

“What You See is What You Get...But That Ain’t What We Want:
Decolonizing African American Protest and Identity Politics through Popular Culture.”

by
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I dedicate this research to all the Black Girl Nerds.

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ABSTRACT

The way in which the public remembers Black Power, is often presented through the lens of a dominate historical narrative which separates it from the Black Freedom Struggle. It creates a dichotomy between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement that need not exist. This narrative erases the thoughts and ideas that the Black community had about Black Power and the place that Black Power holds within the Black Freedom Struggle.

Focusing on the Black Freedom Struggle this research will examine how African Americans have historically defined and redefined Blackness, through cultural productions centered on the Black Freedom Struggle and the Black community. Moreover, this project will explore how these forms of material culture can be used in public history and traditional history to create more authentic and complete historical narratives that are often forgotten.

Public historians seek to engage broad audiences with public interpretation. Yet until public history professionals understand that they are working within a larger cultural environment that is grounded in the belief that African Americans—and other historically marginalized groups—can be ignored, they will struggle to create strategies and programs that engage those audiences. Within the practice, there is a lack of focus on the cultural production of marginalized groups, which erases these groups from historical and cultural narratives. Popular culture productions, film theory, and literature, television, and graphic novels in other words are valuable sources for public historians. They are potentially powerful when historians examine how they function as teaching tools and memory keepers when oppressive historical and cultural narratives are being created.

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Chapter I

History Memory, Identity, and Politics in Popular Culture.

In 1993, the Fox network premiered its hit sitcom *Living Single*; a year later in 1994, the NBC network debuted *Friends*. Both shows featured a core cast of young adults, and followed the relationships, professional lives, and exploits of a core group of friends as they went about their daily lives in New York City. The difference was that while one focused on African-American womanhood and ideas of inclusion in a multi-ethnic New York, the other never ventured out of its cocoon of white feminist ideals or addressed social broader messages or realities. While *Friends* focuses on a cohort of three white women and three white men, *Living Single* attempted to create a space to represent the experiences of African-American women going about their daily lives. Created by produced and helmed by African-American men and women, *Living Single* offers an alternative perspective on the American experience that *Friends* lacks.

Even before the golden age of Black representation on television during the 1990s and early 2000s Black Americans were creating various types of culture productions that focused on various aspects of the Black Freedom Struggle. What I mean by the Black Freedom Struggle is the various ways in which Black Americans have sought and fought to claim power, identity, and self-determination. The term Black Power fits within the Black Freedom Struggle because the term itself is fluid. Thus, Black Power can apply to various moments of the Black Freedom Struggle from the Civil War with Black enlistment, to Reconstruction, the early 1900s with

Black Women's Club Movement, or Black participation on the front and at home during World War I and World War II.

The absence of multiple ethnic perspectives in mainstream popular culture leads to the erasure in the narrative Black Freedom Struggle in the historical narrative. In particular the way in which the public remembers, particular moments within the Black Freedom struggle such as the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement should be reexamined. As a fluid concept within the Black Freedom Struggle the Black Power Movement and the term Black Power has been a part of the Black Freedom Struggle since enslavement. However it was not until Stokely Carmichael began to popularize the term in the late 1960s that white fears and the media began to demonize the term and its tactics. Doing so has Black Power from the overall Black Freedom Struggle and created a narrative of violence, and separation around Black Power.

Challenging this narrative, this research will analyze cultural productions that have either African Americans at the helm of production or that focus on African Americans as a means of integrating the Black Freedom Struggle into the historical narrative and wider public memory. I look at cinematic features such as *Glory* and *Red Tails*, comics *Tuskegee Heirs*, and science fiction graphic novels, public access television, and Johnson Publishing company to explore the evolving concept of Black Power among African American audiences and the white reaction to Black Power.

Although the dominant historical narrative has been created within the halls of academia and filtered through lesson plans, textbooks, and lectures almost exclusively produced by white men until recent decades, this narrative has been reinforced, challenged, and rewritten within the landscape of material culture as well. Historical memory, experience, and identity are each embedded in material culture as a way of remembering the past and celebrating certain historical

narratives. As such, popular culture also facilitates the erasure of privileged historical narratives while perpetuating and reinforcing myths and stereotypes about nonwhite identity.

Material culture includes, songs, books, furniture, architecture and even the oral histories and stories shared by a community. It is both tangible and non-tangible and therefore opens doors for scholars to look at various aspects of a community that are often times lost when looking at archival evidence. In that respect Black culture production such as magazines, public access television, and graphic novels that center on the Black Freedom Struggle are forms of material culture. This form of material culture also serves to preserve and recreate historical memory. Embedded in these cultural productions of movies, television, music, literature, graphic novels, and comic books are representations of events and experiences that should be further explored in both realms of public history and traditional history and used as teaching tools in both in the academic and public realms.

The weaving of memory, history, and popular culture can create what Alison Landsberg terms “prosthetic memory.”¹ Arguing that public awareness of history has become mediated by technology and popular culture, Landsberg concludes that the public often create false memories. She theorizes that the consumption of the historical narrative through movies, television, novels, radio, and other forms of material culture have endowed consumers with the belief they have experienced historical narratives without having the experience, what she calls “prosthetic” memories. My research will work from Landsberg's analysis and argue that many of these “prosthetic” historical narratives are produced with the intention of giving political and cultural

¹ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press 2004.);Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

authority to the dominant white culture, whose hegemony in turn suppresses minority groups in cultural, social and economic ways.

The use of popular culture as a means to reinforce white dominated historical narratives is not new. One of the best examples of the twentieth century would be D.W. Griffiths' *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Adapted from Thomas Dixon Jr. *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) and *The Leopards Spots and the Traitor* the movie as well as the books confirmed white fears of Blackness, and reinforced racial bigotry and violence under the guise of historical fact. Through literature and the popular medium of film, the white audience found confirmation of their fears of Blackness and the Black community claiming power during and after Reconstruction.

The release of D.W Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, demonized former slaves and made Confederates and Klansmen heroes of the Reconstruction-era South. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People protested because members knew the film reflected racist Southern heritage myths that were contrary to the real lived experiences of African Americans.² White audiences and film critics, by contrast, show how creating false narratives in popular culture can reinforce inaccurate and racist histories. Writing to the *Lima News* on December 19, 1915, Paul R. Bish wrote, "The Birth of a Nation I thought I was alright. It gives a person of the present day the conditions of that day, that cannot be learned from reading in a lifetime. It was an education, nothing immoral."³ Bush's endorsement is merely of

² Library of Congress, National Association For the Advancement of Colored People Campaign Against " Birth of a Nation ":Papers of the NAACP, Part 11: Special Subject Files, 1912-1939, Series A : Africa through Garvey, Marcus Group I, Series C, Administrative File, 001421-033-0143 Subject File Copyright 2014, NAACP Nov 01, 1915 - Nov 30, 1915

³ Library of Congress, National Association For the Advancement of Colored People Campaign Against " Birth of a Nation ":Papers of the NAACP, Part 11: Special Subject Files, 1912-1939, Series A : Africa through Garvey, Marcus

how false narratives expand into “truth” once a wide audience accepts the slanted cultural production as historical experience. These narratives become engrained in the viewer's mind, mixing with memory and creating false narratives.

The use of popular culture, and cultural production as a means of creating a dominant narrative that confirmed racial stereotypes and erased aspects of the Black Freedom struggle was prevalent during the twentieth century. Movies such as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Jazz Singer*, reinforced racial narratives of, the mammy, or sambo, while war movies and literature such as *To Hell and Back* (1955) *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* effectively erase the contributions of African Americans in the popular culture war narrative.

This research serves as a means to consider how Black popular culture productions are forms of material culture and how it reflects how the public remembers history. The essential research questions are: (1) How do public history scholars effectively investigate popular culture as material culture? (2) How have African Americans and other minority groups used popular cultural productions to create counter-narratives that oppose the dominant narratives that reinforce hegemonic white cultural and historical narratives? (3) How have these cultural productions challenged stereotypical tropes while providing space to define identity, memory, and history? and, (4) How can forms of popular culture and cultural production be used to reinsert the minority narrative and as teaching tools?

Public historians seek to engage broad audiences with public interpretation. Yet until public history professionals understand that they are working within a larger cultural

Group I, Series C, Administrative File, Paul R. Bush “Letters Show Unity of Opinion on “ Birth of a Nation” *The Lima News Lima* Ohio December 19, 1915.

environment that is grounded in the belief that African Americans—and other historically marginalized groups—can be ignored, they will struggle to create strategies and programs that engage those audiences. Within the practice, there is a lack of focus on the cultural production of marginalized groups, which erases these groups from historical and cultural narratives. Popular culture productions, film theory, and literature, in other words, are valuable sources for public historians. They are potentially powerful when historians examine how they function as teaching tools and memory keepers when oppressive historical and cultural narratives are being created. In this research I use each chapter to explore how a certain popular cultural production serves as primary source of evidence. This approach reflects various currents in scholarly literature that examines the interplay between history and memory making.

Of particular value to my work is Jerome De Groot's *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (2004). Jerome De Groot examines how history is imbedded and also reflects the present's view of the past through various forms of cultural production including movies, television, and literature. He treats the products in all three areas as a curator treats a chair as material culture evidence. Groot's examination is useful in that it demonstrates how when history and popular culture mix, they create different forms of truth and thus change the visitor experience in museums and historical sites.⁴

Although this work will also examine cultural productions of a different sort from those of De Groot it will not place the “historian,” the professional, as the sole guardian of historical truth.⁵ Instead, this research will take minority cultural productions and explore how the creators of the works challenged and inserted themselves into the historical master narrative to create

⁴ Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge 2009).

⁵ *Ibid.*,30

more truthful and whole accounts of historical events, periods, and movements. Groot's argument that history sometimes finds its way into the present is correct. By examining Black cultural productions such as magazines, newspapers, and television shows this work aims to push this theory by examining how cultural productions centered around pivotal moments, such as the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders visualized historical narratives.

A classic work that influenced my approach is George Lipsitz's *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* especially where he examines how the relationship between historical memory and popular culture inform each other. Presented in a series of essays on television, novels, film, and rock n' roll, Lipsitz looks at popular culture, and argues that it offered Americans hope, recovery, and even resistance during the postwar era. Lipsitz's argues that Cultural products generally reflect the dominant ideology of any given period and that this ideology triumphed on television in the 1950s just as it did in political and social life. I have adopted his argument into a loose way.⁶ On the one hand, I agree with Lipsitz that a dominant political and social ideology shaped cultural productions and yielded historical narratives that excluded minority cultures. Yet these same groups used cultural productions as a means of resistance to reinsert their experiences and stories into both popular culture and the American historical narrative.

A third foundational study is Alison Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. I build on her argument about mass culture as a means to create and carry history and memory by specifically focusing on African American and minority cultural production and representation. Landsberg's question:

⁶ George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press 1990).

“To what extent do modern technologies of mass culture, such as film with their ability to transport individuals through time and space, function as technologies of memory?”⁷ – Is central to my narrative.

This research will add to scholarship on the creation and use of history and public memory in the public history context by examining the relationship between the consumer and cultural products and analyze how cultural production has influenced and been influenced by social and political trends. This research will build on the methodologies of material cultural practitioners and use twentieth century cultural productions to look at forms of memory, identity, and resistance For instance Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, (2011) used toys, popular literature, and advertisements to examine how material culture reinforced racial ideologies. Bernstein understood that while cultural productions like children’s toys and books granted white children innocence and a place of value within American society, these same cultural productions denied Black children freedom and innocence.⁸

Using various forms of material culture to infuse popular culture to explore the Black experience Micki McElya’s *Clinging to Mammy The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, (2007) explores the popular image of the Black “Mammy” to examine the historical and cultural implications of white America's dependency on this stereotyped image of Black womanhood. McElya examines the “Mammy” image and material culture, from Aunt Jemima to

⁷ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia University Press, 2004.)

⁸ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

a range of other consumer goods, to look at the history of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras in America.⁹

Similarly, through examples of material culture that use the image of the “mammy” slave, M.M. Manring’s *Slave in a Box: Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (1998) examines how the image has become intertwined with American historical memory and argues that the mammy myth has continued to affect perceptions of Black and white sexuality, gender roles, and class constructions¹⁰. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders’ *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (2009) also falls within this historiography of using material culture to explore identity and politics. Wallace-Sanders chronicles the use of the “mammy” figure in popular material culture between 1820-1935. Each of these scholars’ explorations of the mammy figure and the related stereotype of the loving, caring, strong black woman fits within the historiography of memory and identity as each study looks at how the image is memorialized through material culture, reinforcing the image of the mammy, and creating an imaginative memory that is compounded and reinforced through consumer goods, literature, music, and movies. I hope to treat cultural productions as primary source artifacts to get a similar perspective.¹¹

The use of space and material culture to explore historical trends and issues of identity and resistance has been used best in recent years by traditional historians looking at popular culture such as music and recreational amusement. Of particular value is Shelly Streeby’s *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and Production of Popular Culture* (2002); Yvonne Sims’ *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular*

⁹ Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ M.M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*,(The University Press of Virginia, 1998)

¹¹ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

Culture (2015); Victoria Wolcott's *Race Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (2014); and Matthew Delmont's *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia*, (2012). Each of these scholars has taken popular and material culture and space from each historical era and used it to examine political and social trends. They have also used material culture as a framework to examine race, space, class, gender, and culture.¹²

For instance Wolcott and Delmont use the physical material landscapes of segregated spaces and popular culture to examine the role of youth, the Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the language of gender and racial ideology during the 1950s and 1960s. Using the space of amusement parks, swimming pools, and skating rinks, Wolcott's study examines both northern segregation and youth resistance during this period, explaining that these spaces were a part of the American youth popular culture landscape. The concept of leisure and the popularity of these spaces became a part of American identity. In the same vein, Matthew Delmont uses music and popular culture to explore race, housing history, and segregation and resistance.¹³

Focusing on television and movies, Christine Acham's *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (2005), and Yvonne D. Sims' *Women of Blaxploitation* use

¹² This literature uses material culture and cultural production as a form of material culture evidence to examine American political and cultural trends: Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Yvonne Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (North Carolina: McFarland 2015); Victoria Wolcott, *Race Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Matthew Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

¹³ Victoria Wolcott, *Race Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Matthew Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

popular culture to examine African American identity, resistance, memory, and culture.

Although Acham's use of television programs as a primary resource is not new, her approach and thesis offer a new lens through which to view the Black Power Movement, Black uplift, and Black identity. Using television shows such as *Black Journal*(1968-), *Soul Train* (1921-2006), *The Flip Wilson Show* (1970-1974) and *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), Acham adds depth to the historiography by demonstrating how the struggle for Civil Rights was reflected in mass media. Acham and Sims, by looking at the early years of blaxploitation as resistance, insert a new narrative of resistance into Black Freedom Struggle narrative.¹⁴

Ellen C. Scoots' *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in Classical Hollywood Era* (2015) adds to the scholarship on popular culture as resistance by examining classic Hollywood and its relationship to Civil Rights. Scoots explores the absence of African Americans in film by looking into production decisions that led to the lack of black faces. Scoots also looks at how the pushback on this lack of representation was a form of resistance and struggle for Civil Rights and identity creation in the African-American Hollywood community. Similar to Donald Bogles' *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood*, (2009), Scoots' work serves as a history of the lives and careers of Black Americans in the Los Angeles entertainment industries. Though Bogles looks more deeply at the cultural and physical landscape of Black Hollywood, both scholars weave in the story of the Civil Rights Movement and the construction of historical memory into their narratives. They each also shine a light on how African American involvement in cultural production served as a form of resistance at that

¹⁴ Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

time and created a vehicle of expression and representation for the African American community.¹⁵

Christopher Sieving's *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema From the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation* (2011), and Rickey Vincent's *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panther's Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music* (2013), are two additional paired studies that sharpen my research focus. Sieving's work is a major study at the center of this dissertation because he focuses on a pivotal period of the Civil Rights Movement through the lens of cinema that looks at African-American identity and resistance before the rise of Blaxploitation, by specifically examining African-American-themed commercial cinema in the late 1960s. Much like Donald Bogles' work, this narrative also serves as an industrial history that seeks to explain how social issues and views influenced the production and reception of black-oriented cinema.¹⁶

Rickey Vincent's *Party Music* (2013) is an invaluable examination of how African Americans used popular culture as a form of resistance and identity creation. Vincent's study is important to my work and the larger historiography because it utilizes a relatively unknown source to discuss Black Power and resistance. Vincent's work focuses on the Black Panther Party Band to create a historical narrative about space, place, and the creation of cultural production.

¹⁵ Ellen C. Scoot, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in Classical Hollywood Era*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Donald Bogle, *Bright Boulevards, Bold Dreams: The Story of Black Hollywood* (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2009).

