Respect [which] spearheaded the Public Arts Movement that is flourishing today (Sanders, 1992, 80).

The Black Arts Movement was a compelling, provocative, self-affirming cultural endeavor. It fueled and was fueled by the Black Power Movement. Gwen Patton (1970) notes, that Black Power forced Black people to deal with themselves. Black people began connecting to their African heritage in real and romantic ways. Throughout the late 1969 and the late 1970s, Black Art exhibitions became fashionable at major museums and
Black galleries and museums alike. Exhibits at places like the *Studio Museum in Harlem* or *Just Above Midtown* in New York City were sometimes accompanied by catalogs.

However, only a few texts were available that surveyed the works of Black visual artists, they included Cedric Dover’s *American Negro Art* (1967); Samella Lewis and Ruth Waddy’s *Black Artists on Art* (1969); and James Porter (1970) and Elton Fax (1974). In addition, *Muntu* by Janheinz Jahn (1961) and Ladsilas Segy (1969) were popular texts on African Art and culture among cultural producers. Eugene Gigsby, Jr. would not publish his multicultural text, *Art and Ethnic*, until 1977.

Then as now, non-black art held a privileged status in art education; while black art or the art of ‘others’ is allowed only a minor role in the larger curriculum. “Black” art scurries about on the margins of “white” art at the core of the ethnocentric paradigm that is the Western or Eurocentric art tradition, which Henry Louis gates (1994) describes as “splendid” though “more or less closed” (44)!

The educational impact of this marginalization has been addressed by many scholars Daniels including David Wainwright who as early as 1981 at a conference on *Arts Education in a Multicultural Society* noted: “Non-white children are quick to pick up the implications that their entire ancestry has added nothing of value to the sum total of human knowledge (mason 1988: 73). In 1992, F. Graeme Chalmers wrote “There can be little doubt that art curricula in North American schools, and some art educational scholarships, have been, or are, dominated by particular notions of good art,” notions he further described as “Eurocentric, culture-bound, elitist or even racist” (1992: 134). In 1995, the noted art educator Dipti Desai speaking as a person with “several interlocking histories and cultures” identified the “problematics of not addressing issues of race and
racism in both classroom practice and critical discourse” based primarily on her personal experience as a non-Euro-American who in fact had “faced so many forms of racism that one incident could capture the multidimensional character of racism” (Check, Denison & Desai 1995: 50).

Desai’s disclosure reflects the continuing concern of many non-whites with the Eurocentric nature of art education. An art educator understands race and racial identities are bound together with classroom practice and art discourse. Louis A. Castnell, Jr. and William F. Pinar explored this dynamic of race and knowledge exchange in the text *Understanding Curriculum as Racial Text* (1993). They posit that to understand the curriculum as racial text can either function to maintain or disturb illusions of power and identity.

Race is one fact of American life generally ignored in art education. Until recently, discussions about race focused on the *Maafa*, the African Chattel Slave Trade and Holocaust, and the pain-filled legacies of lynching, oppression and exploitation, bloated-bellied children, civil unrest, inner-city violence, and negative stereotypes. It is not surprising that this ugly history is uncomfortable. However, more recently, social scientists, educators and artists including Toni Morrison (1993), Aida Hurtado (1996), Adrian Piper (1996), Richard Dyer (1997) Joe l. Kincheloe, Shirley R, Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez and Ronald E. Chennault (1998), Maurice Berger (2004), Valerie Babb (1998), and others including multicultural education theorist Christine E. Sleeter (2005) who insists “white people need to learn more about racism and imperialism, as well as about the historic experiences and creative works of diverse non-European groups” (p.
Sleeter also found that interrogating “lived experiences” across racial boundaries helped Whites see other points of view about race.

For some race is ambiguous; and for others, race is potently real. Not all Whites are racist, neither do all Blacks experience race in the same way. In the growing body of literature on race, most scholars agree with Howard Winant and Michael Omi (1994) that race is a social construction.

Like most African American formations or institutions, Black Art is indeed constructed “along the terrain of society’s racial mountain” (Marable, 2000, p. 22). This is understandable given the severe race divisions kept in abeyance by an ever shifting but resilient color line. Today, race-based subject positions have changed but knowledge about Black Art appears locked in a time warp because of race. This study aims to unravel that warp to reveal how knowing about Black Art can benefit art education.

Ladson-Billings (2004) argues that “race continues to be salient in U.S. society;” and asserts “the United States of America was premised on property rights, not human rights; and that the intersection of race and property could serve as a powerful analytic tool for explaining social and educational inequities” (pp. 411-2).

Thus, at the level of theory, instructors must also broadly apply Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore the complicity of race and the status of Black Art in Art Education. To paraphrase David Stovall (2005) Art Education, like any human interaction, is a set of relationships between groups, and these relationships influence how a particular art object or visual culture enters (or does not enter) the curriculum. As it promotes inclusive scholarship, CRT calls for critical analysis of such relationships in order to reveal how sites of power impede or assist in diversifying the curriculum.
Why Art Education Needs to Know *Black Art*

How can Art Education benefit from teaching and learning about *Black Art*? To answer to this question requires some internal as well as external digging as literature about *Black Art* as a viable site of cultural production is relatively scarce. And also racial logics or racial bias must also be considered and dealt with. For a variety of reasons, including racial bias, the genre of *Black Art* to which this question refers has been all but obscured in the art historical record, except in the way of biographical data about a particular artist or two who lived and practiced art-making during the *Black Art* era.

Specifically, this study concerns the much contested visual culture of Black Power—i.e., the symbol system and art objects associated with the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This transitional, transnational and transformative art and visual culture is important despite being overlooked by art historians. *Black Art* is an inclusive term and includes works by African American, Afro-Caribbean, Black British and African artists, referenced here as *Black Art*. It represents a large and diverse body of visual art and artifacts but has generally been obscured in the art history record; and is obviously undervalued as art education content.

The quality, validity and purposes of *Black Art* have been denigrated by Black and White art critics and other intellectuals, including Henry Lewis Gates, Cornel West, and Hilton Kramer. On the other hand, the quality, validity and purposes of *Black Art* are also the subject of recently acclaimed art historical surveys (Collins, 2002; Patton, 1998; Pohl, 2000; Powell, 1997; Farrington, 2005).

Frequently categorized as protest art or social realism, *Black Art* actually includes a greater range of diverse art objects and cultural artifacts produced for various purposes.
To categorize all of *Black Art* as protest art or social realism is to do the genre a disservice. One thing is certain, many of the objects defined as *Black Art* feature African-inspired imagery, conceptual themes, and/or concern political, social and/or cultural issues of special concern to Black people. This includes matters of race and racism.

Art objects featuring Black images may be points of conflict for art educators because they might conjure up traumatic and real links to the Atlantic Slave Trade, Black Codes, the Jim Crow practice of lynching, legal and de facto segregation, other violence and racial discrimination. These potential points of distress are due to the yet unresolved problematic of race in America and the world.

A well-known although unfortunate fact is that W. E. B. Du Bois (2000/1903), over 100 years ago, declared that “the problem of the twentieth-century [would be] the problem of the color-line.” As the first decade of the 21st Century closes, America has not shed its reputation as a society in a “wholly racialized world” (Morrison, 1993, p. 4)—a world that privileged a relative few. Racism is not new nor are its supposed remedies. Not even the temporality, multiplicity or hybridity of postmodernity has erased racism, the scourge of modernity; but how racialized bodies move through the world has changed.