¹⁶ Christopher Sieving, *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema From the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

Furthermore, Vincent bridges material culture and archival resources to create an alternative perspective of Black Power.¹⁷

Studies such as W. Fitzhugh Brundage's *Beyond Black Face: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930* (2011) brought a decade of scholarship to the attention of scholars. Brundage explored African-American identity and resistance through popular culture. These studies examine how popular culture was used to define African-American identity, but also how African Americans used it to fight against oppressive representations and more accurately represent their lived experience. However, within the scholarship, there is still more to be said about the use of popular culture as resistance and as a means of creating historical narrative and community. What seems to be missing from the scholarship is how African Americans use popular culture to rewrite historical narratives. Although the historiography includes the examination of identity, it fails to address the broader political implications of these cultural productions; this study, therefore, aims to add to the scholarship by showing how, through various decades, African Americans have used cultural production as a form of resistance and truth-telling.¹⁸

My research adds to these discussions on the use of media in the fight against racial oppression. This dissertation, however, will push past the classical Hollywood era and explore the post-Civil Rights Movement narrative and look at how cultural productions made by or centered on African Americans were used to create new narratives of history and memory. Additionally, this research broadens the public history focus by looking at these cultural

¹⁷ Rickey Vincent, *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panther's Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press 2013).

¹⁸ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Beyond Black Face: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 2011).

productions as forms of resistance, as spaces to construct identity, and as spaces of cultural experience and conversation.

The use of popular cultural production as a primary source and as a means to explore African-American identity and experience in the United States has found various outlets in the past decade. Allyson Nadia Field's *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (2015) inform this line of study by placing the early African-American cinema within the spectrum of Progressive Era politics. Doing so allows Field to view African-American political and social movements in response to the Progressive Era through the lens of the early twentieth-century genre known as "race films."¹⁹

Although the historiography is broad in approach and methodology, most of it focuses on minstrelsy and stereotypically negative representations of the Black image in media, or the creation of Black popular culture in late 1980s and 1990s in television. Much of the historiography on popular images of Black Americans and other minorities highlights film, television, and animation. Scholars from historical, cultural, and sociological perspectives have analyzed the African-American image in popular culture. Touching on different aspects of the Black image, these studies have examined film, television, print media, and music.²⁰

¹⁹ Allyson Nadia Field, *Uplift Cinema: The Emergence of African American Film and the Possibility of Black Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press 2015).

²⁰ Carol E. Henderson, *Imagining the Black Female Body* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2011); Janis Faye Hutchinson, *Cultural Portrayals of African Americans*, (New York: JF Bergin & Garvey, 1997); Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black Presentation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2009); T. Denean Sharpley, *Whitening Black Venus: Sexualized Savages Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999); Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women 1920-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2007).

Scholarship on pathologically negative stereotypes and images about African Americans is varied.²¹ Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness: African American Image in Film* explores the medium of a film as a means to change human perception and understanding. Guerrero finds, however, that power and racism often became part of the visual medium. For Black people, this meant Hollywood would represent them as "one grand, multifaceted illusion."²² While Guerrero argues that Hollywood often marginalizes Blackness, he asserts that films are also sites for challenging negative tropes, and wherein African Americans can fight to define their cultural and political identity.

These scholars understand the past derogatory images and tropes of African Americans not only shaped the creation of African American identity, but also the construction of white American identity. Thus, their work examines the relationship between these derogatory images and American politics, culture, and society. One of the most well-researched topics in this area is that of the minstrel and colored cartoons in American popular culture. With characters dressed in blackface, wearing white gloves, and depicted with bulging white eyes, white teeth, and red lips, these performances entertained the masses while simultaneously justifying racism.²³ These studies examine the act and performance of minstrelsy among both black and white performers

²¹ Scholars who examine pathologically negative stereotypes and images about African Americans: Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & The American Working Class* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013); Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²² Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

²³ John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult, and Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: TarcherPerigee 2007); Annemarie Bean, *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (New England: Wesleyan 1996); Yuval Taylor and Jack Austen, *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy From Slavery to Hip-Hop* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012); Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Last "Darky": Bert Williams, Black-on-Black Minstrelsy and the African Diaspora*, (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005).

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Eric Lott examines of how blackface performance created and attempted to maintain social boundaries between black and white people. Using minstrel music, lyrics, jokes, skits, and illustrations, Lott analyzes racial ideologies and argues that the creation of blackface minstrelsy was two-fold; it was a way to create and maintain a sense of racial hierarchy, but underneath, it was an examination of sex, gender, and the nation's racial caste system.²⁴

The study of Black cinema and television began more than four decades ago. The first wave of major studies of black-themed cinema were produced by leading critics and scholars and in the field and served as critical analyses and responses to the black cinema of the twentieth century. These foundational studies focused on identity and the history of Black involvement in the film industry. These studies examine the relationship between Black Hollywood performers and the roles they played in the creation and representation of Black identity through film. The former traces the NAACP's relationship with Hollywood and its efforts to fight negative racial tropes, such as the organization's protest against the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. Thomas Cripps' analysis examines the survival of Black performers in Hollywood, the growth of Black protest against Hollywood racism, the underground movement to create independent Black films, and the movement to make the art of film speak truthfully about the realities of the American racial system.²⁵

²⁴The scholarship on blackface, minstrelsy, and other racial stereotypes has extended beyond just stage performance to explore other media as well, including film and television. Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* explains the historical relationship between early animated cartoons and blackface. Like Christopher Lehman, Sammond argues that early cartoons were an extension of blackface minstrelsy and these problematic depictions of African Americans continued to evolve in this new medium Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation*, (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015).

²⁵For more on Black images in film, see: Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press 1977); Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood*

This first generation of studies often did not look at commercial Black-themed films, and like Daniel Leab, viewed many of these films as inadequate and offensive. Christopher Sieving argues that scholars largely ignored commercial Black-themed films until the emergence of second and third wave studies of television and film such as Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness*, Mark A. Reid's *Redefining Black Film*, and Manthia Diawara's anthology *Black American Cinema*. These scholars reclaimed black film and looked at the success of black filmmakers such as John Singleton and Spike Lee.²⁶

Scholars who tend to move away from classic Hollywood and focus on B-movie genres and the Blaxploitation era have pushed the study of the Black image in popular culture forward to consider aspects of Black Power. Stephane Dunn's "*Baad Bitches*" and *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power and Action Films* and Yvonne D. Sims' *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Hero Changed American Popular Culture* examine the cultural and psychological aspects of Blaxploitation films of the 1970s. In particular, Dunn explores Black women's representation in and response to films such as *Coffy*, (1973) *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Cleopatra Jones* (1973). Dunn explores contemporary products of popular culture such as hip-hop rap and fashion to analyze how a younger generation views characters of Blaxploitation films. Stephane Dunn does

Message Movie from World War II (New York: Oxford University Press 1993); Daniel J. Leab, *From Sambo to Superspade: The Black experience in Motion Pictures*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1976); James P. Murray, *To Find an Image: Black Films from Uncle Tom to Super Fly*. (Bobbs-Merrill, 1973); Edward Mapp, *Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday*, (United Kingdom: Scarecrow Press. 1972).

²⁶ Second and Third Generation Black Film Theory and Studies: Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black film*. (Berkley: University of California Press 1993); *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2005); Manthia Diawara (editor), *Black American Cinema* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1993); Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the idea of Black Film* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press 2016); Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Sydney: Accessible Publishing Systems 2010). Ellen C. Scott, *Cinema Civil Rights: Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, 5th edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

not deny that white producers with white Hollywood money made these movies. Therefore, both black male and female bodies were often oversexualized and imbued with racial stereotypes. While the merit of these movies is highly contested, they meant, and still mean something culturally, to Black viewers.²⁷

Much of the historical scholarship on Black representation in mass media centers on the emergence of television during the Civil Rights Movement. Sasha Torres' *Black, White, and In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* and Aniko Bodroghkozy's *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* look at the impact of television on the Civil Rights Movement. Within this scholarship, Torres uses Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's framework of the "Long Civil Rights Movement" to examine the fight for justice within the context of negative media representation.²⁸

The collection of essays edited by Beretta E. Smith-Shomade in *Watching While Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences* (2013) aims to examine the viewing patterns of Black audiences and provide an in-depth look at why and what attracts Black audiences to television shows. Other studies that look at African American viewing habits and images in television include Smith-Shomades' *Shaded Lives: African American Women* (2002) and *Television and Pimpin' Aint Easy: Selling Black Entertainment Television*, (2007). Both look at

²⁷ For more on Blaxploitation: Novotny Lawrence, *Beyond Blaxploitation Comparative Approaches to Film and Media Series*, (New York: Paw Prints, 2017), Stephane Dunn, "*Baad Bitches*" and *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2008), Josiah Howard, *Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2008), Christopher J. Sieving, *Soul searching: African American Cinema Before Blaxploitation, 1963-1970* (Ann Arbor: UMI 2004), and David Walker, Andrew J. Rausch, and Chris Watson, *Reflections on Blaxploitation: Actors and Directors Speak* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow P., 2009).

²⁸ Black Image in Television: Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, *Watching while Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012). Sasha Torres, *Black, White, and In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Kristal Brent Zook, *Color by Fox: the Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Jacquelyn, Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005), 1-31

the narrative through the lenses of gender and race. *Shaded Lives* examines both the progressive and regressive representations of Black women through various television genres

Kristal Brent Zook's *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, a precursor to *Pimpin Aint Easy*, focuses more on the industrial age of television and how networks like Fox used the urban genre to build a brand by specifically targeting Black audiences with shows like *Martin* and *Living Single*. Similar to Smith-Shomde, *Color by Fox* examines how Fox executives used the lived experience of African Americans and brought in Black writers and directors to try and reflect a Black urban life in New York City to offer cultural reflections and representations of Black life that the Black viewing audience could connect with. These included cultural references to, spaces such as beauty shops, barber shops, interactions with police, and being the only person of color in majority white spaces.

Robin Means Coleman's *Say It Loud! African-American Audiences, Media, and Identity* (2002) explores how race is articulated across various media platforms and how media shapes what others learn and define as "Blackness." A deeper chronology comes from Darnell Hunt's *Channeling Blackness*, which traces Blackness in media over the past 40 years. By the late 2000s, new studies began to emerge that focused on Black representation in television and began to look more at gender, identity and the new American obsession with reality television. However, these studies such as *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, *Television Studies After 2009*, and *The Politics of Reality Television: Global Prospects* move away from Black representation, race, and class and focused on more broader themes in television studies.

Although this dissertation aims to look specifically at African-American images and identity in popular culture, it will at times include discussions of other minorities that operate in

the American landscape.²⁹ This dissertation aims to specifically look at productions that were either solely created by African Americans or where African Americans had a strong presence in the production. It will, however, use cultural productions by non-African Americans as a comparison for understanding how African Americans used popular culture as a form of resistance and as a means for producing corrective media representation.

What is true for twentieth-century movies and television is also the reality in other genres, including early print media, science fiction, fantasy, action adventure, and the sub-genre of Blaxploitation. My research will ask questions of gender, identity, and language in these other realms as well as the more studied area of film, television, and music. The major contribution of this dissertation is that it aims to look at how Black people have historically defined and redefined Blackness, and how they have uses popular culture and the media to tell their particular stories. Moreover, this project will explore how these primary sources can be used in public history and traditional history to create more authentic and complete historical narratives that are often forgotten.

Chapters two through four examine how African Americans used various cultural productions to create community and identity, and thereby develop counter-narratives to negative stereotypes by defining on their own terms what “Black Power” and Black revolution meant. Public historians can use various forms of material culture to create new historical narratives that help us understand and interpret the Black Power movement. Like Oscar Micheaux and other pioneers of race movies, Black America promoted its agenda through popular culture with varying degrees of success. While some took the helm, writing and producing their own

²⁹Studies such as Darnell M. Hunt, *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in American* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005); Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1995).

television shows, movies, and albums, others starred in controversial roles in more mainstream commercial productions that nevertheless illuminated the Black experience. Focusing on television and print media, these chapters will examine how African Americans created counter-narratives and community through popular culture.

During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the intellectual, political, and social conversations within the African American community centered around questions such as. What happens next? What is the fate of the Black community? These were just a few questions that these cultural productions set out to answer during the 1970s and 1980s. One focus of chapters three and four will be to look at these cultural productions to see how they can be used as teaching tools to examine the traditional post-Civil Rights Movement narrative and assert that the Black freedom struggle had not ended in 1965, but rather had continued to shine light on other issues such as the economy, education, cultural identity, and the judicial system.

Chapter five will examine genres of Afro-futurism, science fiction, and fantasy to identify new forms of popular culture that shape Black historical narratives, experiences, and the future. This chapter will seek to examine what Afrofuturism is and how the genre, along with the cultural productions that developed out of it, can be used as tools in classrooms and museums to examine historical memory and the Black experience. This chapter will explore how comic books and graphic novels serve as memory keepers and creators of counter-narratives that reinsert marginalized stories into the historical narrative. This section seeks to examine how writers have used the comic genre and the creation of the superhero as subversive measures to challenge the dominant narrative and create space for dialogue about race in power in America.

The conclusion will conclude with how popular culture can be used as a teaching tool and in practical application through public history. This section will include plans, one for in-

classroom use and another for museum use, to demonstrate how traditional historians, public historians, and museum educators can use these primary resources to explore African-American history. By examining how African Americans used cultural production to create counter-narratives that opposed leading narratives of white hegemony and oppression, this research will add to the scholarship by demonstrating African American agency when confronting their media depictions

Chapter II

Power to the People: Identity, Power, and Memory Through Cultural Production

“There is great temptation to become shrill about what happened here in July. Today, more than any time is a time for truth.”¹ These are the first words spoken by the NBC correspondent during a special news report covering the 1967 Detroit Riot. In the fall of that year, months after July’s unrest, NBC aired a special news report examining the circumstances that led to the Detroit Riots. The broadcast is significant in that it highlights mainstream organization attempting to examine the issues that lead to the riots. However, because it is through a white gaze, the report failed to truly gain the African American perspective.

The NBC special news report used statistical data and interviews with African American residents to try and calm the fears of White Americans who had little understanding of how or why riots were rocking the American landscape during the Long Hot Summer of 1967. Though this form of media offers a way to remember events from 1967-68, it also offers a way in which to discuss and remember those events as part of the so-called long history of Black violence, of the threat Blacks are to whites, rather than the thornier issues of employment, housing discrimination, policing and urban development.

In the late 1960s, rising frustrations about the country’s failure to deliver on the promises of democracy and equality led to riots in over a hundred cities, including larger urban areas such as Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Newark, and Detroit. Each riot made media headlines

¹ National Broadcasting Channel, Special News Report, “Detroit Riots”, July 1967, National Broadcasting Network, <https://www.NBCUniversal Archives.com>.

and became priorities for investigation by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In December of 1967, the NAACP conducted and compiled a report on the Watts Riots in Los Angeles. Memos, phone calls, and telegrams were sent from the Los Angeles Branch of the NAACP to executive director Roy Wilkins, trying to discover the cause of the riots and why so many were happening across the United States. In a memo, local NAACP leader Leonard H. Carter wrote, “There are numerous government agencies workers in the area, and a number of newly funded programs have been publicized, but life for the impoverished and jobless citizens has not changed since the riots of last year.”²

While the NAACP sought to investigate the riot, national media outlets pushed a different narrative. Stories such as “Detroit Holocaust” from the *Chicago Tribune*, and “Failure of Negro Leaders in Watts Cited by McCone” in the *Los Angeles Times* declared rioters unruly and unappreciative.³ Stating the leading causes of the riots as housing conditions, jobs, and education, these reports still failed to dive deeply into the African American experience and the systemic inequality that led to the demonstrations. Although African American leaders were having conversations among themselves and with the greater public about the underlying causes of the riots, they did not control the historical. The Long Hot Summer of 1967 and other protests during the late 1960s and early 1970s were linked with what would be termed as revolutionary movements, which did not fit within the established narrative of the Civil Rights Movement.

Public memory of the Black Power Movement and other movements from the late 1960s and 1970s can be examined through how the primary sources of popular culture. Understanding

² Library of Congress, Papers of the NAACP, Part 28: Special Subject Files, 1966-1970, Series B: Group IV, Series A, Administrative File, General Office File FOLDER: 009057-006-0403, Memorandum from Leonard H, Carter to Mr. Gloster B. Current, subject South Los Angeles Program, March 18, 1966.

³ “Detroit Holocaust,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1967, Section 1 pg. 4.

these sources help to reinsert, negate, or illuminate certain historical narratives. Within traditional scholarship, public history, and public memory, there is the traditional Civil Rights Movement narrative that places its timeline from 1954 with the decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* to the 1968 Civil Rights Act.⁴ Historian Brian Ward refers to the 1954-1968 timeline as the “master narrative”⁵ of the era, which has shaped how the public remembers not only the Civil Rights Movement, but the twenty years that followed. While the Black Freedom Struggle occurred in different phases, how these phases have been treated by academics and interpreted in material culture has led to the erasure of many historical narratives, including Black Power, the African-American women’s liberation movement, and the pursuit of economic and political power across the United States. This open-ended narrative separates the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, obscuring their shared histories and goals, creating a difference in how they are recalled in American memory.

Reexamining how the public remembers the Black Freedom Struggle requires looking at scholarship that places new theories and frameworks around the Civil Rights Movement and the various movements that followed, including Black Power. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Use of the Past,” and Jeanne Theoharis and Komizi Woodward’s *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* argue that these two movements have been torn apart by popular narratives and used to create false dichotomies between the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. As Timothy Tyson’s *Radio Free Dixie* and Peniel Joseph’s *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights in the*

⁴ Dissenting Opinion of Judge Waites Waring in Harry BRIGGS Jr. National Archives and Records Administration Records of the United States District Court Eastern District of South Carolina Record Group 21 <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brown-v-board>

⁵Brian Ward, *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001),pg 30; Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie* (Chapel: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Black Power Era point out, these movements sprang from the same soil and thus should not be separated. Current historiographical trends have shown that these two movements developed similarities and differences due to forces that required them to adapt to the realities of the American political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes to achieve their goals. Thus, as these realities changed, the Black Freedom Struggle evolved.⁶⁷

Set within the framework of the “Long Civil Rights Movement,” this chapter aims to examine how the public remembers the years following the traditional master narrative of the Civil Rights Movement, by focusing on the ways in which the public consumes and remembers the Black Power Movement, the term “Black Power,” and the condition under which African Americans were living during the 1970s.

The Civil Rights Movement did not end with the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As a part of the Black Freedom Struggle the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power movement are different ideologies that push for the same outcome which is freedom and power within the Black community. Just as racial discrimination did not suddenly end with the signing of this federal legislation, resistance to racism was not over, and activists carried their fight to other areas of American culture and society. As consumers of popular culture and media African Americans saw these cultural productions as a means to express their, experiences ideas and expectations about the Black Freedom Struggle. Christine

⁶ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005); Jeanne Theoharis and Komizi Woodward, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003); Peniel Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights in the Black Power Era* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

⁷ Hassan Jefferies, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press 2010); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

Acham, who wrote *Revolution Televised: Primetime and the Struggle for Black Power*, emphasizes this type of scholarship by analyzing how Black Power, conversations about Black identity, and the continued push for equal rights played out in media and popular culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸

While the motives and means of resistance were changing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so was the space in which these efforts played out. Americans were reeling from the upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement, growing protests over the war in Vietnam, the women's liberation movement, Gay Liberation, and the Black Power movement. Most whites were tired of change. However African Americans inserted their own narratives of history, experience, and identity into the cultural, political, and historical landscape using the cultural tools at hand. Their movies, music, and television programs may have been flawed but they provided spaces for highlighting that experience and providing counter-narratives.

Thus, by the late 1960s, two different conversations were taking place: one, the white narrative was the mainstream; the other the African American cultural narrative was on the outskirts. One such area of cultural production was public access television, which featured a plethora of shows that highlighted the African-American community. Public access television news programs such as *Black Journal/Tony Brown's Journal* (1968-2008), *Black Perspectives on the News* (WHYY Philadelphia 1974-1979), *America's Black Forum* (1987-2003), and *Black Omnibus* (1972-1973) were shows about and for African-American audiences.

Another key area of cultural production was African-American print media. Newspapers, Journals and mass market magazines *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Black World* which had long been important

⁸ Acham, Christine, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2004).

part in the African American community took centerstage as places of conversation and narrative. Programs and magazines provided forums where African Americans could create their own narratives and engage in conversations about the African-American experience. These programs and feature stories from popular magazines are powerful evidence of African American resistance to the notion of a sanitized Civil Rights era that ended with Dr. King's assassination. These same sources reexamined the Black Freedom Struggle, and considered how African Americans viewed themselves their struggle and found new ways to remember this history.

“Some people say we got a lot of malice; some say it's a lot of nerve. But I say we won't quit movin' until we get what we deserve.”⁹ In the winter of 1968, James Brown issued a soulful funk-infused proclamation that called for the African-American community to embrace and construct its own political and cultural identity. Looking at various public history timelines presented at museums and historical sites the Civil Rights Movement would seem to have ended in the mid-to-late 1960s, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which were indeed pivotal moments in the struggle for Civil Rights. However, looking at the deeper systematic, oppressive policies in the United States was the next step that the dominant culture refused to take instead declaring that the Black Freedom Struggle was over.

From the late 1960s and into the 1970s, riots rocked the American landscape. These street actions were the most direct way to pose a different narrative around oppression. African Americans still felt trapped and frustrated by a system that did not have their best interest at heart

⁹ James Brown, “Say It Loud I’m Black and I’m Proud,” *A Soulful Christmas*, 1968 King Records 7” 1968.

despite the passage of federal legislation in the 1960s, African Americans across the country were still subject to a systematically repressive system that stretched its tentacles into every realm of their lives. Police harassment, judicial injustice, failing schools, and being shut out economically were just a few of the issues that African Americans dealt with on a continual basis. Taking action to the streets made these issues unavoidable for the larger American public.

From 1965-1968, more than 159 protest street actions termed riots by nervous white public happened across the nation including Detroit, Cincinnati, Buffalo, Tampa, New York, Newark, and Rochester. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson tasked the government with creating the Kerner Commission to examine the cause for the violence in the streets. For many members of the community, the answer was simple; lack of resources and access to proper employment, housing, and education, and police brutality were the major causes for upheaval in these cities. The Kerner Commission's findings reflected these realities, stating, "We have visited several cities; we have heard many witnesses; we have sought the counsel of experts across the country. This is our basic conclusion: Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one white – separate and unequal."¹⁰

Developing within this climate, civil rights groups adopted different policies and tactics to address the political, social, and economic oppression of the African-American community. the Black Panther Party, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Black women's organizations, and the United States government developed strategies to address issues facing the African-American community and protest across the United States. While the NAACP called for more positive

¹⁰ Jacob "Jack" Rosenthal Personal Papers, Subject Files, 1961-1999, Kerner Commission, 1968. JRPP-002-009, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

solutions and anti-poverty programs, the Black Panther Party and other grassroots organizations pushed for internal community leadership and African-American self-determination.¹¹ The dominant cultural narrative stigmatized the African American grassroots organizations as divisive, gun mad, and a threat to law and order. Today Americans do not recall the promise, but they do recall phrases such as Black Power, the Black revolution, Black liberation, and the Black Panther Party.

The first step in reexamining these terms and how the public remembers the racial world of the late 1960s and early 1970s is to place them in historical context and view these movements as forms of resistance. In August of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed forward the Economic Opportunity Act as part of his War on Poverty, with the purpose of reducing the poverty rate, strengthening the safety net for the poor and unemployed, and creating educational opportunities. By means of new federal programs such as Creating the Community Action Program Job Corps, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Social Security Act of 1965, which created Medicare and Medicaid, the Johnson administration sought to create the Great Society.¹² Even still, the U.S. government failed to comprehend or address the systemic nature of racial oppression when it came to opportunities in the United States.

In late 1968, , Richard Nixon an emerging coalition of social conservatives on the right, which included many southern white evangelicals who sought stability against what they saw as

¹¹ Library of Congress, Papers of the NAACP Part 28: Special Subject Files, 1966-1970, Series B: Group IV, Series A, Administrative File, General Office File FOLDER: 009057-006-0403 Memorandum from Leonard H. Carter to Mr. Gloster B. Current, subject South Los Angeles Program March, 18,1966.

¹² University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Billy E. (Billy Ebert), The Content of the Economic Opportunity Act. 1964-1966. Black and white short film explaining the Intention of the Economic Opportunity Act, which was passed in 1964. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://library.digitalinc.org/cdm/ref/collection/avmovies/id/27>. (Accessed June 22, 2018.)

threats to their dominance in the social order and a representative voice, elected Richard Nixon as president. In the years to come both created and eagerly consumed skewed images in popular culture and media of various movement groups and organizations that were pushing for civil rights. Although federal laws were passed, racism and oppression still permeated every sector of American life and culture. The necessity for liberation and freedom went beyond the political and forced America to consider oppression in all forms.

However, looking at public memory and the way that this period is remembered, it becomes clear that certain narratives have been privileged, elevated, and preserved, while others have been forgotten or dismissed in the wider public sphere. The “I Have a Dream” speech that Martin Luther King Jr. delivered on that sweltering August day in 1963 has become a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement in public memory. Popular culture has significantly contributed to the raising of certain strategies and leaders of the Black Freedom Struggle while erasing others, facilitating a historical narrative that focuses on great men and pivotal moments, and thereby reinforcing this master narrative to the consuming public.

There is a stark difference in how popular magazines wrote about the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement. While *Life Magazine* wrote approvingly and eloquently about the 1963 March on Washington the magazine showed animosity toward the Black Power Movement. Following a cover page photo of Asa Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, the article “They Come Marching Up Conscience Road” speaks to the morality and dignity of peaceful protest of the Civil Rights Movement. “More significant than the immediate effect the Washington civil rights march would have on the Congress of the U.S., more

remarkable than the spectacle itself, was the Negroes' orderly demonstration of their potential as a moral force," the article stated.¹³

In its 1963 coverage of the March on Washington *Life* magazine was sensitive even laudatory about the protest. Its later 1968 article "Black Power Must Be Defined" reflects a clear lack of understanding on the part of *Life* editors of the goals and principles of the Black Power Movement. Rather than examine the Black Power Movement as a new phase in the Civil Rights Movement, the article defines it as a stumbling block in the quest for civil rights, stating, "The civil rights movement has stumbled badly over a phase that so far has defied every attempt at definition."¹⁴ The article includes a image of a young Black couple dressed in overalls, which reinforced the story: Here were non-threatening ,Blacks meeting while Martin Luther King Jr. politely for rights to be granted to them as citizens. (See Figure 1).

Portraying the Black Power Movement as violent, indignant, and without vision, in contrast to the morally righteous organizations of the late 1950s and early 1960s creates a negative counter narrative that distracts from the vision, and goals of the Black Power Movement. How these two movements were treated within these forms of news media would be repeated within popular culture and thus embedded within larger American social and historical memory.

¹³ "They Come Marching UP Conscience Road," *Life* September 6, 1963, 21.

¹⁴ "Black Power Must Be Defined," *Life*, July 22, 1966, 4.

THEY COME MARCHING UP CONSCIENCE ROAD



Negroes stir up nation in mighty Washington march

Dotted with color like a single giant living thing, the crowd amassed at the memorial to Abraham Lincoln 200,000 strong. Each dot was a person—with a cause the U.S. has come to know very well.

More significant than the immediate effect the Washington civil rights march would have on the Congress of the U.S., more remarkable than the spectacle itself, was the Negroes' orderly demonstration of their potential as a moral force. For all the dissension that has split Negro organizations, the march was an astonishingly well-executed product of leadership. Despite forebodings of violence, it came off without a hitch, in almost beatific calm.

Participants came in from many places. Some had driven down turnpikes from cities of the east in the gathering light of dawn, cheered along the way by Negroes who could not make the trip. Some had come from Mississippi, some had walked from New York City. They said what they had to say with songs. They said it in speeches: "We must destroy the notion that Mrs. Murphy's property rights include the right to humiliate me because of the color of my skin." And when all voices had spoken, Roy Wilkins, head of the N.A.A.C.P., looked at the orderly, eager files and said: "I'm so proud of my people."

NEGRO (OTWIC). Overlaid couple with New York delegation, members of Gordon Great Wood union.

Figure 1. They Come Marching Up Conscience Road *Life*, September 3, 1963

As Aniko Bodroghkozy argues in *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement*, network television coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and race relations in the United States heavily influenced how American citizens and foreign countries viewed these topics. Exploring new treatments of the Selma Voting Rights Campaign, integration riots at the University of Mississippi, and the 1963 March on Washington, Bodroghkozy's analysis demonstrates how popular culture as a form of consumable material culture changed the way in which Americans experienced and thus remembers the Civil Rights Movement. Images of dogs, water hoses, children, and police brutality, intertwined with themes of struggle, dignity, and the rhetoric of Americanism. These images and words became the primary historical memory of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Freedom Struggle in the minds of the American public. This memory is not false, but it is however incomplete.

The late 1960s -1970s also brought with it an economic depression, urban crisis, school bus riots, and failures within the educational system. Numerous factors in the 1970s led to an economic recession, which in turn influenced the reactions of middle and upper-class white Americans to many of the organizations seeking to define and practice the meaning of Black identity, Black Power, and Black autonomy. These efforts were met with firm resistance from conservative factions who found a voice when President Richard Nixon called out to this "silent majority" in his November 3, 1969 speech, requesting solidarity for the Vietnam war effort.¹⁵ A conservative backlash intensified which led to misrepresentations in the media and cultural productions of the minority experience in the United States. Many white Americans felt alienated by the rise of the counterculture and social and political movements that pushed the Black

¹⁵ President Richard Nixon Silent Majority Speech November 3, 1969 C-Span Digital Archives Video Library American History Series <https://www.c-span.org/video/?153819-1/silent-majority-speech>

Freedom Struggle beyond the boundaries of their comfort. Unable to empathize with systemic racism and oppression, these citizens came to view the Black Power movement, feminist movement, and anti-war and anti-poverty movements as counterproductive to the gains made during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. To quell the masses, television, movies, and literature began to idealize these earlier efforts as the correct way to protest.

While movies, literature, and television demonstrate no qualms in addressing other social and cultural aspects of the 1970s, politically and culturally, certain narratives that did not fit within the mainstream of American public memory are forgotten or changed. White opinion leaders and cultural critics lauded movies of the 1970s such as *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) *American Graffiti* (1973), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) for offering cultural commentary on a mostly white generation of youth that felt disconnected from the American Dream. These movies offered a form of escape for white youth who did not connect with their parents and were overcome with fears of economic stagnation, war, and poverty. Though these films offered a scathing view of American society, they did so almost exclusively from a white perspective, effectively memorializing the white experience while ignoring those of African Americans.

Frankly there was a space within popular culture for white American youth to express their discontent and disconnection with the mythical “American Dream,” and for the older white generation to celebrate and reinforce that same myth. But the cultural space allocated for the examination of the Black Freedom Struggle in wider popular cultural production was not as large. Blaxploitation films, even with their stereotypes and limits, ushered in new ways to explore the African-American experience, even if the more commercially successful movies in this genre were written, produced, and directed by white men. *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), for example, created spaces for Black women on screen, but were

set in rundown urban landscapes and characterized by numerous racial stereotypes and oversexualized Black bodies. Though these movies examined, urban issues the white lens that produced them sensationalized these issues and never fully peeled back the intricate layers of the African-American experience. Yet Cleopatra Jones, and Foxy Brown were not the mammy, sapphire, jezebel or angry Black woman of past cinema. Thus, their strength created space for the exploration of Black identity.

Movies such as *Black Like Me* (1964), *Putney Swope* (1969), *The Liberation of L.B. Jones* (1970), *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), *The Spook Who Sat at the Door* (1973), and *Claudine* (1974) are a few movies that appeared during the late 1960s and 1970s that focus on different aspects of Black Power and identity and disillusionment with American ideology. They are vital resources for the public historian in that they insert the Black narrative into the American cultural narrative of the 1970s.

For instance, after the release of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* in 1971, Lerone Bennett Jr. wrote a scathing review of the movie in the September 1971 issue of *Ebony*, declaring the film into white stereotypes and was not revolutionary.¹⁶ In response a reader, Swahili Jones wrote to the magazine disagreeing with Bennett's critique of the movie. The reader argued that the film was not meant to be revolutionary, was not meant to be a reflection afro, dashikis, or any of revolutionary group. He writes "The film is about a nigger, no more no less. Its about a nigger, who made the decision against his indivial safety to aid a brother. And this was done without Malcom X or Stokely preaching the beauty of blackness in his ears or King preaching the love of another in his head." He ends with "He is just a nigger dealing for

¹⁶ Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Emancipation Orgasm: SweetBack In Wonderland" *Ebony* September 1971, 106.

his life, his survival just like all other niggers.”¹⁷ These movies though not seen as revolutionary by some connected to a broader audience because it highlighted their everyday American experience.

These forms of media also began constructing narratives of a post-racial United States where everyone, regardless of color, could achieve the American Dream. Television shows such as *The Jefferson's*, *Julia*, *Sanford & Son*, and *All in the Family* tried to portray a fictional post-racial post-Civil Rights Movement America where systemic racism was overlooked and failure to thrive became a result of Black inferiority or personal failure. Although Archie Bunker was a bigot, he was only one bigot; he was surrounded by people who constantly fought to change his mind on race relations in America because, by the 1970s, racism had ended, and America was one cohesive melting pot. The face of racism was one white man or white woman, maybe even a group, who did not yet understand that their prejudice was morally wrong, not something that was systemic. Thus, American citizens failed to realize that oppression and racism were not individual problems nor rooted in Southern states but deeply embedded within every area of American politics, economy, culture, and society.