*Black Art* represents a sharp turn in history, concerted efforts to wrestle the art and visual domain away from the “old” circumscriptions of racial abuse and segregation. Black artists, along with student activists and women, were demanding change—the art and visual culture of the era reflected these demands.

All too often, race and racism are seen as African American problems (Holt, 2000). Because art educators are predominantly young white females from non-blended
communities, (Erickson, 2004; Milner, 2003), *Black Art* keeps these historical events we would rather forget topical. In this regard we apply the healing power of *Sankofa*, the well-know Akan proverb which translates as “go back and fetch it.” Thus, instructively, *Sankofa* supports recovery and restitution of that which was forgotten (Maulana, 2003). It symbolizes the notion of looking at the present with a critical eye on the past to weigh the good and the bad; and to determine what worked and what did not in order to improve present and future possibilities. We can wisely learn from both the difficult and the good times. Michael Foucault subscribes to the essence of *Sankofa* when he asserts that all histories are selective responses to the present.

Emphatically, Maulana Karenga (1967) in *The Quotable Karenga* argued that culture, “as the basis of all ideas” encodes a set of values which bond a people together (p. 22). Art, Karenga insisted, needed to be “functional, collective and committing” to best serve the needs of Black people struggling against racism and economic oppression. Art was seen as a potentially revolutionary tool necessary to “win the minds of Black people. In addition, Karenga was correct when he argued that “art for art’s sake” was invalid because “all art reflects the value system from which it comes” (ibid.).

Though Karenga authored these words 40 years ago they resonate today and are affirmed by numerous scholars. For example, art educators Christine Ballengee Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr concur that “culture provides beliefs, values, and the patterns that give meaning and structure to life” (p. 6). In terms of the purposes and functions of art, renowned artist and art educator Murry DePillars (1990) further argues that art is directly linked to socialization processes and asserts that art is not passive. Art tells who a people
are and where they have been, and as it represents ideas orients the individual to the group (DePillars, 1990).
CHAPTER FIVE

RACE-ING ART EDUCATION TOWARD A NEW OPENNESS: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Within racialized forms of ‘looking’, profound differences of history, culture and experience have often been reduced to a handful of stereotypical features, which are ‘read’ as if they represent a truth of nature, somehow indelibly inscribed on the body. (Hall & Sealy, 2001, P. 4)

Art and Learning Matters Today

Like it or not, America is a racially-invested society, and the schools have often failed to move students beyond the misconceptions inhered in racial biases (Shujaa, 1995). Finally, after 400, it appears the racial landscape is in the process of changing. But how are we accountable to history and how is history accountable to us? No recent in fundamental ways, however, racism continues to have potency particularly in the area of and powerfully influences knowledge and research epistemologies that have consistently worked to maintain the center/margin status quo.

Art classes are increasingly populated by children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds (Daniel, 1990). By 2020, it is projected that youth of color will make-up nearly half of the American student population (Milner, 2003).
Despite the increasingly diversified student body, Africanness is culturally repressed in public schools; and art teachers will likely continue to be predominantly young white female teachers from non-blended communities (see Grant, & Sleeter, 1993; Milner, 2003; Shujaa, 1995b; Sleeter, 2000; & Wallace, 2004).

This social history of art education must be re-examined in order to build an appropriate integrated understanding of the role of art in the development of American life overall. The trail of Art Education’s history travels across the strident landscape of the oppression and exploitation of Black people. In spite of these horrific events, there is substantial evidence that Black people showed excellent artistic skill producing art forms that re-occur over centuries, thus indicating that successful systems of training and skills transference existed. These craftsmen and craftswomen were labeled “primitive” by European explorers in the 15th centuries and persist today (Driskell 1976: 11). Efland does not consider this notion of “primitivism,” but rather relates it to the child imagery that influenced Paul Klee (1879-1940). Africa is necessarily mentioned in the context of Picasso’s appropriation of African stylistic concepts which motivated the monumental, irreversible turn towards modernism in art production (Efland 1989: 149). Thus when we trace art education history across the terrain of blackness, even across the period blacks were the enslaved chattel of white slave owners, we begin to see that art learning occurred in parallel and oppositional veins.

**Race and Education**

Mwalimu Shujaa (1995a), an expert on the educational needs of African people, has criticized American schooling for being a hegemonic force in society—a force that
has not sufficiently rid itself of “particular influences of white supremacy” (p. 11). Looking at the interplay of self esteem and race, Shujaa found that “African American students develop coping strategies related to self-efficacy” (p. 198); and that schools tended to socialize Black students in ways that “inflate[d] the White ego as it deflate[d] the African ego” (p. 199).

F. Graeme Chalmers (1992) clearly cites racism as the cause of the Eurocentric bias in art education. Arthur Efland (1990) in *A History of Art Education* traces the origins of Western art education to classical Greece, discussing this civilization as if it evolved behind White ghetto walls isolated from the great civilizations of Egypt, China and ancient Peru (Grigsby, 1990). Synthesizing the various strands of art education into a coherent and readable tome, Efland admits, six pages before the end of the book, that Western (i.e., American) art education has neglected Blacks, Native Americans, women and ethnic “minorities.” He confirms what Toni Morrison (1993) argues is a Western aesthetic tradition that has also been “a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, [and repressing] formations and exercises of power…” by non-white and/or female artists (Morrison, 1993, pp. 6-7).

Race continues to be a dominant factor in Western society. Whiteness continues to signify an identity that is at once everything and nothing, an invisible presence of perceived and actual power and a site of normality and security. Blackness, on the other hand, continues to be very visible as it connotes inferiority, a lascivious nature, and insecurity. These ideas about racial differences are readily visible in the great art works of the West. Lee A. Ransaw (1990) is correct when he states “art is a form of truth.” He then hypothesizes that to derive truth about racial representations one must study a range
of art from given periods. Looking at the collections in the Western world’s major
museums--the Louvre, London’s National Gallery of Art and New York’s Metropolitan
Museum of Art--Ransom also indicates that art objects offer a “direct testimony about the
world that surrounds us and other people at other times;” and stipulates that “images
portrayed on canvas are often more precise and richer than literature” (Ransaw, 1990, p.
79).

Against whiteness, the valuation of blackness, as the repository of all the non-white skin colors of the rainbow, takes a downward path along the binary of the racial
canon. Within this paradigm, blackness represents that ultimate “alterity,” the opposite of
whiteness. Long since refuted is the biological determinism of the 19th-century. Since
then perceptions of race as a biologically inherited category has been refuted by scholars
including by the philosopher and cultural critic Alain Locke who in 1924 published the

*Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture* links race to cultural practices rather than
to biology and for him cultural practices are learned over time and not simply inherited.
Environmental ecology was critical to shaping how different or the same racial groups
behaved. This may be why Locke (1926) admonished Black artists to study African art
because he recognized that this knowledge was not simply passed on through the skin.

Scholars today agree that racial categories are social constructions which emerge
through a process of *racial formation* (Omi & Winant, 1994). Formerly considered a
totalizing state to which a person was born into or mythically condemned to by Ham’s
so-called embarrassment, the biological aspects of racial designations are downplayed
today and even considered foolish. However, in *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles W.
Mills confirms that while the phenomenon of *race is sociopolitical rather than biological*
it is nonetheless real. Before 1980, Black intellectuals and advocates often spoke from the vantage point of cultural nationalism to insure heroic Black images and points of view were considered equally (Karenga, 1967).