¹⁷ Swahili Jones, “Letter to the Editor, SweetBack in Wonderland” *Ebony*, November 1971, 18.



Figure 2. Sweet SweetBacks Baddassss Song Marquee, *Oriental Ebony* September 1971

Various means of popular culture disseminated much of this skewed reality. These sources instead created a fictional reality that focused on oneness and a cohesive Americanism that did not exist. Popular television shows such as *Julia* (1968-1971) depicted a united America where an African-American woman had a stable and respectable job, lived in a mixed-race apartment complex, and was respected by her white neighbors. Julia worked as a nurse, her husband died in the Vietnam war, and she was a single parent who never experienced any issues with race. Although the show featured Diahann Carroll in a non-stereotypical negative role, it failed to touch on some of the realities that Julia and her son Cory would have faced. The message delivered was that the Civil Rights Movement was over, and America was at peace with itself, entering a post-Civil Rights era.¹⁸

A later Diahann Carroll movie *Claudine* (1974) stood in stark contrast with *Julia*. Starring Diahann Carroll, James Earl Jones, and Lawrence Hilton-Jacobs, in major roles. the film depicts a working-class African-American family living in the confines of systematic oppression, racism, and the welfare system in the United States. While *Claudine* does not represent the entirety of the African-American experience, and while *Julia* may indeed represent an idealized cohesive America, they each offer different perspectives on memory, identity, and experience. In contrast to *Julia*, *Claudine* creates a counter-narrative that supports the ideas of scholars who assert that the Black Freedom struggle did not end with the passage of federal legislation in the mid-1960s.

Similar to *All In The Family*, *Claudine* and *Julia* focused on a working class family however the lens in which each views, society, and politics are drastically different. While *Julia* attempted to create a post-Civil Rights America, *Claudine* highlighted the systematic racism

¹⁸ *Julia* September 1968-March 1971, NBC starring Diahann Carroll. The program ran for 86 episodes. Produced by Savannah Productions Inc., Hann Carr Productions Inc, and 20th Century-Fox Television.

within the various sectors of government, All in the Family Archie Bunker on the other hand is a bigoted conservative who represents the last beer bellied dying breath of bigotry.

Every Saturday evening Archie Bunker would appear on CBS to shout, racial, ethnic and religious slurs about “coons” and “spades.” Though Archie Bunker adhered to the adage of American grit, and pulling ones self-up by the bootstrap, he represented the face of bigoted Americans who failed to realize that African Americans and other people of color were not allowed the same advantages given to white Americans. In comparison *Claudine* highlighted how one could adhere to the rules of the system however due to systemic racism the system would never work in Black people’s favor and thus *Claudine* always found herself at square one whenever she attempted to take steps forward.

While *Claudine* does not represent the entirety of the African-American experience, and while *Julia* may indeed represent an idealized cohesive America, they each offer different perspectives on memory, identity, and experience. In contrast to *Julia*, *Claudine* creates a counter-narrative that supports the ideas of scholars who assert that the Black Freedom struggle did not end with the passage of federal legislation in the mid-1960s.

As a form of visual media, *Julia* and *Claudine* serve as proxies for American historical memory, and each offers the consumer a distinct way to view the Black Freedom Struggle and the African American experience after 1965. *Julia* embraces and upholds the traditional “master narrative” by creating a world in which race and socioeconomic issues play no role in her and her son Cory’s daily lives. Julia does not face systematic racism, such as housing discrimination, or employment discrimination. If Julia or her son Cory must deal with racism, it is typically with one individual, most often from the South, who is the last remnant of racism. *Claudine*, however, allows the viewer to peer into the daily life of a single African-American mother who is forced to

work within a systematic racist system to keep her family housed and feed. She does not want to rely on government welfare, yet hiring and equal pay discrimination force her to do so. Like *Julia*, there is no group or person who is racist; however, it is a system that judges her for her reliance on government help yet at the same time denies her access to opportunities that would allow her to leave government assistance.

Although *Julia* and *Claudine* feature the same female lead, they present two unique perspectives on the African-American experience after 1968 and present the audience with different memories of the post-Civil Rights Movement master narrative. While one seeks to close out the Civil Rights Movement by creating a post-racial memory, the other seeks to examine the African-American experience through a bureaucratic governmental system that is failing to live up to its promise of true democracy. Just as *Julia* and *Claudine* can be read as sources for historical memory of this next stage of the Black Freedom Struggle, one can also use other forms of popular culture to examine how the public remembers and understands the Black Power Movement.

Public memory of the Black Power Movement is complex. Within popular culture and created visual material culture, the narratives of reference or fear seem to revolve around the Black Power Movement, which in turn erases the fact that this movement was complex and fluid. In the past twenty years, there has been an effort by both former Black Panther Party members and scholars to produce new narratives of the Black Panther Party and the Black Power Movement.¹⁹ Within popular culture, the image of the Black Panther Party and the terms “Black

¹⁹ Elaine Brown, *Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books 1992); Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012); Bobby Seale, and Stephen Shames, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers*, (New York: H. Harry N. Abrams 2016); Yohuru Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press 2006), Bryan Shih, and Yohuru

Power,” “Black revolution,” and “Black liberation” have either been commodified, demonized, or exalted within public memory.

Although scholarship and documentaries have examined the complexities of the Black Power Movement, many of those nuances are still left out of public historical memory and discourse. Moreover, while these terms were rigidly defined by media and used in various cultural productions between the 1970s and 1990s, it is important to remember that these terms represent a wide range of identity and memory in the African-American community.

Often in public memory, the term Black Power Movement, and Black Liberation are associated with the Black Panther Party and carry negative connotations. Between the federal government’s efforts to undermine these movements through public media, the Black Panther Party was presented as a violent and dangerous organization. Often, when presented in the news, the image of Black Panthers was always of men dressed in black carrying a gun. Portraying the Black Panther Party as a terrorist organization, media outlets used sensationalized headlines like “Black Panthers Story: Violence and Shroud of Secrecy.”²⁰ or “Police Seize Panther Fortress in 4-Hour Gunfight, Arrest 13,” which reported that “The police were doing what they had to do when they surrounded the headquarters Monday with sniper rifles military rifles, shotguns and wearing military-style flack vest.”²¹

In the late 1960s through the 1970s popular media grouped the terms “Black Power” and “Black liberation” to be synonymous with the Black Panther Party. The negative stereotypes

Williams, *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Nation Books 2016) Goran Olsson, *Black Power Mix Tape, 1967-1975* (Chicago: Haymarket, Books 2014), and *Black Panther Party: Vanguard of a Revolution* (2015)

²⁰ Donald B. Thackery, “Black Panthers Story: Violence and a Shroud of Secrecy,” *Detroit Free Press* July 6, 1969. 45.

²¹ Dial Torgerson, “Police Seize Panther Fortress in 4-Hour Gunfight, Arrest 13,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1969, 1-3.

attached to that group became attached to the very notion of African American empowerment. To provide an accurate narrative, public historians should look to Black cultural productions to examine Black Power, identity, memory, within the context of the Black community in the 1970s.

Looking at a wider range of print media as well as Black television news productions and other primary documentation enables the public historian to provide a different perspective on Black Power and interrogate how the public remembers the movement. The most common images that the public has of Black Power in the media are of Olympic medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists on the podium after the 200m race at the 1968 Summer Olympics. Other iconic images include the Black Panther Party members armed outside of the Sacramento State Assembly with headlines that read “Heavily Armed Negro Group Walks into Assembly Chamber.”²²

²² Jerry Rankin, “Heavily Armed Negro Group Walks Into Assembly Chamber,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1967, 3.



Figure 3. Gold medalist, Tommie Smith (center) and bronze medalist John Carlos (right) at 1968 Olympics in Mexico City
Ebony, December 1968

PAUL COATES Prejudice on Road

The American tragedy of prejudice is a story that has come and gone many times. "The Scarlet Hours" is just another episode in this drama. It was once more aware that in the arena history plays a role. Change comes, slowly it appears on the stage marking the course of a nation's fate. The nation will of a Blacker and the social boundaries of the West.

In the Sacramento meeting, Negroes got on the order of a meeting.



He talks much in contrast to the rest of the country. In the past of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., representing the Christian National Alliance, who told the conditions "We had no meeting for a meeting group—the show" he said that more statements in the Bible could be interpreted as anti-Semitic.

He was captured by the James H. Watson who said the greatest danger is "a Communist Bill to be as far as possible."

Apparently, the new writer "never don't" know the scene, because he wrote "apparently" without prejudice in religious groups.

Nazi Party Member
That to have gone on a trip to the East, Dr. Watson was in the American Nazi Party and should be with the other of the Thousandth, a white male about



ARMED PROTESTORS IN CAPITOL—Members of Black Panther Party in Capitol grounds Assembly chamber.

Firm's Secretary Testifies on Fee at Watson's Trial

A private secretary of the U. S. Attorney General testified that she had paid a \$10,000 fee to a woman who had been named in a letter to the U. S. Attorney General. The woman, who had been named in a letter to the U. S. Attorney General, had been named in a letter to the U. S. Attorney General. The woman, who had been named in a letter to the U. S. Attorney General, had been named in a letter to the U. S. Attorney General.

Heavily Armed Negro Group Walks Into Assembly Chamber

BY JIMMY HARRIS
A group of heavily armed Negroes walked into the Assembly Chamber during a debate on the Civil Rights Bill. The group, which was led by a man named [Name], carried rifles and shotguns. They entered the chamber at the time of a debate on the Civil Rights Bill. The group, which was led by a man named [Name], carried rifles and shotguns. They entered the chamber at the time of a debate on the Civil Rights Bill.

Abortion Measure Wins Major Test

Changes That Might Have Killed Bill Defeated by Vote in Senate

BY JERRY COLLINS

SACRAMENTO— Senate passage of a bill to liberalize the state's abortion laws was a major victory Thursday.

The 222 vote, the Senate's final adoption of amendments that the author of the legislation said might have killed it.

The vote was an indication that the liberalized abortion measure probably has enough votes to become law.

The bill would permit abortion in cases of rape or incest or when the mother's health is threatened by the fetus might be born abnormal.

Existing state law permits abortion only when necessary to save a mother's life.

Sen. Anthony C. DeSantis (D-Sacramento) is the author of the amended bill to liberalize the law.

Approved by the Senate, it was approved last Friday on a narrow margin vote in the House.

The liberal amendments introduced by Sen. DeSantis in the House Friday night by the Department of Public Health in state medical reports on abortion performed under the liberalized law.

It alleged, they would have that a, would be sure by the State Finance Commission, which would approve all bills involving a vote in the state.

The Republican administration had asked emergency funding and state capital, but representatives of the House of Representatives would

Supports Revision Offered
DeSantis also introduced a separate measure during the state legislative session in Sacramento, which said he had

BY RAY DENNIS
The Sacramento State

STORM OFF COAST MAY BRING MORE RAIN THURSDAY

A weak storm system off the southern California coast may bring more rain to Los Angeles Thursday.

The Weather Bureau said the chance of rain will be 20% Thursday morning, increasing to 50% Thursday afternoon.

There is a 10% chance of rain in Los Angeles on Thursday, but the 20% chance of rain will be 20% Thursday morning, increasing to 50% Thursday afternoon.

Forecast high temperatures for today range from 65 to 75 degrees in Los Angeles, 60 to 70 degrees in Santa Barbara and 65 to 75 degrees in San Diego.

Temperatures in Los Angeles today range from 65 to 75 degrees, with a low of 45 to 55 degrees.

Forecast high temperatures for today range from 65 to 75 degrees in Los Angeles, 60 to 70 degrees in Santa Barbara and 65 to 75 degrees in San Diego.

Temperatures in Los Angeles today range from 65 to 75 degrees, with a low of 45 to 55 degrees.

Reagan Demands Reforms to Save Medi-Cal Program

BY RAY DENNIS
The Sacramento State

Figure 4. Los Angeles Times May 3, 1967, Article on Black Panther Party

The term Black Power was not new in the late 1960s or 1970s. Black Power has always been intertwined within the Black Freedom Struggle. The term Black Power and the Black Power movement became popularized and demonized in dominate media after Stockley Carmichael called for it during the Meredith March against fear in 1966, the term its tactics and reforms were always a part of the Black Freedom Struggle. However, the dominate narrative through both popular culture and media organizations attempted to demonize the term Black Power, and its tactics. Thus, dominate narrative strove to separate Black Power from the Black Freedom Struggle and demonize it within the historical narrative.

In *Waiting 'till the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* Peniel E. Joseph challenges these assumptions of Black Power and argues that it is not a break from civil rights reforms, but rather a complimentary from of tactics during the Black Freedom Struggle. He argues that it was the natural outgrowth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organizational history.²³ By comparing well known moments of the civil rights narrative with that of lesser known ones Joseph draws a connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power demonstrating their interconnectedness within the Black Freedom Struggle.

The complexity of the Black Power Movement goes beyond just one group or organization. The Black Power Movement did not start with the rise of the California-based Black Panther Party, nor did Black Panther Party ideology encompass the whole philosophy of Black Power. Just one year after the formation of the Black Panther Party, other organizations began to hold conversations about Black Power, and the Black Power Movement.

²³ Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power In America*. (New York: Holt Publishing,2006) 164.

In November 1967, for instance, student activists and leaders gathered at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for a Black Power Forum. While the forum was to be a space for the discussion about Black Power within the African-American community, newspapers and news outlets created a different narrative of rebellion, violence, and Marxism. In an article titled “UNC Irresponsible in Hiring Agitator,” North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Bob Scoot stated that hiring professor Howard Fullman would only bring disorder and violence, specifically pointing to the Black Power Forum that had been held there just a few weeks prior. “I believe it is wrong for a college or university campus to be used as a form of Black Power advocates—where they make such statements as “No Black person should be fighting in Vietnam.”²⁴

While Scoot associated Black Power and the forum with violence, other sources from the forum negated this narrative. *The Black Power Pamphlet* distributed at the forum states that the principles for Black Power were: “Black Power is the establishment of racial pride, identity, purpose, and direction to secure economic, political, social, and cultural power and influence for the Black peoples in America. With the development of potential and positive self-image, the Black man attains self-respect and self-determination.”²⁵ Students created the *Black Power Pamphlet* and distributed it at the forum. The pamphlet stressed that the best way for the Black community to gain power is to create spaces in which the Black community can look out for themselves and combat the overall racism system. Though the whole pamphlet was not printed in mass media, excerpts of it were printed in newspapers and the discussion was carried on by students in the student newspaper the *Carolinian*.

²⁴ “UNC Irresponsible In Hiring Agitator” *Rocky Mount Telegram* November 15, 1967,1.

²⁵ Black power legislation. 1967-11-01. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2757>. (Accessed May 7, 2018.)

On November 17, Cassandra Williams wrote an article for the *Carolinian*, about the Black Power Forum. She noted that “Dr. James Brewer, professor of Afro-American History at North Carolina College in Durham, argues that the assessment of Black Power has been embellished with stereotypes of violence, hoodlums’ looters, etc.” However, these stereotypes were not the whole of the Black Power Movement.²⁶ The Black Power Forum and the *Black Power Pamphlet* highlighted the fact that Black Power was a fluid movement and term and was being discussed in various sections of the Black community.

A later sermon by Rev. Robert Hamill served as an example of how the conversation on Black Power, Black liberation, and Black freedom were discussed in different spaces and through various mediums. In his sermon Hamill talked about the origins of Black Power, explaining that it was not something that started in 1966, nor was it just a second phase of the Black Freedom Struggle. Rather one can see from his sermon that Hamill saw the term Black Power as fluid and encompassing many factors. “Black Power is a serious attempt to build political strength among those denied and voice,” he wrote, “a serious attempt to gain economic ‘security’ for millions who live below any reasonable standard of decency; a serious attempt to create self-pride among people whose self-respect was destroyed by slavery, white supremacy and poverty.”²⁷

How the media, and the government depicted Black Power organizations such as the Black Panther Party shaped wider public perception. In that limited viewpoint the dominant culture viewed the terms “Black Power,” “Black revolution,” and “Black liberation” as

²⁶ Williams, Cassandra, News Analysis: Black Power Forum. 1967-11-10. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2528>. (Accessed May 18, 2018.)

²⁷ Hamill, Robert, “Black power and White Response.” 1970-06. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2604>. (Accessed May 18, 2018.)

synonymous with rebellion, violence, and communism. The African American community saw this differently as demonstrated by various cultural productions. In their viewpoint these terms meant autonomy, community growth, education, protection, economic freedom, and personal pride.

The Black Power Movement wanted to honor, remember, and preserve the Black historical narrative, while pushing for higher educational, economic, and living standards in a country that still refused to live up to its promise of freedom and democracy for all citizens. The following two chapters will examine how public historians and historians can use popular culture to reexamine the meaning of Black Power and Black liberation. The following two chapters will look at print media and television to examine the different conversations that the Black community and the larger public were having about Black Power.