More recently, the postmodernist scholar Maurice Stevens (2003) has called attention to racialization as an historical formation which indeed has a history within itself. Stevens describes the concept of “trans(per)formance” as a mode of cultural production that offers the possibility of creatively responding to the troubling histories and the present conditions that social trauma like racism has produced. Rather than arguing for hope or the possibility of transcendence, Stevens focuses on efforts that work within and against constricting social protocol; and embarks on the important task of showing how the performative features of African American identity reveal the effects of trauma, by attempting historical recovery, and envisioning national wholeness, cultural coherency, and projecting ideas of authenticity (p. 5)

The optimal aspect of Stevens’ concepts are revealed in the way the Black performing subject contests the crude oppositions between black/white, self/other, sanity/insanity, and interior/exterior. In this regard, disavowal supports binary relationships by covering over terms that exist between their fixed poles. On one level, while it is honorable to revisit the stories of oppressed people, Stevens views these stories of trauma as scars on life and the psyche.

In this way, trans(per)formative theory disavows critical aspects of the discursive formations that give Black Art meaning. Thus, trans(per)formative theory, although useful, is considered cautiously because while it moves thinking toward a post-race or post black paradigm, in the process it seems to dangerously discard Black (i.e.,
Africentric) cultural canons that have and must co-exist as healing forces of the psyche and of life (see Myers, 1993). Therefore, although important concepts are gleaned from the notion of trans(per) performance, these ideas must be filtered through optimal theory and Africentricity in ways that link conceptualizations and interpretations between *Black Art* of the past and art produced by African Americans, today.

Additionally, the aspect of critical race theory that is inherently transdisciplinary is also similar to trans(per)performative theory, in that it also supports well-rounded analyses. It can also extend how the trans(per)formative view can serve to move understanding of the self from externalized subject formations to dynamic notions of subjectivity that privilege interiority from an optimal vantage point (Myers, 1993; Stevens, 2003). This will also supports the process of reCognizing in ways that help to insure that one remains cognizant of how historical and cultural implications of racialization have tended to privilege Eurocentric thought over other ethnic epistemologies (see Chanda & Daniel, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Myers, 1993; Stevens, 2003).

**Liberating Art Education**

Within the American social order, blackness was looked upon as a problematic, while whiteness was perceived to be emblematic of privilege, prestige and feelings of superiority. Seeking to destabilize these essentialist conceptions, artists and scholars are disturbing the binary and investigating blackness and whiteness as discursive spaces—interrogating how racially-loaded codes embody, encode, and convey important ideas. In America race consciousness is ubiquitous and affects how we live our lives. A major
topic of scholarly research is the deconstruction of Black racial stereotypes and their influence on culture and meaning-making (Goings, 1994; Turner, 1994; & Hall, 1996).

By overturning the simple victim/victimizer binary, critical multicultural art educators strive to strengthen an anti-oppressive ecological order in the classroom. By reviewing works through a racial lens, art educators can effectively confront the hidden racial structure of art history and formal elements. The historic exultation of whiteness has been an important although invisible content of Western artistic production.

Howard Wynant and Michael Omi (1994), Cornel West, (1994) have played a huge part in generating the popular understanding that race is not a biological factor but a socially constructed idea. Stuart Hall (2002) has clarified Foucault’s discourse theory and demonstrated how race also becomes a critical historical factor in constructing power paradigms. Some consider race to be a declining bankrupt idea, too complex and convoluted to have any meaning. African American museum administrator Kinshasa Holman Conwill (1993) insists that race can not be overlooked because its relevance today is inextricably linked to many horrible things that have happened in this society due to race. However, race and racism manifest differently today than they did in the past. Shifts have occurred in the material base out of which race and racism emerge (Frazier, 1968; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; & West, 2002).

The plausibility of Obama’s successful candidacy may seem to suggest that America is approaching a genuine moment of restructuring its thinking about race, and restructuring its cognitive experience with blackness. What might be occurring is a welcomed to reCognize the black male body and the black mind, in ways that free us from the racial binary (see Chanda, & Daniel, 2000, p. 8). However, we must be careful
not to assume too much before we use every possible means to gain a fuller understanding of how race has mattered in the American social order.

Libratory themes are prevalent in Black American art, as they are in the works of painter/scholar Murry DePillars (1990). DePillars’ work underscore the perception that art is not passive, but rather capable of orienting an individual or group by establishing an “image-situation.” Drawing this notion from the work of Lerone Bennett, Jr., DePillars builds on the notion that art plays a key role in the socialization process. Bennett provides these ideas on the importance of art as it speaks to the mind’s eye, thus creating an “image-situation’ wherein like history…

[Art] acts because it is the basis of the image which is the ground of [human] acts. This is a point of enormous importance, for [humans] act out of their images. They respond not to the situation but to the situation transformed by the images they carry in their minds. In short they respond to the image-situation, to the ideas they have of themselves in the situations.

The image sees.
The image feels.
The image acts.

…If you want to change a situation, you have to change the images [humans] have of themselves and of their situation. (Lerone Bennett as quoted in DePillars, 1990, pp. 115-116)

Art As a Catalyst for World-Making

World making is an intriguing concept introduced by Vesta Daniel (1990). It is appropriate here because the goal of Black Art and the Black Arts Movement was in fact to do just that--to make a better world. One of the central tenets of the Nguzo Saba is Kuumba, a Kiswahili term which means creativity. According to Maulana (1977), the principle of Kuumba/Creativity translates as: “To do always as much as we can, in the
way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it” (p. 9).

The socializing role of art is also supported by Arthur Efland (2000), a specialist on art and cognition. Efland maintains that if art were only about itself its formal qualities (form, color, line, organizational space, etc) would encompass the totality of its content and meaning. However, art is more than itself. It engenders and even requires the construction of “new” knowledge based on more than itself. Meaning and significance in art are derived through the use of language and signs gleaned from everyday social interactions. Therefore, the viewer/participant brings a “lifeworld” and everyday language and experience to the task of meaning-making in art (Efland, 2000, p 77).

According to Efland, this “lifeworld” is the world of everyday social interactions of the viewer/maker, a world abounding with racial meanings—racial meanings that are passed on through natural everyday socialization processes (see Thandeka, 1999). Thus, one can infer that the art viewer/maker might also be aware of commonplace racial codes in the everyday, although we know that these codes are so commonplace they are often invisible. However, Thandeka (1999) points out those racial codes are also nurtured and exist in the everyday, common place. So, one can assume that artists, too, in the commonplace community circumscribed by Western art and racial canons, are at least minimally aware of these racial codes and consciously or not enfold them into the work.

It is not surprising that racial content (and intent) is often hidden in the artist’s organizing principles, or masked by the art object’s symbolic or metaphorical elements. Of course, this is not the case with the works by painter Michael Ray Charles and silhouette-maker Kara Walker. These artists deliberately exploit negative racial
stereotypes for which they have achieved great monetary support from the white-dominated mainstream art world. The works by Charles and Walker use the stereotype to focus on trauma. This can be uncomfortable and disturbing because they re-introduce the negative traumatic history in ways that have no repeal, no victorious outcome. For many African Americans these works fail miserably because they miss the creative flexible thinking that went into overcoming or defying the stereotypes of enslavement.