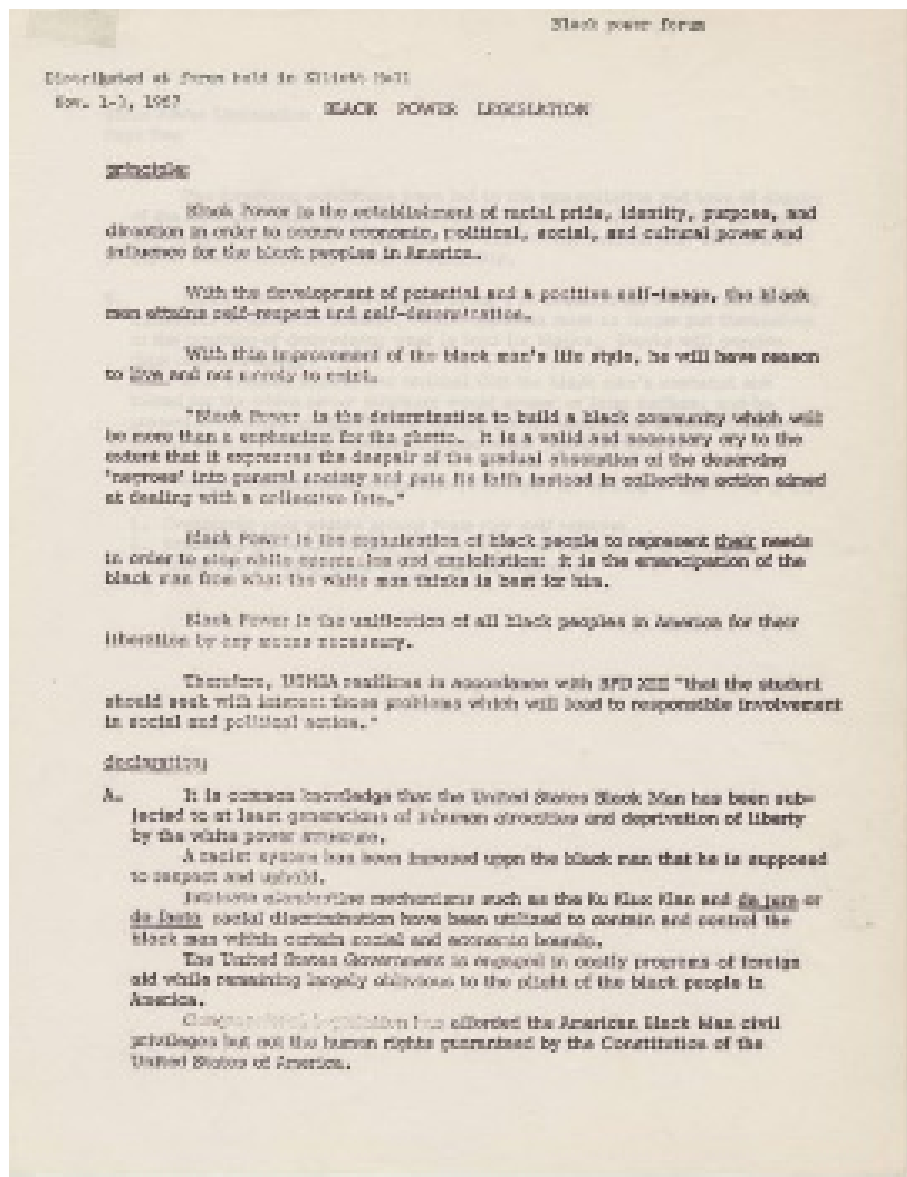


Figure 5. Black Power Legislation Pamphlet, Black Power Forum November 1, 1967

Chapter III

African American Print Media as a source for Historical Memory

Material Culture Landscapes of Conversation: Print Media a Site for Historical Memory

Wanting to produce counter-narratives that would reach large swaths of African Americans, Black writers, musicians, artists, and performers reached out to the public with narratives of resistance. The ways in which news, ideas, and politics were disseminated in the 1970s shifted, giving the African-American public news outlets, including print media and public access television, space to express their frustrations and hopes for the future. These two spaces for cultural production created opportunities for the African-American community at local, regional, and national levels to discuss the state of the Black experience, Black politics, and Black identity in the United States.

By Print media, I am looking particularly at the mass market publications of the mid to late twentieth centuries, where Black-centered concerns took center stage within their pages. During the late 1960s through the 1970s, the Johnson Publishing company had the largest varied readership in magazines. Established in the early 1940s, Johnson Publishing introduced *Ebony* and *Negro Digest* to the Black audience. First produced without a strong political angle, *Ebony* and *Negro Digest*, later titled *Black World*, focused on reimagining African American identity and culture outside of White-helmed publications. Although few would call the early years of *Ebony* radical, by the late 1960s, Johnson Publishing began to focus more on ideas of Black identity, politics, and culture.¹

¹Established by John H. Johnson, Johnson *Publishing Company* was created in 1942 in Chicago. The Johnson Publishing Company produced *Ebony*(1945-) *Jet*, (1951-2014) (*Negro Digest* 1942-1951 1961) renamed *Black*

Cultural production is not just a reflection of political, economic, and social policy, but it informs and helps activists negotiate these policies. Black cultural production creates a space for activism, change, and negotiation that can lead to different forms of power.² Examining the different cultural statements of Black Power is by no means an attempt to tame the Black Power Movement, but rather a means to consider how it can and should be examined through various forms of cultural production. As a site for the creation and preservation of history, identity, and culture, print media created a space for dialogue and exploration for the African-American community. It offered a space in which Black Americans could view themselves from their own perspectives. Although television and cinema were popular forms of cultural consumption, print media was a major form of cultural construction and consumption by the Black American population throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Black print media has a long and distinguished history of taking the United States government to task on its failings and shining a light on the Black experience. It serves as a site for the Black community to construct and preserve historical memory because it challenges the traditional master narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. Including a range of Black experience after 1965, print magazines reflected the dynamics of the Black community and Black grassroots activism. They shined a different light on the organizations and goals of Black political mobilization in the late 1960s and 1970s.

By the late 1960s, Black print media began to produce special issues dedicated to particularly pressing topics facing the African-American community. Housing, education,

World in 1971. Johnson Publishing has been pivotal in shaping African American culture since its first publication in 1945. Through its various productions Johnson Publishing has created a space for Black centered ideas and culture to flourish from 1945 through the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement to the present.

² Iton Richard, "In Search of the Black Fantastic Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

busing, the urban crisis, and the economy were all issues that *Ebony*, *Negro Digest Freedom Ways Journal*, and Black newspapers examined at great length. These special issues, along with articles and letters to the editor, highlighted new narratives about the post-1965 Black Freedom Struggle. These outlets created a space in which African Americans could explore the meaning of Black Power and Black liberation in its various forms and create a nuanced conversation.

The examination of Black Power in *Ebony* began in November 1965 with Lerone Bennett Jr.'s article "Black Power." The ten-page article traced the rise of political power among African Americans during Reconstruction and argued that era had lessons for the New Black Power Movement. He observes "Beginning in 1867; the freedmen assumed the instruments of power by organizing political groups."³ The first edition of *Ebony* to use the term "Black Power," this issue also began to ask its readers what the term meant to them and how the African American community could attain its goals. Although Bennett equated "Black Power" with political power, across many issues from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, the terms "Black Power," "Black revolution," and "Black liberation" came to mean many things to various writers and readers.

In October of 1966, Reverend James Bevel of the SCLC addressed a conference sponsored by the leftist anti-Vietnam war group Students for a Democratic Society. Rev. Bevel discussed non-violence and his philosophy on Black Power, explaining that he adamantly adheres to the philosophy of nonviolence and believed it could create "Black power" by bringing the Black community together to force change at an economic and social level.⁴ Like Bevel, John O. Killens argued in the Symposium on Black Power published in the *Negro Digest* that

³ Lerone Bennett Jr., "Black Power Freedmen Seize Reins of Power in South after passage of 1867 voting Rights Bill" *Ebony*, November 1965, 28-38.

⁴ "James Bevel, on Black power," 1966-10-29, Pacifica Radio Archives, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (WGBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC, accessed June 23, 2018, http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_28-6688g8fs31.

“Black power” lies in the economic and structural power of the Black community to not just make changes for the middle class, but for all Black Americans on every rung of the socioeconomic scale.⁵

The conversation was pushed further in 1966 when Stokely Carmichael was elected head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and began to popularize the term “Black Power” and its philosophy as it pertained to African-American freedom and liberation. That same year, in October, the Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, California. By the end of 1966, the term “Black power” was swirling through the American public, becoming part of the American media rhetoric surrounding the nation’s political climate. Carmichael nor the Black Panther Party were the first to invoke Black Power. As a fluid term Black Power meant various things to different organizations and people within the Black community. It is because of this fluidity that the term Black Power can be applied to movements of the Black Freedom Struggle before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement. It was not until Stokely Carmichael invoked the term that media organizations and whites began to demonize the term and push back against the growth of the Black Freedom Struggle by creating a narrative of violence and hate around Black Power.

Even though Stokely Carmichael and other members of SNCC routinely explained what they meant by Black Power, mainstream media outlets distorted it to mean anarchy and rebellion. To address the public misperception of the term, SNCC in May 1966 went on the local news in Atlanta to discuss the philosophy. Essentially, the group stated that Black Power was about achieving true freedom and democracy by any means necessary. Feeling that the federal

⁵ “Black Power Its Meaning and Measure,” *Negro Digest*, November 16, 1966.

government would not live up to its promises and understanding that power was fluid, the organization understood they might have to push further than the nonviolent accommodationist tactics of their predecessors.⁶

Ebony magazine created its own forum on Black Power in its fall 1966 issue. Published in a special issue, *Ebony* examined “Black power,” not just as a movement, but as a philosophical concept, in a special issue that featured an editorial on Carmichael, “Black Power with Stokely Carmichael Architect of Black Power.” The article opened with a photograph of Carmichael in his black glasses speaking into a microphone. Calling for Black Power at the rally, Stokely Carmichael told the audience that the movement must shift gears. He strongly declared: “No more long prayers he says No more Freedom songs no more dreams let’s go for power.”⁷

The issue then delved into Carmichael’s philosophy and experience and sought to give its readers an understanding of his motives and his definition of “Black Power.” As the editor explained, since Carmichael yelled the words “Black Power” during the Meredith March, the philosophy and the term had become both revered and condemned within the American public. Opening with a descriptive scene of Carmichael driving a Ford microbus down a South Georgia road, the writer detailed how those Carmichael met responded to his call of Black Power with one of their own. He also noted that most did so with slight fear and apprehension, hesitating, to shout words so long forbidden proved difficult to say. But when they did so, it was with pride and resolution.⁸

⁶ Series of WSB-TV news film clips of members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) discussing the “Black Power” philosophy, Atlanta, Georgia, 1966 May 23, wsbn38936, WSB News film collection, reel WSBN0154, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga.

⁷ Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Stokely Carmichael Architect of Black Power,” *Ebony*, September 1966, 25-32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-32.

Throughout the interview, the writer returned to the same essential question: “What is Black Power?” He wanted to rephrase and get a definitive answer from Carmichael, who does not have one simple explanation for Black Power. Instead, Carmichael talked about Black Power in ways that highlighted the fluidity and complexity of the term. Throughout the interview, Carmichael used the term “Black Power” as a call for different actions, explaining that it “is the only way, for Black people to get together and force white power to meet their legitimate needs. It is a way for them to come together to stop oppression by any means necessary; Black Power is a means for the Black poor to get together, define their needs and put people in power to achieve them.”⁹

In response to the interview, *Ebony* received a plethora of letters from the community that expressed both their appreciation and condemnation of the piece and the term Black Power. In a letter titled “Under Architect of Black Power” reader John Edwards wrote: “The term Black Power has become the most controversial issue of the day, and all the politicians and civic leaders are having a field day expounding their interpretation of what they consider Mr. Carmichaels’ interpretation.” Referring to the aforementioned historical essay, “Black Power: Freedmen Seize Reins of Power in South After the Passage of 1867 Voting Rights Bill” in the November 1965 issue, Edwards applauded Carmichael's philosophy of Black power, stating, “Mr. Carmichael is evidently trying to regain for the Southern Black man the birthright that was snatched from him almost 100 years ago.”¹⁰

In that same issue, Mrs. Carmel T. Goosby from Chicago Illinois wrote, “I agree wholeheartedly that a power base, political and economic, must be constructed from which to

⁹ Lerone Bennet, Jr., “Stokely Carmichael Architect of Black Power,” *Ebony*, September 1966, 26.

¹⁰ John Edwards, “Architect of Black Power Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony*, November 1966, 3.

negotiate. Too long have we tried in vain to bargain with those on the top rung of the ladder while we stood on the bottom. In that position, one does not negotiate, one supplicates. I do a slow burn every time the press for the sake of sensationalism, persist in using the words 'Black Power' out of context and twisting them to their own nefarious ends."¹¹ Another letter that highlighted the support for Stokely Carmichael and illustrated the conversation within the African American community was from Kay Johnson of Los Angeles. "I as a Negro was a little skeptical about just what Black Power meant, but now, after reading 'Stockley Carmichael: Architect of Black Power' (September 1966), I know and understand. We should back this young man and encourage him all the way."¹² These letters highlighted how different sections of Black America felt about the term Black Power. For them, the movement was not just about action but agreeing with Carmichael felt that it was a term that encompassed various aspects and needs of Black America. It was not just about raised a fist and the emergence of the Black Panther Party which many news outlets emphasized. Black Power was about creating a physical, and mental space in which to bring about change in the Black community.

While these readers agreed with Carmichael and Black Power ideology, there were others in the community who disapproved. In the December 1966 issue, reader Edward C. Wallace wrote: "The article 'Stokely Carmichael: Architect of Black Power' which appeared in your September 1966 issue paints a picture of an irresponsible, jive-talking juvenile. Is this the man who seeks to lead us to the achievement of full justice and equality in this country?" Other voices of dissent who felt that Black Power and militancy would alienate citizens included James P. Murry from White Plains, New York, who wrote, "Upon reading a recent series on the civil

¹¹ John Edwards, "Architect of Black Power Letter to the Editor," *Ebony*, November 1966, 3.

¹² "Controversial Carmichael," Letter to the Editor," *Ebony*, December 1966, 18.

rights controversy in a New York newspaper, I can only conclude that Mr. Carmichael has hurt the problem more than he can ever help it. The cries of Black Power, riot, and militancy by some has alienated many white Americans friendly to the Negro cause. If the Negro does believe in the American ideal as a way of life, why shun the system and reject help from those more able than himself and just as willing to give it?¹³

In November 1966, *Negro Digest* released the issue “The Meaning and Measure of Black Power.” A cover image of a raised clenched fist ready to strike became the visual metaphor of the movement. To so many African Americans having grown up in a society, where the clinched white fist signaled violence to come, the turning of the tables, so to speak, meant everything. Defiant, ready to strike the raised black fist empowered African Americans visually and emotionally.

¹³ “Letter to the Editor” *Ebony*, December 1966, 16-18.



Figure 6. Negro Digest Cover November 1966

The issue featured a symposium with contributions from several prominent Black thought leaders. The editor noted, “ We think that the racial situation in this country has reached a critical point long predicted by a line of writers from W.E.B. Du Bois to James Baldwin and Lerone Bennett Jr., and we feel that thoughtful consideration now must be given to the nature and direction of the struggle against racism.”¹⁴ The purpose of the issue and symposium was to provide its readers with space for discussing Black Power outside of white-owned print media.

Contributors were asked to consider and answer two questions: First “Is the Civil Rights Movement at the crossroads? And If so, what are the practical alternatives to it?” Second. “What is your own reaction to the term ‘Black Power’ and why do you feel the national press and the white public reacted as they did to the term?”¹⁵ The responses to these questions varied. Anita R. Corwell, a freelance writer, and Eugene Walton, an employee of the Postmaster General’s office, believed that Black Power “equates to social and political change, and speaks to the urgency of the African-American community to gain solidarity and rid themselves of helplessness and inferiority.”¹⁶

The tone of the 1968 issue is not surprising; by the late 1960s, *Ebony* magazine went through a shift in its focus and tenor. Though *Ebony* still featured its advertisements pushing American consumerism, it no longer attempted to sell the dream of middle-class assimilation to people that could only attain a small modicum of it. Instead, by the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Johnson Publishing began to examine a vast array of issues affecting the African-American community. Print media is effective as a form preserving historical memory, and can help

¹⁴ “Black Power Its Meaning and Measure,” *Negro Digest*, November, 16 1966, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21,22.

examine Black Power, related grassroots organizations, and how Black Americans were forging their own destiny in the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

In 1968, *Ebony* released its own special issue intended to create a conversation about the future of Black America. The lead article stated, “We have Marched, We have cried, We have prayed, We have voted, We have petitioned, We have been good little boys and girls. We Have gone out to Vietnam as doves and come back as hawks. We have done every possible thing to make this white man recognize us as human beings.”¹⁷ Using the remarks he gave to President Johnson’s Riot Committee, Lerone Bennett observed how a vast number of African Americans felt they were still fighting an uphill battle for freedom, respect, and power.