Walker and Charles appear to defile African American cognitive style which is similar in approach to what Efland (2000) and Georgina Short (1997) describe as indicative of cognitive flexibility theory. In relationship to art education praxis, Efland and Short advocate for integrated teaching strategies grounded in cognitive flexibility theory. Because “the purpose for teaching the arts is to contribute to the social and cultural landscape that each individual inhabits,” Efland considers the relationship between art and the social and cultural landscape:

The function of the arts throughout [Western] cultural history has been and continues to be the task of “reality construction.” The arts construct representations of the [real] world...[or] imagined worlds...not present, but that might inspire human beings to create an alternative future for themselves. Much of what constitutes reality is socially constructed, including such things as money, property, marriage, gender roles, economic systems, governments, and such evils as racial discrimination. *The social constructions found in the arts contain representations of these social realities* (Efland, 2000, p. 171, italics added).

For Efland “racial discrimination” is an evil social construction. But it is one that cannot be overlooked when discussing Western social and cultural landscapes. One of the assumptions of this study is that the evidence of the social construction of race has for far too long been overlooked in the select oeuvre of Western masterpieces. As various scholars such as Yvette Abrahams (1997), Lisa Gail Collins (2000) and Sander Gilman
(2002) bring attention to evident racial content in the masterworks of Georges Seurat, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas and others, this notion can not continue to be ignored. In this way, the art image becomes a mediating vehicle of both good news and “evil” things.

Using the image as a prompt for learning about culture and society, and to make “race” the antagonist image prompt, can help to reveal insights about race in ways that can help prepare students to confront complex, uncomfortable topics related to race as they undertake their various “world-making projects” (see Daniel, 1996).

**Art and Values**

As a socializing vehicle, generally, art it is not value-free, nor is it apolitical. The art privileged in the canons of Western art education, tends to deify European-descendent cultures and individuals while frequently ignoring or discrediting non-European people and cultures. As racial beliefs and practices inform Western life in general, it is not surprising that it can also inform art making, evaluation and preservation. By making race a critical facet of art inquiry, art educators can enhance their role as instigators of positive social and cultural change.

To approach racial codes in visual materials through integrated praxis, can help to uplift students as agents of subject formation. Students are better able to deconstruct or breakdown racial content even when invisible and/or not overt, such as in the landscapes by the 18th Century British artist Thomas Gainsborough, whose colonial-era portrait of *Mr. and Mrs. Adams* (completed in 1750) clearly indicates values about land ownership, materiality and Decartes’ 17th-century notion of the “I think therefore I am” self-made man (and woman) (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 398). New critical strategies for these sorts of tasks are supported by optimal theory as it guides analysis toward healthy wholistic
outcomes. Such strategies can help to construct new ways to interpret the historical experiences of the racial self, and the personal self in relationship to self-representations of racial beliefs in history. Teachers and students using race as a prompt for art inquiry can discover, analyze, interpret and change the ways delimiting visual strategies intersect with lived and imagined experiences.

The history of African American art is the wary victim of the pathology of racism and the general discomfort that attends talking about race and racism. By recognizing this as a cause of the shortfall in the historical record on African American art, scholars are increasingly mining the archives to deconstruct the axioms of science to eliminate the flaws as they have failed to untangle the social, moral and political dimensions from the racial paradigms that continue to impact what Morrison (1993) describes as this wholly racialized American society.

Therefore, this study attempts to construct a new approach to art teaching and learning about African American art, and particularly about the Black Art of the 1960s and 1970s. And by doing so, support teaching and learning that further enables the dismantling of the monolithic nature of art education and thus reduce the old racial hierarchies which formed it. F. Graeme Chalmers (1992) offers an insightful critique of the ingrained traditions of ethnocentrism, i.e., Eurocentrism in art education.

The persistent power of an ingrained ethnocentrism is evident in the inclusive but somewhat misleading text, *Twentieth Century American Art*, by the noted art historian Erika Doss (2002). Doss is the director of the American Studies Program in the Department of Art History at University of Colorado, Boulder. Her notable survey of
American art history is mentioned here because she includes a 21-page chapter entitled “Feminist Art and Black Art” (pp. 181-201).

However, looking more closely at this 21-page chapter from the purview of a scholar with an African-centered point of view reveals concerns that are troubling. Unfortunately, Doss (2002) takes license in her narrative about this historic period in contemporary American art history.

As the title suggests, Doss (2002) discusses the Feminist and Black Arts Movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Immediately, she opens the chapter with the importance of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* as exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1969. Doss ably points to the key issues that inform this compelling multimedia project, which turns commonplace women’s work (i.e., giving dinner parties) the stuff of monumental commemorative events. Chicago’s *Dinner Party* is clearly the quintessential icon of the burgeoning women’s art movement.

Doss (2002) substantiates her claim by contextualizing her analysis against Linda Nochlin’s provocative 1971 essay, “Why Have there been No Great Women Artists?” Nochlin’s pivotal article instituted a new discourse within the art establishment as it demanded that women be invited to the table. Doss also underscores the point that women’s art took off in many directions while remaining true to the politically-oriented Women’s Liberation Movement. There is obviously some importance given to the separation between a political thrust and an aesthetic thrust. The significance of this point though not outrightly admitted is revealed later when talking about the Black Arts Movement.
Before the end of the second paragraph on the first page of the chapter, Doss gives credit to African American artists, among other minority artists, for making American art more inclusive and pluralistic suggesting that it was obviously not diverse before these efforts just as Chalmers (1992) had pointed out. In any event, Doss states:

Guided by the activism of Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation, and by ‘consciousness raising’ techniques aimed at heightening social and political awareness and self-knowledge, the 1970s erupted with styles and artists collectives protesting inequities of gender and race. Challenging the mainstream art world’s longstanding exclusion of women and non-white artists, the abiding dominance of Feminist and African American artists, among others, redirected the course of twentieth-century American art along more expansive and pluralistic pathways (p. 181).

While informative, Doss’ (2002) account is misleading. Her narrative begins in 1969, several years after the onset of the Black Arts Movement, which for the purposes of this study began in 1962, although for equally valid reasons, Mary Schmidt Campbell (1985) points to 1963 as the start of the movement as the first Black Art images entered the public sphere in 1963 (see Douglas, 1996; Donaldson, 1970). My position is that the intellectual and aesthetic planning for the movement began earnestly in 1962 (Donaldson, 1970; Okediji, 2003).

This point of beginnings is lost in Doss’ text wherein she devotes 15 pages to the Feminist movement which in fact, came years after the Black Arts Movement, which she summarizes in all of six pages. History does tell us that when Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party was being exhibited on the West Coast in 1969; the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York was hosting a bold group exhibit of Black Art (Clarke, 2003).

When dealing with the subject of Black Art, Doss (2002) follows the popular discourse which situates the genre as inflexible, fixed and race-bound. She notes that
Benny Andrews, a significant personality during the era, “refused to let museum curators pigeon-hole him as ‘only’ a ‘black’ artist” (p. 194). While this point is very true and there is no reason to doubt Doss’ veracity in telling this story, the telling falls short and does not enlighten because there is no context for the merits of Andrews work. One sentence might have explained that Andrews not only struggled with museums to make ways for Black artist but also formed coalitions with women =, white and black and mainstream white male artists to confront major social ills of the day (Andrews, 1978, 1985).

While noting that Black artists also “developed multiple strategies for visualizing blackness and representing black life;” Doss (2002) does not give a decent accounting of the wide-ranging Black political activism that helped to generate increased opportunities for African American and women artists in the mainstream art world, she provides no linkages as she represents a very liberal point of view.

On the other hand, an Africentric reading of Andrews work would situate the museum as a site of white privilege and a gatekeeper of the status quo in order to better explain the significance of the efforts of Andrews, Chicago and others. The value of Black Power advocacy is also lost in Doss’ telling. Andrews (1978) and Tom Floyd and others had the force of Black Power behind them as they confronted the museum curators who were White had little understanding and appreciation for any “black” thing or personage. Knowingly, Doss (2002) rearranged the order of events of an important historical period. Clearly, the Black Arts Movement came before the Women’s Art Movement and before the wonderful feminist art of Judy Chicago—but of course this was not as important to Doss (2002) as it would be to a scholar with Africentric sensibilities. However, the outcome is the same for both, it is misleading and wrong. It is
important to recognize that this wrong depiction of facts has been accepted by the publishers and readers as truth. This is tolerated because Black Art has been defined as race-based, protest art and thus allowed to remain outside of the art discourses, which therefore suffer because they are wrong.

In light of Doss’ (2002) authorial re-vamping of the art historical record, it is important to reflect on the words of the multicultural guru, James Banks who warned that “all knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 8). By privileging Feminist art over Black art, Doss (2002) provides us with an example, of what Scheurich and Young (1997) call “epistemological racism,” which “means that [Doss’] current range of research epistemologies…arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race, [or gender or class-based] epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial [and/or gender] group while excluding epistemologies of other races/cultures…” (p. 8).

According to Scheurich and Young (1997) this practice of epistemological racism has negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular. In other words, our “logics of inquiry” are the social products and practices of the social historical experiences of whites, and therefore, these products and practices carry forward the social history of that group and exclude the epistemologies of other social groups. But again the critical problem for all of us, for Whites and Blacks –is that the resulting epistemological racism, besides unnecessarily restricting or excluding the range of possible epistemologies, creates profoundly negative consequences for those of the other racial cultures with a different epistemology, ontology and axiology (pp. 8-9).
Doss’ (2002) account would erroneously lead one to believe that the Feminist art movement came before the Black Arts Movement—not true. Several pages into the chapter, Doss gives clues to indicate that indeed the Black Arts Movement preceded the Feminist Art Movement. In Doss’ historical account, Black art is deemed less important because it is repositioned in chronological time and empirical order. This is unfortunate, but not unusual that the historical record has been adjusted to suit the dominant social order and possibly the bias of the author.

As a renowned authority on American art, Doss has in other texts explored aspects of art produced by African American artists during the sixties and seventies. She focuses on Emory Douglas the revolution because this narrative “arises although Doss is to be commended for not excluding the Black art of the 1960s era altogether as others like have. like the Janson’s texts have it did commence in the early 1960s with pivotal imagery by male and female artists including Faith Ringgold and Betye Saar, who are both represented first as iconic of the Feminist art movement. While it is true that both of these women were instrumental in the women’s art movement they were also pivotal in using art to address pressing social issues of the day particularly in relationship to racism.

Clearly, this reading of Doss’ (2002) work points to the appearance of exclusionary racially-bias interfering with her narrative. For Doss “The Dinner Party’s positive celebration of female bodies and sexuality, its consciousness-raising about women’s history and reclamation of women artists, and its subversion and revision of masculinist historical narratives” was the more important story to tell (p. 186). As a well-placed after thought, Doss does reveal that the African American author Alice Walker was critical of Chicago’s work because it only included one black woman, Sojourner
Truth, but failed to mark her presence with the female codifying motif that Chicago had used with the other images of women.

**Teaching about Race with Black Art**

While art can be dangerous and subversive, it can also “open new vistas, blur traditional boundaries, and reach out to new definitions” (Karel Rose cited in Rose, & Kincheloe, 2003, pp. 101-102). How race has critically influenced aesthetic understanding and knowledge about art; and conversely how art has influenced understandings about race will be examined.

Teaching students to recognize the harm racism has visited upon human beings across history and around the world enables teachers and students to explore their value of self and others, and their knowledge of self and others. This study draws on Optimal Theory which advances the notion that understanding that self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge. Art education not only provides numerous opportunities for self-exploration and self-expression; but also offers unique opportunities to explore how others value, know and represent self and others.

Art education, like American education in general, is founded on Euro-American knowledge (Chalmers, 1992, Gordon, 2001). This canonical focus is characterized by Eurocentricism, an elitist ethnocentrism (Chalmers, 1992). The Eurocentric focus inscribes a history of domination over assigned hierarchies of racialized identities. Within this arena, the most highly prized knowledge is culled from a kettle of “white-washed” ideas. Ideas come into knowing through thought and actions. In the world dominated by
European powers the ideas of others have been appropriated and subsumed or either
ignored or reduced and/or silenced.

In art education, Vesta Daniel (1990) reminds us that “‘official knowledge’
condoned by the existing power structure is social-political reality regardless of its moral
coloring” (p. 87). But it is this “moral coloring” that the subject of race brings into clear
view. European ethnocentrism has led to the distortion, devaluation and even the
abrogation of non-European art practices and aesthetics. Chalmers (1992) effectively
exposes the racist ideological core that multiculturalists are trying to push aside (Morris
& Stuhr, 2001). Chalmers argues that the pioneering art educators during the so-called
European era of Enlightenment and he further contends that these racist ideas are
“covertly embedded in much of what has been called elitist aesthetic and art education
theory” (p. 36).

Disdain for the elitist sensibilities inhered in art education brought about the
titular demise of Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE). DBAE was seen as focusing
too heavily on European art and not responding to diversity (Thurber, 1993, p. 28). Even
Michael Day (1993), an ardent supporter of DBAE, had to acknowledge that critics of
DBAE found it “narrow, formalist [and] elitist (p. 24). As art educators sought to respond
to the diversity in the world of art, they embraced multiculturalism as a theory of
educational reform as a major strategy for reforming the field. What today is
globalization was once a simple dynamic of transnational corporate behavior; and before
that this means that deep structure meaning and significance of non-European cultures is
overlooked as it was in the art practice aesthetic knowledge emerging is Within this
universe, privilege rested among those assigned to the racial category “white,” the
individuals of the Europe’s elite social order. This elite powerful body directed knowledge construction and its acquisition was controlled by the ruling class. Beverly Gordon (2001) argues that a society’s conceptual system is based upon its realm of knowledge (Gordon, 184, p. 184). For Gordon, this “conceptual system has its own internal logic,” its own objectivity and rationality in which the sacred resides.

Globalization has not eradicated race or made a non-factor, for the observant scholar, globalization makes racial boundaries

Marimba Ani (2000) offers deep African-centered insights into Euro-American conceptual systems of knowledge and reasons they work to undermine and essentially prohibit non-European epistemologies from the discursive arenas of education. Ani’s compelling critique of European cultural thought and behavior suggests knowledge emerges from a distinctive cultural logos or its asili (p. xiv). This European or Western asili provides the ideological inspiration for aesthetic expression and cultural wholeness.