The riots that took place over the Long Hot Summer were a cumulation of various factors that the United States government was not fully addressing in the late 1960s and 1970s. The official government response to summer’s unrest was the “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,” also called the “Kerner Report.”¹⁸ Although the report provided an explanation of the African American community’s frustrations, which led street action, it strongly condemned the actions of “rioters” without digging too far into the structural oppression behind them. For the African American community, this report was but one in a series of official reports where the government ultimately took little or no action to rectify the situation.

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, a witness before the Commission, who had read other similar reports, chided the report: I must again in candor say that you members of the Commission are a

¹⁷ “We Have Marched, We Have Cried, We Have Prayed, A militant’s testimony before President’s Riot Commission,” *Ebony*, April 1968, 29-38.

¹⁸ Source: *United States. Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968)

kind of Alice in Wonderland with the same moving picture re-shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and the same inaction.”¹⁹ The Kerner report, like others prepared by a government who was itself complicit in the oppression of the African American community, said nothing new about the state of Black America. Thus, after the Long Hot Summer of 1967, three years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and four years after the Civil Rights Act, Black print media was asking its readership to consider the next steps that Black America should take if the federal government and white Americans were unwilling to live up to the promises of democracy.

As officials met to discuss the causes of street action, the Black communities was conversation about Black Power explored ways in which to express their frustrations with the United States Government and American social, and political values. In December 1968, just two months after the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, *Ebony* featured a special “Olympics in Retrospect Photo Editorial.” After praising the feats of the U.S. track and field team, the editor went on to note, “The one thing which will be most remembered by all had nothing to do with athletic performance. It had to do with Black protest. The Black athletes had promised a strong protest, and it came when Smith and Carlos accepted their medals and turned to face the American Flag for the playing of the national anthem. Standing motionless and looking down toward the ground the athletes each raised a clenched, Black-gloved fist in a Black power salute.”²⁰ Though the Black Power Movement had been in the national newspapers U.S Olympic gold medalist Tommie Smith and teammate John Carlos, salute propelled the conversation of the movement within white media outlets.

¹⁹ Report of the National Advisory commission on Civil Disorders, (New York: Bantam Books, 1968) 1-29

²⁰ “Olympics in Retrospect,” *Ebony*, December 1968. 160- 161.

Within popular culture and American cultural public memory one of the prevalent images of the Black Power Movement is that of Tommie Smith and John Carlos giving the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Calling it a stubborn protest that jarred the Games, the November 1, 1968 issue of *Life* reported on the protest. The magazine was one of the few non-Black print media outlets to attempt to humanize and examine the reasons for the silent gesture. Other news outlets such as *The Morning Call* of Allentown Pennsylvania, declared the protest another violent problem for the Mexico City games.²¹

In February 1969, *Ebony* released another special editorial on “The Rise of Black Power” by Lerone Bennett, Jr. The piece examined the growing prominence of Black Power philosophy and how the African American community could attain it. Bennett remarked that the rise of Black Power began with the 1966 march by James Meredith from Memphis to Jackson, Mississippi, which was interrupted when Meredith was shot, and Stokely Carmichael shouted “Black power” in front of the Mississippi state capital.²² Bennett went on to argue that “Black Power” as a term and philosophy was not a rejection of the movement’s predecessors, but rather a term emphasized Black pride, dignity, and self-determination.

The August 1969 *Ebony* issue, “The Black Revolution,” focused on what the term meant to different sectors of the community. It produced over three months of letters to the editor from the African American community. The issue particularly focused on what Black Revolution meant to the Black community, Black identity, and Black Arts. The issue also included an eight-page article on the Black Panther party. Lerone Bennett Jr.’s opening article “Of Time Space and Revolution.” Here Bennett examines the state of Black Rebellion and its impact on the Black

²¹ “Problem Plagued Olympics Add ‘Black Power,’ Movement to List” *The Morning Call* October 20, 1968 42.

²² Lerone Bennett Jr. “The Rise Of Black Power” *Ebony* 1969,36-42.

community. Noting that the Black Rebellion was born out of the failure of the United States government to live up to its promise of democracy Bennett argued that the rebellion would continue until all illusion of democracy were torn away, and true power is achieved by Black Americans. In that respect, Bennett noted that Black America had to take stock of their needs, and strategies in order to define what they wanted to from the revolution and how in the new decade to define it. Here we also see that Bennet created a bridge between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement by arguing that though it may be called revolution and rebellion, that Black America was still fighting to rip away the same illusions resisted by Civil Rights leaders and protesters.²³

The entire special helped to create a space to reexamine how the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement have been remembered and interpreted in public memory. The articles “Revolution in Sound,” “Black Theater,” “Myths of the Black Revolt,” and “Politics and the Black Revolution” restructured the narrative around Black Power and Revolution. By addressing different ways in which Black Americans viewed power and identity through music, pose, and community uplift this issue highlighted the different ways in which Black America viewed the term and the action of Black Power.

Politics and the Black Revolution is socially interesting because it demonstrates how in the eyes of the Black community Black Revolution was not about rebellion and riots, but Black Revolution and Black power was about politics and gaining power within the United States government system. As John Conyers, Jr., U.S Representative 1st District, of Michigan stated in

²³ Lerone Bennett Jr., “Of Time Space and Revolution,” *Ebony*, August 1969, 21-35.

response to those who want to give up on politics “How can we give up on our one access to government- a government that controls the destiny of us all?”²⁴

The conversation on Black Power also began to extend into how Black identity could grant the Black community a form of power. Stating “Being Black is more than skin color it’s an attitude a state of mind” the article “How Black is Black” addressed identity and pride asserting that power comes from embracing one’s identity.²⁵ The article examined how Black America could and should move away from white norms of beauty and acceptance and create its own.

Again, in response to this issue, readers wrote into the magazine to continue the conversation. Clifford J. Herron noted “This special issue of *Ebony* will open the eyes of many passive blacks and whites. I still remain black and proud.” Adam J Viney, Sr., agreed with Lerone Bennett adding “It is necessary now to program this insight and unify at all levels in all the Harlem of America” Warren Mead Jr. writes “ We hear so much about Afro haircuts, soul music, and soul food, I am proud of being a black man in America.”²⁶

The August 1969 *Ebony* “Black Revolution” issue, as well as the letters to the editor in the October 1969 issues, emphasized how *Ebony* was creating space for conversation around Black Revolution that was not happening in mainstream media. Black Revolution and Black Rebellion took on negative connotations when examined in non-Black areas. The August 27th, 1966 *Stevens Point Journal*, from Wisconsin, described Black politics as having taken a violent radical change. “Has the Black Revolution entered a new phase where terror will replace reason?” the author asked. “What will be the course of the Black revolution in the United States?”

²⁴ John Conyers Jr., “Politics and the Black Revolution” *Ebony* August 1969,162-166.

²⁵ Charles V. Hamilton, “How Black is Black?” *Ebony* August 1969, 44-52.

²⁶Letters to the Editor, *Ebony* October 1969,15-18.

If it is reduced to ‘get whitey’ it invites disaster. It should be aimed at Black property,” instead of “Black Power.”²⁷

The *Logansport Press* in September 1969 ran a three-part series by Allen Goldsmith titled “Toward A Violent Black Revolution.” This series’ main theme focused on connecting the Black Revolution to violence and power. The article described “Black Revolution” as a violent phrase, and when it did attempt to examine Black Power, it reduced the movement to simply equating Black pride with white hate. Loaded with inaccurate statements and assumptions about the Black community, the editorial series, which appeared in several newspapers across the United States, failed to understand the nuances and meaning of Black Revolution.²⁸

Mainstream accounts such as these erased the complexity of Black Power, Black Revolution, and Black Liberation as philosophies and movements. Focusing on Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams, the writer of “Toward A Violent Black Revolution” assigned to each man the philosophy of violence, negating and erasing any other work that the two men did in their lives. Focusing on rage and anger instead of frustration, fear, and agency to build the Black community, popular mass media created a misleading narrative of Black Power and Black Revolution.²⁹ The danger of this mass-consumed media was that pieces like these were syndicated across the nation. “Toward a Violent Black Revolution,” for example, appeared not

²⁷ Dr. James P. Shenton, “Which Way Black America?” “Black Revolution” *Stevens Point Wisconsin Daily Journal* August 27, 1966, 5.

²⁸ Allen-Gold Smith, “Toward A Violent Black Revolution” *The Logansport Press*, Logansport Indiana. Part One September 8th 1969, Part 2, September 9 1969, Part 3 September 5 1969.

²⁹ Allen-Gold Smith, “Toward A Violent Black Revolution” *The Logansport Press*, Logansport Indiana. Part One September 8th 1969, Part 2, September 9 1969, Part 3 September 5 1969.

only in the *Logansport Press*, but also in the *News-Item* of Shamokin in Pennsylvania, the *Alton Evening Telegraph* of Alton, Illinois, and *The Jackson Sun* of Jackson, Tennessee.³⁰

Counter to these monolithic arguments in white-helmed media outlets, Black periodicals helped create a space for the public to talk about Black Power and Revolution in more fluid terms. The aforementioned *Ebony* issues and the *Negro Digest* March 1967 issue, which featured an article by Lerone Bennett, Jr., “The Real Meaning of The Black Revolution, Black Identity, and Black Power,” showcased how these terms were talked about and defined among different sectors of the Black community.

Looking at the letters to the editor in special issues as well as regular monthly issues of *Ebony* and *Black World*, one can see that the readership was eager to provide their viewpoint on these subjects. In response to the *Ebony* issue of “Black Revolution and Black Power,” readers both agreed and disagreed with the terms and how they were defined in various articles. Warren Mead, Jr., from New Orleans wrote, “We hear so much about Afro haircuts, soul music, Black studies, and soul food, and now EBONY has come up with a special edition to explain these terms.”³¹ Lewis Edward Bell wrote, “You had a dialogue in this issue... I feel that your function is becoming increasing one of educating and providing a vehicle that serves to unify the Blacks and define meaningful goals.”³² While those readers focused on the cultural terms of Black Power and Black Revolution, others such as R. Douglas Greenlee from New Haven, Connecticut responded to “Politics and the Black Revolution” stating, “Congressman Conyers dealt candidly with the whole political picture, and if Black Americans head his advice and continue to move

³⁰ Allen GoldSmith, “Towards A Violent Black Revolution”, *The News-Interm* Friday September 05, 1969, ;“Towards a New Black Revolution,” *Alton Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday September 10 1969, “Towards A Black Revolution” *The Jackson Sun*, Friday September 12,1969.

³¹ Warren Mead Jr., “Letter to the Editor” *Ebony*, October 1969, 16.

³² Lewis Edward Bell, “Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony*, October,1969, 16.

into the political arena, changes in this society will come much more rapidly than in past year... *Ebony* is on the right track by covering the entire spectrum of the Black community.”³³

The December 1969 issue of *Negro Digest* continued the conversation through an article by Solomon P. Gethers, “Black Power: Three Years Later.” Gethers promoted a consensus among the Black community that power and freedom could only be fully realized when the community came to a consensus on the how. “Throughout Black America,” Gethers wrote, “there is a growing realization that Black Liberation can only be effected through Black initiative.... What is required? By what means are we to gain our freedom? Black Power? Vote Power? Dollar Power Black Capitalism? Black Nationalism? Reform of the system? Overthrow the system?”³⁴ Providing a different perspective on these questions, a reader Brooks Johnson argued that the Civil Rights Movement was not at a crossroads, and that “what the civil rights movement is after is a chance for Black Americans to share in the power and privileges which have previously been allocated to the whites and Negro elite.”³⁵

Starting in the 1970s, *Ebony* magazine began featuring topics that urged Black Americans to consider next steps in the push for Black liberation. The August 1970 issue, for example, was titled, “Separation? Integration? Liberation? Which Way Black America?”³⁶ The issue presented different perspectives on how African Americans should move forward, politically, while exploring different meanings of Black power and liberation. The issue’s three leading articles, Separation, Integration, and Liberation reveal a conversation in Black America that was not happening on network news or in national newspapers. The three articles discussed

³³ R. Douglas Greenlee, “Letter to the Editor” *Ebony*, October 1969,16.

³⁴ Gethers Solomon, “Black Power: Three Years Later”, *Negro Digest* December 1969, 4-10

³⁵ “Symposium Black Power Its Meaning and Measure,” *Negro Digest* November 1966,20-25.

³⁶“Which Way Black America? Separation? Integration? Liberation?”, *Ebony* August 1970.

the conversation among Black America about the best course of action in the new decade. Though the end goal was liberation, the conversation on how to achieve such liberation and Black Power was taken about by *Ebony*. Some writers like Robert S. Browne argued that liberation could only come from separation when Black America created its own space, economy culture and community to achieve true liberation. In his op ed, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP pressed for Integration as a way for Black America to achieve true liberation. Lerone Bennett Jr. in “Liberation” argued that true liberation for Black America would only come through understating and finding a middle ground between integration and separation. While mainstream outlets presented Black politics as a two-sided coin—either for or against Black Power—they failed to look at the nuances of the conversation that was taking place in various forms of Black print media.

Magazines like *Ebony* provided a space for the Black community to have conversations about these issues. The October 1970 issue has more than five pages of letters to the editor all responding to the August 1970 issue “Which Way Black America?” Once again, we see that these letters highlighted how Black America through *Ebony* created a space for conversation outside of white media outlets. Readers such as “Mrs. Joanne Bridges Bailey noted “No longer can we justifiably stand on the sidelines refusing involvement. Lerone Bennett is perceptively eloquent in defining our major black need: psychological/ attitudinal liberation prefacing any social, economic struggle.” Another reader Suylyman Shahid Mufassir wrote saying “I am glad to see *Ebony* speak not merely to, but forcefully in behalf on black folk: our rights goals and

aspirations. Thanks especially to Mr. Lerone Bennett Jr. for giving a lot of us a category (liberationist) which best befits our efforts in the black struggle.”³⁷

These letters varied in which strategy the reader believed would work in order for Black America to gain true democracy. They also showcased the fluidity of what Black America conceived true power and democracy was. These conversations were not just had within Black intellectual circles or by popularized Black intellectuals but among but among the community who are often forgotten within the narrative of Black Power especially within popular culture.

Mrs. Joanne Bridges Bailey from Jersey City, New Jersey wrote, “Thank you so much for an excellent issue, ‘Which Way Black America.’ As with the philosophies of Martin Luther King and Brother Malcolm X, we have a choice. No longer can we justifiably stand on the sidelines refusing involvement?³⁸ Lerone Bennet is perceptively eloquent in defining our major Black need: a psychological/attitudinal liberation prefacing any social-economic struggle.”³⁹ Similarly, Claudette Clever wrote, “Transformation is the only sensible solution (and I do mean only) to the ‘white problem’ We have to get ourselves together first. Then we can work on getting WASP together.”⁴⁰

While some readers agreed with liberation and transformation, others agreed with Sen. Edward Brookes’ and Roy Wilkins’ on integration. Mary C. Power wrote, for example, “I am inclined to think along with Sen. Edward Brooke and others who believe that integration is the eventual answer. However, I fully understand the views of those advocating separation although

³⁷ Mrs. Joanne Bridges Bailey, and Suylyman Shahid Mufassir, “Letters to the Editor Which Way Black America” *Ebony* October 1970, 14-16

³⁸ Mrs. Joanne Bridges Bailey, “Letter to the Editor Which Way Black America,” *Ebony*, Magazine October 1970, 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁰ Claudette Clever, “Letter to the Editor Which Way Black America” *Ebony* October 1970, 14.

I do not uphold these views nor deem them practical. ..I believe that with total integration in its true sense there must surely follow a liberation- a genuine, Black share of political power and all that this entails.”⁴¹

As the conversation about Black Power and how to attain it changed, Black media sources began to focus on the integration of Black Power within the political social and cultural realms of Black life. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Johnson Publishing created a space for the African-American community to talk about Black Power and what it meant to hold power in America. Other than defining the terms Black Power and Revolution outside of the white homogenous perspective, the conclusion of this conversation is that one of the tenants of Black Power for the African-American community is that of political power. Political power meant that the African-American community had the influence to force the United States government to live up to its promise of democracy and dismantle systematic racism within American institutions. To that end, Johnson Publishing featured articles that highlighted the rise of African-American politicians and political movements at both the regional and national levels. Claiming power at various government levels was another way the Black community sought access to power.

⁴¹Mary C. Power,” Letter to the Editor “Which Way Black America” *Ebony* October 1970, 16-20.