As a result of the cultural logic of a society’s asili also generates it “cultural cognitive style” or utamawazo. The Western, Eurocentric or dominant Euro-American asili is characteristically expressed as “rationalistic and controlling” in ways that equate power and humanness with whiteness. According to Ani (2000), Western social orders take “pleasure in power (utamaroho), not power to which is energy; but power over, which is destruction” (p. 230).

Gordon (2001) argues “the African American conceptual system challenges Western ideological hegemony in two ways:

First it provides a source for critiquing the fundamental principles upon which objectivity and rationality regarding social construction of race and racism are constructed within the system. Second, by articulating the evolution and
construction of an alternative realm of knowledge that can move beyond and transcend the prevailing conceptual system, this conceptual system affords non-White, non-Western peoples a foundation on which to base action for social change” (p. 184).

In education, multiculturalism has been broadly embraced to manage what Gordon (2000) calls the “Black challenge to Western ideological hegemony” (p. 185). The radical dimension of this black conceptual system is represented as an African cultural worldview—a worldview whose realm of knowledge is defined as Africentric or in other words a system of knowledge where African interests are vitally important.

The discursive structure employed in American schools legitimizes and perpetuates the existing patterns of power relations. “Leadership for educational justice requires a better concept of the cultural mechanisms that affect educational participation of students, parents and teachers alike” (Rizvi, 2005, p. 176).

Therefore, it is important to recognize that “cultural othering” is an aggressive and destructive action designed to maintain the power and authority of the European aesthetic purview. If Ani (2000) is correct in asserting that the utamaroho or inspiration of European culture is domination over others, then it suggests that whiteness was constructed around notions of self-righteous privilege and confirmed through the configuration of different as less than their white selves.

Deconstructing Race in Research Epistemologies

Racial Bias in Research Epistemologies. An unfortunate fact is that mainstream art discourses grounded in Western modernist epistemological traditions have tended to reproduce racialized categories of power in ways that reinforce how “racial power is exercised legally and ideologically” in the USA (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas,
James J. Scheurich and Michelle D. Young (1997) address the ideological side of this matter in their discussion about racial-bias in research epistemologies.

Responding to what they suggest was a persistent, unanswered query from “respected scholars of color,” Scheurich and Young (1997), as self-identified White scholars, discussed whether “the epistemologies of educational research were racially-biased” (p. 4). Identifying as “our range of research epistemologies,” they specified positivism, post-positivisms, neo-realisms, interpretations, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/post-structuralisms” were by-products of the dominant race—the mainstream White race (ibid.). Toward the end of their analysis, they addressed epistemologies they defined as “race-based,” specifically referring to Africentricity, Africentric feminist epistemology, and critical race theory (p. 10).

Race-ing Epistemologies. Desiring to “facilitate an understanding of just what epistemological racism is” Scheurich and Young (1997) provide a compelling discussion about research issues and epistemology (italics in original text; p. 4). The discursive format of their analysis is both historical and interpretive. Theirs is a commendable discussion that brings attention to the varying forms of racism including overt, covert, institutional and societal racism. They also address “civilizational racism,” which they point out provides the possibility for overt, covert, institutional and societal racism to exist and prosper.

According to Scheurich and Young (1997), there is relative silence from the academy on the subject of racial bias in research epistemologies. The reason for this they claim
is not a function of overt or covert racism as some might argue, or of institutional or societal racism, as others might suggest. Instead…this silence is a function of a different lack—a lack of understanding among researchers as to how race is critically significant epistemological problem in educational research (p. 4).

However, despite this apparently enlightened disclosure, it is interesting that even though Scheurich and Young (1997) admit that racial rationales, hierarchies and exclusions were central to the founding of America and the development of modern western civilization, they are careful not to describe the research epistemologies of the dominant group of majority white people as race-based epistemologies although they do name Africentricity and critical race theory (CRT) as race-based. The unspoken implication is that scholarship based on the lives or from the perspective of African descended people is lessened by race in ways that non-raced or White research is not.

[D]ominant research epistemologies—from positivism to postmodernisms—implicitly favor White people because they accord most easily with their social history…Thus, even though it may be unintended, the “clothes” that an epistemology could be said to be fit better and are more comfortable to White researchers because White researchers themselves are a product of the social history of Whites, just as the dominant epistemologies are a product of White social history [as are the university, legitimate scholarship and knowledge]…all cultural products of White social history…The negative consequence for scholars of color, however, is that they must learn and become accomplished in epistemologies that arises out of a social history that has been profoundly hostile to their race and that ignores or excludes alternative race-based epistemologies because mainstream research communities have assumed that their epistemologies are not derived from any particular group’s social history, i.e., are free of any specific history or culture (Sheurich & Young, 1997, p. 9).

By aligning the research epistemologies along racial lines in such a way that Africentricity and CRT are labeled as raced-based, but positivism, post-positivisms, neorealisms, interpretations, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/post-structuralisms are not labeled race-based is telling. As Scheurich and Young (1997) bring forth an enlightened analysis of the implications of racism and research, they also and
perhaps inadvertently burden and delimit the black side of the racial equation while allowing the white side off the racial hook. The very reasons they cite above reflect the very arrogance of racism and learned feelings of normative superiority.

It is an important supposition of this study to demonstrate that by discussing Africentricity and critical race theory (CRT) as “new” race-based epistemologies (p. 9) Sheurich and Young (1997) mislead readers in at least two ways. First, their approach infers that none of the other aforementioned research epistemologies are race bound, or have a racial or racist dimension—this only serves to reinforce the notion of the invisibility of whiteness in Western vernaculars (Dyer, 2002; Morrison, 1992; Wright, 1998). Secondly, to perpetuate this sort of mislabeling of the one set of epistemologies as race-based and the other set as race and culture-free presumes that theories like Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness is not equivalent with other theories about systems of knowing because it acknowledges racism as a central informing factor. Although they declare racism is heinous, and assert that one can be anti-racist but promulgate racism often in profound but unconscious ways, Scheurich and Young do not adequately shed the onus of race from theories that interrogate racial logic.

Some twenty years before Scheurich and Young (1997) brought these matters to the attention of their fellow white researchers, Black Art extended earlier discourse that had emerged from the social history of Africans in America and again made visible the invisibility of whiteness. Many Black artists of the sixties and seventies attempted to expose the dominant culture ideals encode the sort of universals that postcolonial theories eschew today. The rule of law, for example, is a broad civilization assumption and a cherished ideal in America, however, Wright (1998) rightfully argues:
The rule of law...has not, throughout its implementation in American history, helped many white people understand freedom. The ideal of the rule of law in America was that it was to promote the universal American ideal of freedom. But throughout a long portion of its history, white Americans promoted slave law and the rule of slave law. Throughout virtually their entire history, they promoted and implemented racist law. These two forms of law made it possible for Whites to engage in legal lawless behavior against Black people (and Indians, and other people of color in the country). The Jim Crow racist laws [of] the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not dismantled until the 1960s and 1970s [the era and objective of Black Power and the Black Arts Movement], and they are not yet completely dismantled. And where racist laws no longer exist, racist thinking and racist practices continue [often unconsciously] (p. 102).

The problem of racism is real, but it is a problem that is difficult to explore openly. It is not really a Black problem, but White problem. In the study *Learning to be White*, Thandeka (1994) makes a serious claim that whiteness and white privilege is taught the primary caregivers to their children at an early age. It is in this sense that Wright (1998) asserts Whites have learned *license* which he explains is the opposite of freedom. As a noted historian, Wright asks, “When have most white people had a chance to learn about a genuine universal freedom?” (p. 102). License means that one has the right to do and say anything they please; Lipsitz (2002) and others have defined this as “white privilege.”

Scheurich and Young (1997) identify “modernism” as a broad civilizational assumption, a universal notion that underlies America’s cultural construction of “the world” and “the real.” This modernism brought with it a social order that bell hooks (1997) describes as a “white supremacist capitalistic patriarchy” (p. 197), a descriptor reflecting modernisms primary assumptions—racism as well as sexism and classism. Scheurich and Young (1997) explain that racial hierarchies and exclusions were so widely circulated that they became central features of modernist thought. Consequently,
they add, “White racism or White supremacy [was] interlaced or interwoven into the founding fabric of modern western civilization” (p. 7).

Racism Matters. Well-known is the hegemonic and hierarchal character of Western modernism. Well-known is the system of chattel slavery Euro-Americans instituted to forcibly displace Africans from their homelands to cultivate these new lands. These “real” stories involve not only Euro-Americans, continental indigenous cultures and the displaced Africans who were enslaved, but they are fundamentally reflective of the Western world and have influenced the knowledge to which the world has access. In this regard, Scheurich and Young (1997) confirm “ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies are not outside history or sociology” (p. 7).

Citing educator Edmund Gordon and colleagues, Scheurich and Young (1997) add, “knowledge, technology and the production of knowledge is cultural;” and they also assert “Knowledge production operates within communicentric [ontological and epistemological] frames of reference…[and they note that] “all knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators” (p. 8).

Knowledge is directly related to human interests: we do not build up knowledge through objective perceptions, or scientifically cognize an object before entering into other, more primary relationships with it. One knows “things” to the extent that one engages in subjective relationships with them (Myers, 1993, p. 90).

The prevailing Western environment and historical realities suppressed Africans and Black subjectivity was muted in many ways. African and African American knowledge was also undervalued. Myers (1993) characterizes these prevailing conditions as sub-optimal and argues that they caused difficult circumstances for Blacks generally and for black women in particular, all of whom start out further disadvantaged than
others because they “do not meet what in U.S. culture is the very prized criterion of having white skin” (Myers, 1993, p.10). W. D. Wright (1998) explores this historic modernist universal in a different way.

Wright (1998) addresses this problem as the failure of scholars--Euro-American, African-American and others—to look at not race but racism and to see racism as a problem of the dominant group with implications for others, but first and foremost racism is a problem of Whites.

The problem in America has never been race, but rather racism—namely, the way white people have understood and related to race, either the white race or the black race, or other races…The way they have related to these races has been to glorify the white race and denigrate and punish all the others. Thus, White racism and White racist divestment are the places to look for the right answers. Focusing on these matters will require white people to engage in deep introspection that will lead, one hopes, to individuals divesting themselves of their own racism, that is, to self-alteration and self-healing (p. ix).

To strengthen his position, Wright (1998) points to the significance of current and inherited historical environments upon racial logics. Wright explains that while different people can share the same time period, the circumstances of their existence, the starting and end points of their common era can represent differing historical environments (conditions he refers to as the \( h_e \) factor). Historical environments can be vastly different for a group or groups.

The historical environment of African people in America relegated them and the knowledge they came with and/or developed to the bottom of the racial hierarchy endemic in American life. Black Americans had to contend with and rally against their historical environment simply to realize and express subjectivity and agency (Myers,
Blackness was ridiculed and legally excluded in the contrasting historical environment of Euro-Americans because

Whiteness [was] everywhere in [American] culture, [although] it is very hard to see…”[W]hite power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular.” As the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations (Dyer quote in Lipsitz, 2002, p. 61).

Although racial paradigms and historical environments have changed dramatically, race, as George Lipsitz (2002) argues, remains a sinister cultural construct, primarily because, as Bolgatz (2006), Holt (2000), Myers (1993), Thandeka (1994), and Wright (1998) argue, we do not talk about it or we talk about it in the wrong way. Black Art explicitly interrogated matters of race and racism. It caused discomfort among some Whites and Blacks. But more importantly, it helped to energize the resolve of a younger generation of Black people to value and be more vocal about their lives and desires and their experiences within the American historical environment. In this regard, they introduced or rather heightened the discourse on race by focusing a great deal of attention on racism, not only through visual imagery but also through their critique of “art world” practices and the policies of major art institutions.

Making Racism Visible: Challenge and Consequence. Racism is considered a cultural construct whose causes and consequences are, according to Marimba Ani (2000), rooted in the cultural logos or asilis of the Euro-American social order. Related to this idea about the Euro-American asili, is Lipstiz’s (2002) view that the racial paradigm pits various ethnic groups against a single white norm characterized by a “possessive investment in whiteness [that] is not a simple matter of black and white” (p. 62).
Returning to an assumption stated earlier, to isolate Africentricity and CRT as race-based research epistemologies, is to further perpetuate their isolation and marginalization within the academy. This tendency of mainstream academics to racialize phenomena in this way takes the onus off the double-edged nature of the constructions, conceptualizations and enactments of racism, which as Wright (1998) argues, is what matters most; and thus profoundly opposing Cornel West’s (1980) view that it is race that matters.

Wright (1998) accuses West’s popular pronouncement that race matters misses the point. Although popular and provocative, West, according to Wright, bases his argument on a misunderstanding of nihilism to suggest that the Blacks work against their own success by exhibiting behavior that is “meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness” (p. 103). Wright, a historian, asserts West is wrong to blame Blacks for the “disjunctive cynicism” that is spreading among a number of Blacks and leading them toward licentious behavior” (p. 104).

For Wright (1998), West fails to draw attention to the root cause of the race issue. He and the others like Vincent Harding (1981) and John Blassingham (1979), for example, suggest it would be wise to know about the long continuous stream of Black resistance to racism. This is not to say that Black people have no responsibility for changing the racial dilemma, but more often than not, contemporary Euro-Americans believe they have the license to exclude themselves from assuming responsibility for racism. Wright effectively demonstrates that racist thinking is by definition power and domination thinking. He equates sexist thinking with racist thinking, which suggests it should be as visible a critique as is the gender critique. In addition, Wright also insists
that Whites have worked to reduce overt acts of racism; but have ignored the often subtle and insidious institutionalized forms of racism (Wright, 1998).

The Black Arts Movement of the Sixties and Seventies echoed this accusation through diverse cultural forms. Content paralleled and augmented the work of political activists and civil rights workers. Black visual artists rallied against White racist aesthetics and legitimizing criteria, they contested and openly rejected “White racist claims of authority and legitimacy, precisely because they could not be validated by reason, intelligence, or morality” (p. 104). Nihilism, Wright (1998) explains further, is more appropriately understood as the Black intelligentsia moving into a revolutionary posture, a posture represented by Black Power.

Baraka (2000) recently described racism as a byproduct of America’s fascist capitalism whose philosophical basis for aesthetic evaluation is rooted in, beautifies and renders slavery and national oppression profound. Critical race theory (CRT) provides strategies for rooting out the possessive investment in whiteness that characterizes the discourse surrounding Black Art.