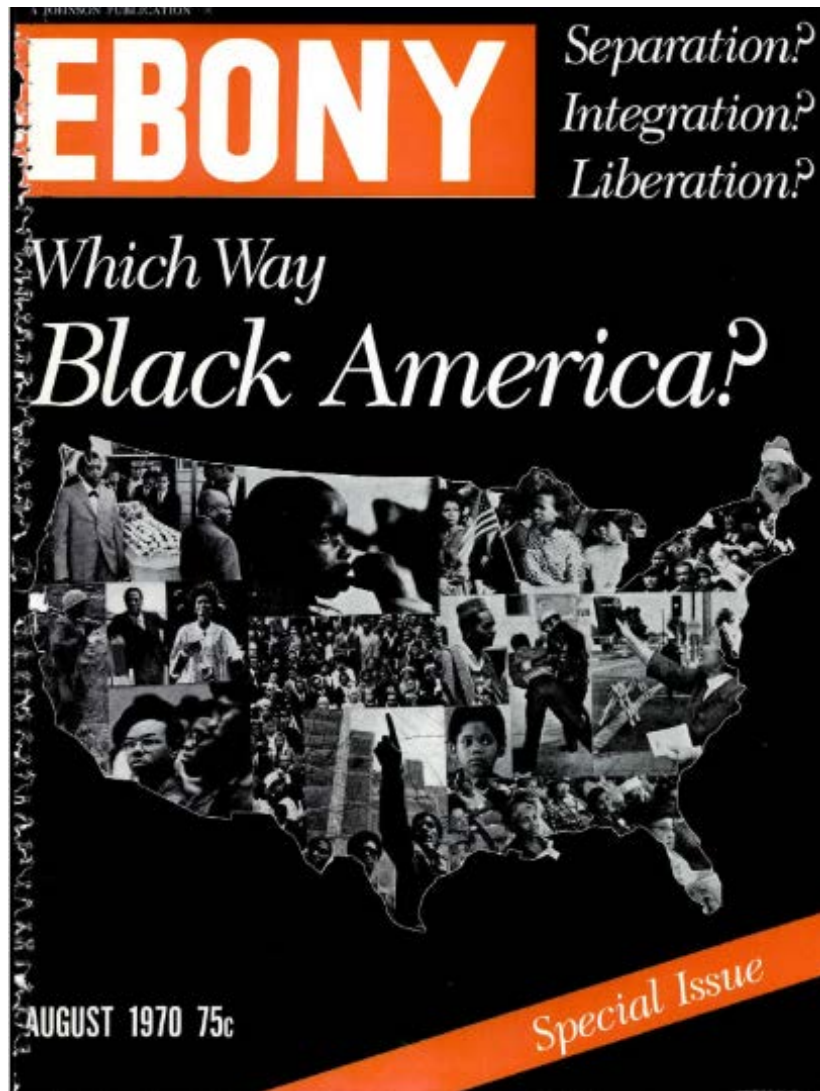


Figure 7. Which Way Black America? Ebony, August 1970

The January 1969 issue of *Ebony* featured an article titled “My First Year in Office,” containing interviews with several Black mayors about Black power, community, and American policies. The following month, in February 1969, Shirley Chisholm graced the cover of *Ebony*, with the title “New Faces in Congress and First Black Woman on Capitol Hill.”⁴² Although the article stated that there was hardly an explosion of Black political power, with Chisholm joining Louis Stokes of Cleveland and William Clay of St. Louis, there was clearly a shift occurring across the nation toward greater Black political power.⁴³

By the end of 1969, there was a subtle shift toward representing a broader range of Black identity and politics that spoke to different sectors of Black America. Articles such as “Black Mayors Discuss State of the Nation” and special issues such as “Which Way Black America?” and “The South Today.” tackled that issue of progress or lack thereof in the United States.⁴⁴

In “Black Mayors Discuss State of the Nation,” *Ebony* conducted a poll among twenty Black Mayors from northern and southern cities. Continuing the conversations on Black Power and Black consciousness, the group addressed the question “Is America better off or worse as a result of the explosion of “black consciousness?” All twenty mayors agreed that America was better off and would benefit from black awareness and pride.⁴⁵

They mayors were also asked about the state of Black America, and many felt that though there has been a push and they had gained more political power through integration and change within the American system, they still had some doubt on whether the United States could or would live up to democracy. After polling twenty Black mayors about the status, present, and

⁴² “New Faces in Congress,” *Ebony* February 1969, 56-67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁴ “Black Mayors Discuss State of the Nation,” *Ebony*, February 1970, 76-84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-80.

future of Black people in America, *Ebony* concluded that though many thought that it would take another ten to twenty years for Black Americans to achieve full democracy there was still hope in the present. Some mayors such as Richard Hatcher disagreed, believing that due to low economic, and housing opportunity the state of the Black future was plummeting.⁴⁶

It is interesting that a majority of the twenty mayors hailed from Northern cities with a few from southern towns such as Highland Park, Mississippi. Many mayors from Northern cities felt that though political change had been made through federal government involvement there were still economic and housing issues that were stifling Black America from reaching its full potential. In that regard, they believed that Black America would never gain full power or democracy unless as Richard Hatcher stated, “this nation awakens to the need for dramatic changes and takes sweeping action in re-ordering its priorities.”⁴⁷

The August 1971 issue “The South Today,” focused heavily on economics, politics, and education in the South. Most of *Ebony*’s special issues focused on the nation as a whole; this issue serves as a marker to discuss the political, economic, and educational future of Black Americans in the South. The article gave credit for the rise in African American political power to social movements in the 1960s and the 1966 advent of Black Power and race-consciousness.⁴⁸

The article “Black Voices of the South” tapped into the opinions of citizens such as Julian Bond and Charles Evers mayor of Fayette Mississippi John Lewis, Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy and Mrs. Franny Lou Hamer. *Ebony* asked the leaders questions on how much political and economic power they believed Black citizens of the South had gained and how

⁴⁶ “Black Mayors Discuss State of the Nation,” *Ebony*, February 1970, 76-84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-84.

⁴⁸ Hanes Walton Jr., Ph.D. “Black Politics in the South,” *Ebony*, August 1971, 50.

could progress be pushed. The participants were asked such questions as: How would you characterize race relations between Blacks and whites in the South today? Have they improved, worsened or remained unchanged since the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools? Which area do you consider most important to black progress and what is being done to achieve progress in that area? Do you still consider integration of the type advocated by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a workable solution to black problems in the south? ⁴⁹

The feedback from the participants provided evidence that supported the argument for political power being intertwined with that of Black Power and the conversation of progress within the Black community. In answer to the question of integration and progress, most concluded that white leaders who remain resistant to change slowed Black progress. Some like Charles Evers believed that in order for change to happen for the Black community to gain power they must continue political, educational activity and use selective buying power as a community to create and maintain progress. Emory O. Jackson managing editor of the *Birmingham World* believed that the most important change was securing the use of the ballot.⁵⁰ Though many of the participants agreed that the most progress had come in the form of politics and education, they reconized the need for a greater push forward especially economically.

⁴⁹ "Voices of the South," *Ebony*, August 1971, 50-55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 50-55.

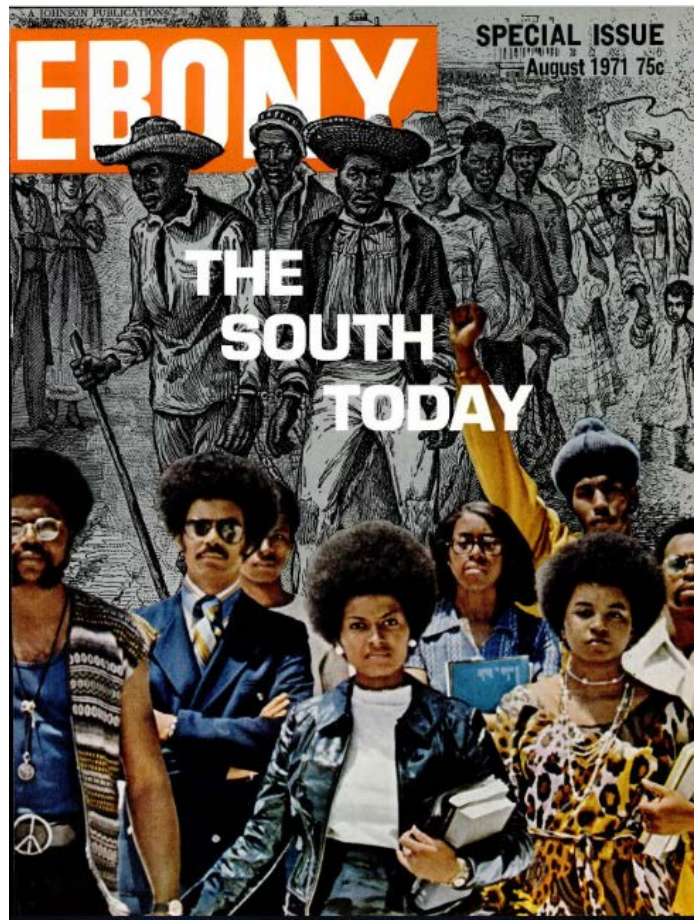


Figure 8. The South Today Ebony, 1971

Although education and employment as forms of power were highlighted throughout issues of *Ebony*, *Negro Digest*, *Jet*, and *Freedom Ways Journal*, each form of print media held nothing back when expressing disappointment with the government's lack of resources and care when it came to these same areas. The 1970s saw inflation, economic stagnation, an energy crisis, high unemployment, and more employment discrimination in the United States. The 1973-1974 oil embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries caused energy prices to rise rapidly and create shortages.⁵¹ By 1974, the United States' economy was entering a recession, and Americans saw themselves faced with high food and energy prices, combined with low wages.

Disrupting the master Civil Rights Movement narrative was one of the biggest contributions these resources made, taking the Black Freedom Struggle from the South and demonstrating that it was a national fight. One of the first special issues *Ebony* produced that examined whether the Black community had indeed attained power was the August 1971 issue "The South Today." Providing insightful observations on the post-1965 South, the issue examines whether the political and cultural landscape of the South had shifted. Leading contributor Lerone Bennett, Jr.'s article, "Old Illusions and New Souths," described the post-1965 period as a sort of second Reconstruction, noting that while this moment held promise, one need not get trapped by illusions that the American dream and promise of democracy had been attained by all. Despite meaningful progress, Bennett also pointed to emerging patterns that both reflected Southern culture and American culture writ large. Bennett contended that neither the South nor America had approached racial reconciliation or fundamental reconstruction.

⁵¹ State, U.S. Department of State., "The U.S. Economy of the 1960s and 1970s." ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/us-economy-in-the-1960s-and-1970s-1148142> (accessed July 4, 2018).

Moreover, he explained, there was not a push towards true integration, as true integration requires integration of power and resources, and the Black victims of the Southern system were being forced to bear the cost of changing the system. There was still resistance, Bennett pointed out, and that resistance was becoming more sophisticated, more Northern, more complex, like how Northern whites were feeling to suburbs and using zoning regulations and urban renewal to create “Dixie-Style Harlems.”⁵²

Many readers of that issue concurred with Lerone Bennett, Jr.’s opinion about the South and whether or not things were truly changing for Black Americans. The letters to the editor provided a glimpse of not only the various conversations of Black power within the African American community but also evidence that complicated the Post-Civil Rights narrative. Letters to the editor concluded that the South was not changing, and that same systemic racism was happening in the North and West as well. Sam Winston’s response to “‘The South Today’” confirmed a belief that I have had for some time. It appears that the South is slowly changing into more or less what the North presently is. White racism is well-entrenched in the North, though it has historically been not so much out in the open it has taken more subtle form than the white racism in the South.”⁵³

By the late 1960s and into the 1970s, African Americans found themselves facing many of the same issues only without the target of changing discriminatory laws. How was the Black community to combat job discrimination, housing discrimination, urban renewal, and socio-economic inequality when the laws had officially changed, but the racism persisted, and the capitalist system was rigged against them? After 1965, the focus of the Black Freedom Struggle

⁵² Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Old Illusions and New South,” *Ebony*, August 1971, 35-41.

⁵³ Sam Winston, “Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony* October 1971, 18.

shifted geographically from the South; however, unlike the South, the North had no one face of racism and inequality. There was no George Wallace, Strom Thurmond, or Jim Clark to be the faces of oppression. Instead, African Americans were tasked with forcing the American public to realize that racism was so ingrained within the American economic, social, and cultural systems that it was a nation-wide issue. Sam Winston for instance feared that the South was becoming much like the North. However, systemic oppression had been accruing throughout the United States for generations.

Although the federal government had passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1964, Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, African Americans and organizations such as the NAACP still found themselves fighting to force the United States government to live up to its promises. Into the in the 1970s, the NAACP brought several cases before the Supreme Court and the Equal Opportunity Commission concerning housing and employment. In a memorandum released in 1974, the NAACP noted that in 1973, there were 197 suits filed with the Civil Rights Division alleging discrimination in education, employment, housing, and public accommodations.⁵⁴

Johnson Publishing opt-eds and articles and features in the late 1960s through the 1970s showcased the ways African Americans sought to gain power through various means and highlighted the systematic discrimination within different sectors of American institutions. Between 1968 and 1979 *Ebony* featured a yearly annual progress report in the January issue, focusing on various aspects of the African-American community. Topics included education, politics, employment, and social issues. The 1968 report “Scattered Gains Amid Tragedies,”

⁵⁴ Library of Congress Papers of the NAACP, Part 30: General Office Files, 1966-1972, Series A: Subject Files Group VI, Series A, Administrative File, General Office File Library of Congress. Copyright 2014, NAACP, “Justice Department Post New Records in Enforcement of Civil Rights Laws”, 1974,45-50.

which appeared in the January 1969 issue, discussed the Long Hot Summer of 1967, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Power, and the fight for justice within the American legal system.⁵⁵ It also suggested that the rise in political militancy in the nation would ultimately grant African Americans more power. “The main signal of significant changes,” the report stated, “was manifested by a maturing in political militancy and solidarity that resulted in the election in November of three new Black U.S Congressmen.”⁵⁶ With the win of Nixon over Hubert H. Humphrey, the latter of whom was supported by Black voters; the writers argued that the nine new Black congressmen and women would grant African Americans at least some power and representation within the government. Moreover, the article pointed to the successful 1968 attempt by Mississippi Blacks to gain representation at the Democratic National Convention after the debacle of 1964 as a form of true Black power.⁵⁷

Each report, from 1968-1977, covered government and politics, commented on Black power and American democracy and sought to examine how far the Black community had come in the previous year toward attaining full access to American democracy. In January of 1970, *Ebony* reported, “Blacks Run For Mayor in Several Cities in the Drive for Political Power.”⁵⁸ However, while *Ebony* published progress reports that spoke of a Black community moving forward, some readers disagreed, believing that the Black community had not truly achieved full power and access to the American democratic promise. After the 1971 Progress Report declared that African Americans were making major strides and gains, declaring it the “Year of the Coalitions,” some readers disagreed. Yes, the Black populace was making some progress, but it

⁵⁵ “Progress Report of 1968 Scattered Gains Amid Tragedies,” *Ebony*, January 1969, 90-96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁵⁸ “Progress Report of 1969 Government,” *Ebony*, January 1970, 106.

was not so for the Black masses and seemed to be limited to middle- and upper-class African Americans. One reader stated, “Last year was marked by repression, inflation, oppression, unemployment and a rise in the use of fascist tactics all directly related to the Black masses.”⁵⁹

The Annual Progress Report not only covered government and politics, but education employment, and religion as well. If Black Power and Liberation meant access to political spaces, it also included the right for African Americans to decent education and accurate historical narratives. In response to the 1968 Progress Report, a reader wrote, “Education dealing primarily with the young is such an important factor in sapping our destiny. There must be Black influence in the public schools.”⁶⁰ Access to higher education was also a cornerstone in the creation of Black Power and liberation. Not only access, but the ability to have control over the historical narrative of Black studies was significant to gaining power. In the Annual Progress Reports of 1970, 1971, and 1975, there were features on how both students and teachers sought to control Black studies and challenge Eurocentric views of civilization and history.

Although the annual progress report was meant to serve as inspiration and call-to-action, it also highlighted the areas where African Americans were losing power and slipping on the rocky mountain they wanted to climb. It opened dialogue and conversation in the African American community on what power was and whether African Americans were truly achieving it. One way in which *Ebony* and Johnson Publishing helped in reworking the narrative of the post-1965 Civil Rights Movement is that while it created a conversation around Black power and Black liberation, it also started a dialogue among its readers where power was still nonexistent in the Black community.

⁵⁹ “Elsie Scott Progress Report Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony* March 1971,13-14.

⁶⁰ “Sherman S Wilson Progress Report of 1968,” *Ebony* April, 1969.