**Optimizing Effort**

Theoretically, the Black Art of the 1960s and 1970s, in all its various and intersecting manifestations (including music, poetry, art, visual culture and more), strove to impart psychic healing and stimulate intimate communications in order to generate esteem and a new sense of purpose within the Black community. Black visual artists joined the struggle to improve the life chances of Black people. Just as the Civil Rights Movement involved wide range of people with various views endeavored to connect
viewers through imagery to a living spirit and a new understanding of themselves. Artists were equally challenged to interrogate and expose the “great spiritual and psychological harm” that Black experienced as a result of “the moral and philosophical decay of a corrupt [Western] civilization” (Neal, 1970, p. 34).

According to Larry Neal, a key framer and ‘spiritual leader’ of the movement, posited that a goal of the Black Art movement was to represent and respond to “a total vision” of Black people; and called on the “DuBois’ sons and daughters in the Black Art movement” to “go forth to destroy the Double Consciousness…to merge the “warring ideals” into One Committed Soul integrated with itself and taking its own place in the world” (p. 35).

**Conclusion**

Black art emerges out of a history of systematic denigration. Though African Americans have participated in and been part and parcel to the development of Western society and the Western art world overall, their experiences and in this case their visual arts have been located outside what is known as the Western art canon. This dislocation has caused Black people and their arts to exist on the margins of a hyper-valorized society. Blackness represents

To construct a more appropriate knowledge base about art, Jacqueline Chanda and Vesta Daniel (2003) encourage art instructors and learners to *ReCognize* works of art by newly considering not only their present physical meaning but also linking that meaning to a near and/or distant pasts and co-existing realities of the art work and/or the artist who produced it. Daniel and Chanda further advocate for the need to transform one’s thinking by first moving beyond the level of physical knowing to contextual knowing by
investigating and considering “the origin, nature and limits of the art works historical and cultural setting” (p. 11).

*ReCognizing* presents new opportunities for viewing phenomena and visual culture very intimately and also from the perspective of the African person. Mazama (2003) holistic view toward research necessarily supports reCognizing as a way to step outside the dominant European conceptual framework and to consider the role of race in art education; and for that matter, the role the discipline of art education has played (and continues to play) in the perpetuation of racialization.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

RECOVERING AND RECLAIMING THE ART AND VISUAL CULTURE OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

But can you expect teachers to revolutionize the social order for the good of the community? The educational system of a country is worthless unless it accomplishes this task. (Carter G. Woodson, 1933, p.145)

The inclusion and study of Black Art into the art curriculum courageously acknowledges the importance of race as a critical overarching difference that art inquiry has generally avoided. By bringing Black Art into normal, everyday curricular activities will surely go a long way to strengthen student resolve to be able to discuss racial questions evenly and with deference for other’s feelings.

In the final analysis, as Jane Bolgatz (2005) cogently argues, it is imperative that more art educators and students become conversant with racial literacy as a moral imperative that generates discussions about goodness. While not focused on blaming guilt, it is Bolgatz’s view that guilt is a useful feeling in that it lets an individual know that something is wrong.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory is informed by critical race theory (CRT) to generate comparative analyses of representations of race and racism in art from
an Africentric philosophical perspective—a perspective that emanates from the vantage point of African people. The principle reason for constructing this approach is to make visible the invisible and subtle dimensions of epistemological and institutionalized racism that have heretofore shaped the discourses on Black Art. By integrating CDA, CRT and reflexive methods for reCognizing Black Art and related phenomena, art educators are better informed to uplift the arts as viable forces for change and practical tools for enlightened world-making!

Finally, this study, familiarizes art educators with Africentricity, and ways to apply optimal theory for self-knowledge and to rid the world of racism. Agyei Akoto (1994), a curriculum specialist, argues that events such as the Atlantic Slave Trade, white supremacy, colonialism, racism, and more, provide a historical context for accepting Africentrism as a necessary expression of people who seek the truthful reconstitution of Black, African and the African Diaspora narratives.

Theoretically and practically, this study finds it is imperative to locate Africans within all phenomena. It is also vitally important to recognize that from its inception, Africentricity “seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness is a trope of ethics. Thus to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classicism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse…and white racial domination” (Asante, 1990, p. 2). Therefore, it is important that art learners understand that when the Women’s art movement bought attention to gender issues; the Black Arts Movement was well underway and Black or African American artists had already been effectively putting the visual domain in service to struggle. Clearly, the two art movements emerged out of a similar need to liberate its
constituency from oppression be it race, gender and/or class. *Black Art* preceded feminist art by a few good years. It is necessary to repeat this simple fact because art texts do not.

The personal actions required for collective transperformative work are grounded in the process and methods identified by Linda James Myers (1993) as part of the self-corrective behavioral theory, “Belief Systems Analysis” or BSA (pp. 75-86). BSA methods are designed to introduce individuals to an optimal conceptual system—a system which will help to eliminate the need to see the art and visual culture by and about African peoples as “alternative visions” (Pohl, 2002, p. 408). To transfer the lessons about race into art education course work, a reasoning process known as *reCognizing* is recommended.

In addition, as conceptualized by Jacqueline Chanda and Vesta A. H. Daniel in 2000, the cognitive acts linked to *reCognizing* can help art learners to critically re-examine what is known from the perspectives of marginalized centers of knowledge in order to gain a broader view of the historical and cultural genesis of images and icons, and link the present to the past to envision a more perfect future (p. 8). It is anticipated that by using race as qualifier to *reCognize* art meaning where race is presented as a pivotal historical and cultural marker for establishing difference, art teachers can encourage students to deconstruct problems of race in different ways. Standpoint theory supports what Harding calls strong subjectivity, or the notion that the perspectives of marginalized individuals can help to create more objective accounts of the world.

While there are multiple ways to perform reflective thinking and reflective teaching, Linda Myers’ theory of Belief Systems Analysis (BSA) provides the more suitable and reproducible conceptual system for this project. Supported by Optimal
Theory and BSA, race reflection can be a viable strategy to uncover inconspicuous beliefs, perceptions, and experiences, specifically as related to race (Milner, 2003). BSA provides substance and direction to race reflection.

Although this Western approach to the history of art education seems impervious, its deep structure must be dismantled in order for multiculturalism to succeed and for the nature of this Western framework perpetuates is that it precludes the historicizing of art and or art education within the context of Western art and art education. Room must be made to insert the history and cultural contexts and the art and visual culture of Black Art into the story of Western art history as well as into the African American art historical narrative.

The trail of Art Education’s history travels across the strident landscape of the oppression and exploitation of Black people. In spite of these horrific events, there is substantial evidence that Black people showed excellent artistic skill producing art forms that re-occur over centuries, thus indicating that successful systems of training and skills transference existed. These craftsmen and craftswomen were labeled “primitive” by European explorers in the 15th centuries and persist today (Driskell 1976: 11).

Imagine if, when I was a child several decades ago, all the images I saw at my school where by black artists and/or about black people in heroic situations.

Imagine if all the pictures of my childhood were about Black victors and not Black victims.

Imagine if my environment reflected the wealth of black love that encircled me in my home and in my neighborhood.

Imagine if the world we make is truly free of racism.
Black Art imagined this world and inspired us all to do all that we can in any way that we can to make our community more beautiful and beneficial than we found it!

Future work will move this study forward to make Black Art more accessible to art educators and their students. The next phase is to refine this research to make it more easily convertible for instructional use in the areas of contemporary art as “difficult art” and to delineate best practices for conducting race reflective instruction and learning to optimize teaching and learning through self-knowledge for healthier world making.
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