In August of 1975 *Ebony* produced a special issue, “The Bicentennial: 200 years of Black Trials and Triumphs,” which contained three pivotal articles by Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, Vernon E. Jordan, and Lerone Bennett, Jr. These pieces asked the readership to consider questions like Had Blacks attained power? And should Blacks celebrate the nation’s Bicentennial? Understanding the terms “power” and “Black Power” to be complicated, the three men had varying answers to these questions. Jackson said yes, while Jordan wavered, and Bennett said no. Presenting its readership with this question in August, the following two months’ issues were full of letters to the editors in response to these questions. Some readers thought that Black Americans were gaining power and equality in the United States, that progress was being made, and that African Americans should celebrate their citizenship. Valorie Reid wrote, “I must agree with Dr. Joseph H. Jackson that we should celebrate this event because we should not let 200 years of struggling by our ancestors go unmentioned!”⁶¹ “I give a resounding ‘yes!’” said reader Alfredia J. Wallace. “I want to celebrate 200 years of American history because we, the Black people have come a long way by faith.” Even readers who took the middle ground such as Marner Rae Smith felt that even though African Americans had suffered much, as a people, they were gaining power and should not jump ship on the American Dream.⁶²

While many readers felt that African Americans had earned their stake in the American dream, others felt that they had yet to gain any true power, and they should not celebrate the bicentennial. Ed Seaman wrote, “I agree with Mr. Bennett’s article in your August special issue. I agree it would be hypocritical to celebrate 200 years of lies and injustice.” Reginald Bennett

⁶¹Edward Plummer Jr. Valorie Reid, and Sharon Holt, “The Bicentennial Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony*, December 1975 26.

⁶² “Should Blacks Celebrate Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony*, October 1975, 14-15.

wrote, "If not by participating in the ceremony we gain nothing else, we can at least show the world that we do control some part of our destiny and lives."⁶³

Continuing to report on political power, the September 1976 issue featured an article on Kenneth Gibson, who became the first Black president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. In December of 1977, *Ebony* featured a story on Unita Blackwell, the first Black mayor in Mayersville, Mississippi. These articles much like the ones before, focused heavily on political progress in the South but did conclude that they are starting to see wider trends that are similar to that of the Northern States. While the Black community sought a rise in political representation, they also fought against housing, and job discrimination and economic oppression. However, much like in Northern and Western States these issues were representative of a whole oppressive American system. Thus, the conversation begins to evolve from gaining political power to how to use political power as a means of gaining economic power.

This conversation within *Ebony* continued throughout various issues in the 1970s into the 1980s. Although the term Black Power is used less after the 1970s ended, the magazine still created a place within its pages for readers to discuss the state of the African American community and power. Print media is an underutilized form of primary resource. However, if used in conjunction with other resources, both public and academic historians can pull various narratives from its pages. Popular Black print media created a space for different conversation within the African American community about Black Power and liberation. It showed that the African American community was not monolithic and held various views about what Black Power meant. This form of popular material culture also provides a resource for looking past the

⁶³ "Letter to the Editor," *Ebony*, October 1975, 12.

pre-1965 master narrative and examining the issues and concerns of the African American community.

Chapter IV

Power to the People: Conversations on Black Power and Creating Narratives

“For God’s sake, you got to give power to the people. There’s some people out there hoggin’ everything, tellin’ lies, givin’ alibies about the people’s money and things... For God’s sake, you got to give more power to the people.”¹ In 1971, the Chi-Lites appeared on *Soul Train* with proud fists raised high and sang these lines. The “power” the Chi-Lites were alluding to was Black Power, political power that would uplift all Black Americans and enable the African-American community to craft and define just what that power meant. One way the people sought this power would be through various forms of cultural productions such as Black public access television and print media.

Like Black print media, Black public access news shows offered different ways to define Black identity and preserve public memory of Black Power and Black Revolution. Creating a space for Black thoughts and ideas, Black public access television was a venue where cultural, political, and social issues could be discussed from the perspective of the African American community. In the post-World War II era, television became the new landscape in which Americanism was discussed, defended, and created. Tropes were not just guidelines for creating characters, but themselves became representations of Americanism and American ideology. This chapter will explore ways in which Black Americans used television to directly reach the Black audience and thus have power over these narratives.

¹ Chi-Lites, “Give More Power to the People!” *Eugen Record Brunswick*, 1971.

Gayle Wald's *It's Been Beautiful: Soul and Black Power Television*, and Devorah Heitner's *Black Power TV* are two of the most recent pieces of scholarship that have examined Black public access television. Heitner suggests that the late 1960s were a golden age for Black public television, because Blackness was centered and separated from the assimilation or the "buffoon" narrative prevalent in network television of the time. Heitner uses community-oriented shows such as *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* and *Say Brother*, to look at how these programs expressed Blackness in a hostile landscape, but also created a space for rebuttal of the dominant cultural narratives that were being created at the time. These shows did this by creating content and programming focused on the Black community and Black issues, such as employment, housing, street action, and African American history and culture.

As a form of memory keeping and historical perspective, Black television news shows offer a glimpse into how scholars and the public can view the Black Power movement and the term "Black Power." When talking about Black Power, scholars can use these programs as primary sources to examine different meanings of power and identity within the Black community and outside of it. Providing a counter-narrative to network news these shows for a predominately Black audience offered and still offer a way to look at the different aspects of Black Power and Black Revolution and how the public remembers them.

By the end of the 1960s, a plethora of Black-themed public access television shows began to broadcast in many areas of the United States. These shows were both local and national and offered a visual media landscape in which the Black community could have conversations about Black Power, Black Revolution, Black culture, and Black identity. Shows such as *Black Journal/Tony Brown's Journal* (1968-), *Black Perspectives on the News* (1974-1979), *Soul!* (1970-1973), *Say Brother America's Black Forum* (1989-2003), *Black Omnibus* (1972-73)

hosted by James Earl Jones, and *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* (1968-1970) offered political and cultural commentary from a Black perspective. In September 1969, just a year after *Black Journal*, *Talking Black*, and *Say Brother* premiered, *Ebony* magazine produced an editorial “Black TV: Its Problems and Promises,” which examined the rise of Black-focused and Black-created public access television and what that meant for the Black community. Although the writer argued that Black television may have the problem of not being truly authentic, Gil Maddox and Bill Greaves of *Detroit's' Colored People Time* disagreed with this assessment, stating, “We don’t seek to duplicate the white images and styles. We seek to do our own thing.”² Bill Greaves argued “When we say, Dig that dude rapping on the boss, foxy broad, and don’t stop to translate what we said, that’s black programming.”³

In its May 1973 issue, *Ebony* magazine featured one of its many editorials on Black depiction in film and television. “*What Can Blacks Do About TV*” examined the increase of Black faces on television but noted that this did not translate to positive portrayals of black life and experience in television. Television was failing to educate, influence, or communicate to Black America positive images of realistic black experiences or black history.⁴ Agreeing with the editorial, a reader wrote in August of 1973, “I’m glad to know that I’m not the only one concerned with the negative black image that is appearing more and more on TV.”⁵

²“Black TV Its Problems and Promises,” *Ebony*, September 1969, 88-94.

³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴ “What Can Blacks do About TV?,” *Ebony*, May 1973, 165.

⁵ “What Can Blacks Do about Tv Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony* August 1973, 21.



BLACK TV ITS PROBLEMS AND PROMISES



Mrs. Audrey Harvey (left), black hostess of Schenectady's *Black Telethon*, interviews visiting foreign students about racial relations in their own countries, while Matt Robinson (right), host and producer of Philadelphia's *Black Book* TV show, interviews guests before predominantly black audience in the studio of TV station WFIL.

Figure 9. Black Tv Its Problems and Promises *Ebony*, September 1969

Soul! Say, Brother! Colored Peoples Time (later renamed *Black Journal*), *Black Omnibus*, and *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* depicted Black Power, and Black identity as something dynamic and encompassing numerous aspects. The term “Black Power” carries with it historical, cultural, political, economic, and social currency, and these shows attempted to depict all of these aspects of Black Power. Produced, written, directed, hosted, and staffed by African Americans, these shows can be used to examine different conversations held within the Black community as even locally focused programs were broadcast nationally.

Colored Peoples Time, which went on air in 1968, intended to focus on the visibility of the Black community and positive media relating to the Black experience. Hoping to engage Detroit citizens, the show documented over thirty years of local Black history, including a mixture of community awareness and national politics. The format included interviews, music, panel discussions, and short segments titled “Free Your Mind.” In 1969, the show featured a special segment titled “The Making of a Rioter” that explored the various causes of the Detroit riots in July 1967. Featuring interviews with students, faculty, and members of the Black Student Association from Northeastern High School in Detroit, the show examined inadequate school conditions as one cause of the riots. The students stressed that the rioting was not just caused by lack of job opportunities but rather systemic institutional racism within the school system. Lack of proper educational structure due to under-funded city schools meant that Black students were not prepared to enter college or the workforce and attain better jobs, they explained. This, in turn, led to a perpetual cycle of oppression for many Black youths in the city.⁶

⁶ “The Making of a Rioter,” *Colored Peoples Time*, Episode 10, September 6 1969.

Conversations about systematic institutional racism were also held on shows such as *Say Brother*. In the January 1975 episode, Boston field marshal for the Black Panther Party, Chico Neblett, argued for a unified force against institutional racism. Neblett explained that although legislation existed to protect the Black community, there still were no measures taken to break down public and private institutions that still upheld racism.⁷ Across the United States, African American citizens still faced employment and housing discrimination, and poor educational systems, while dealing with rising cost of living and urban renewal, which was displacing large parts of the Black community. This particular episode of the show discussed ways the African American community could force the federal government to live up to its promise. If the government failed, then the African American community would have to create its own spaces in which to uplift and care for each other.

Like *Colored Peoples' Time* and *For Blacks Only*, *Say Brother* created a space to examine Black Power through highlighting grassroots organizations and opening a forum for local activists to discuss community issues and provide solutions. With a youthful host, the staff of *Say Brother* at WGBH in Boston wanted to create the show as a call-to-action for the Black community. Episodes included dance segments, and discussion segments that focused on community activism and local issues such as busing and educational disparities. The original director, Stan Lathan, felt that with a young Black staff *Say Brother* had free reign in its first year to create a show about Black Power and community.⁸

⁷ "Say Brother; New Music; Blast from the Past with Chico Neblett," *Say Brother*, January 9, 1975, WGBH Media Library & Archives, accessed May 23, 2018, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_ECDA92772C3A44D2B1D3AC5E651318F9.

⁸ Stan Lathan 2005 Interview with Devorah Heitner, Devorah Heitner, *Black Power Tv* (Durham: Duke University Press 2013)."80.

Not all of the program's early episodes survived but episode seven can be studied. It highlighted the show's intent to document the political and cultural transitions of the late 1960s, including Black Power. The episode featured a variety format, part musical showcase, part talk show. Its opening theme song, "Say Brother," created by the jazz band Stark Reality, stated in no uncertain terms that the show positioned itself within activism and Black Power: "I'm shouting loud and clear. I'm feeling proud, you hear. Black is beautiful you know. The waiting years are gone. It's time to run along. Black Power's what we're talking 'bout. Say, Brother! The Black man sings a soulful song. He sings for freedom loud and strong. Cause freedom's beautiful you know...you know. You're looking outa site. Your natural looks are tight. Black is beautiful you know. Say, Brother!"⁹ As Heiter argued, this song reflects the transition in African American politics from civil rights to new militancy.¹⁰ Indeed, shows like *Say Brother*, *Soul!*, and *Colored Peoples' Time* created a space for conversations about Black Power and activism in the community that spoke to and gave voice to the frustrations of many who felt that the legislation passed in the 1950s and 1960s was not enough.

In terms of reexamining Black Power and its meaning these programs sought to explore not only what Black Power meant to the community, but also what actions should be taken. As community-based shows with an agenda to rewrite the Black Power narrative, these programs made a point to examine Black Power on college and university campuses. The January 1969 episode 24 of *Say Brother*, "Black Power on University Campuses," went directly to young students to examine Black Power. The program covered the student takeover of the Brandeis University administration building, Ford Hall. The crew followed and interviewed the students

⁹ Stark Reality "Say Brother opening Theme Song," *Say Brother*, 1968.

¹⁰ Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV*, (Durham: Duke University Press) 63.

for two days to capture each moment of their demonstration. The first half of the segment featured the students' take over and the enumeration of their demands. The second half covered a panel discussion with students about Black Power on university campuses. The students demanded more classes that would challenge the Eurocentric narrative of history. For these students, power came in the form of education and knowledge of one's history.¹¹ This episode delved into how Black students understood the term "Black Power" and liberation; to them, it meant freedom of access, and a right to learn about one's history in a stable and encouraging environment. As one panelist stated that protest on campus symbolized a demand by black men and women to gain power in an environment that influenced their lives.¹²

In May 1979, *Say Brother* once again focused on the creation of African-American studies education and student protest. The episode "Role of Students in the Creation of African American Studies Program" examined the status of African American heritage programs in the Boston area, including Harvard University, Northeastern University, and Boston University, and explored why students were pushing for them in these major institutions. This episode finds that black students were essentially attempting to create a place of power and reclaim their own community's narratives in white spaces.¹³ This episode speaks to how different segments of the

¹¹ Much like historian Martha Biondi's *The Black Revolution on Campus*, episodes such as this one on *Say Brother* filled a gap in the history of Black students during the Black Freedom Struggle. *The Black Revolution on Campus* accounts the black freedom struggle in the late 1960s and early 1970s, of Black college and university students and their protest. Black students demanded, and sought reform on public university campuses, demanding they be more involved in the community, change in curriculum, and mission. Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹² The Say Brother Collection, WGHM Media Archives and Preservation Center, "Say Brother Black Power on University Campuses," Program 24, *Say Brother* January 16, 1969.

¹³ The Say Brother Collection, WGHM Media Archives and Preservation Center, "Say Brother; Afro-Studies: Why So Many Barriers? Role of students in the creation African American Studies Programs," Program 917, *Say Brother* May, 11, 1979.

Black community sought to attain power and how they interpreted the meaning of Black Power and liberation.

The fact that many of these shows are focused in the Northeast, Midwest, and West Coast presents a unique perspective in reexamining the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power narrative. It was not just a southern narrative and there were not just a few racist souls to convert; rather the programs wanted to force the public to realize the institutionalized, systemic nature of racism that minority communities were facing even after government legislation was passed.

As spaces where the Black community could discuss Black Power and Black liberation in nuanced ways, these shows had segments that pushed for community action and involvement that would create power and agency. *Say, Brother, Soul! Colored Peoples Time*, *Black Journal*, *Our People*, and *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* offered conversations about Black Power without the interference of dominant white hegemonic discourse. Essentially, as community-centered programs, these shows gave power back to the people by allowing them to have a visual space to talk about the Black experience from different parts of the country.

Segments such as “Speak Out” on *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* focused on Black community members and professionals as experts on topics that concerned the African-American community. Using Black hosts and African American experts in topics such as education, the economy, and housing allowed the show and the community to have agency and control over the narrative. In one 1968 episode of *Inside Bedford Stuyvesant*, host Jim Lowry introduced Mr. Thomas by not only stating that he was an art teacher, but by mentioning his degree. Mr. Von King was not just a contractor, but a member of the School Board and Former PTA member. Mrs. Lee Brown and Mrs. Hortense Beveret were introduced as active and involved members of

the community who knew its history.¹⁴ Going beyond professions, Jim Lowry used these introductions to validate the guests' knowledge, education, and community involvement, thus positioning them as authorities on the Black experience.

Another 1968 episode of *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant* episode featuring Harry Belafonte offered a space in the "Speak Out" segment to give power and agency to the Black community by presenting an image of Black youth that was contrary to the stereotypical negative images in news media. In the episode, Harry Belafonte talked to members of the Bed-Stuy community in a local Brooklyn park. Taking questions from the community, the members of Boys High School conducted the interview, where they discussed the representation of Blacks in the media, poverty, education, and politics affecting the Black community. Harry Belafonte and the interviewer debated how the program could effectively serve the Black community. Both agreed that the program should serve as a means for the Black community to hold a conversation with itself and with the nation at large. Though Belafonte applauded the efforts of the show, he insisted that the show must be given more funding to more effectively serve the Black community.¹⁵

What can be concluded from these public access programs is how Black Power is linked to how the Black community perceived self through media. The community did not want to see themselves through white journalism or white commentary but through how Black journalists and Black commentators viewed the world. Harry Belafonte was specifically speaking of white journalists such as Jack Newfield of *Life* magazine, who sensationalized inner city areas such as

¹⁴ Inside-Bedford-Stuyvesant, Community Forum, 1968.

<https://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileblack/uncategorized/harry-belafonte-on-inside-bed-stuy-1968/>

¹⁵ Harry Belafonte Interview Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant 1968, Broadcasting While Black Thirteen Media with Impact <https://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileblack/uncategorized/harry-belafonte-on-inside-bed-stuy-1968/>

Bedford-Stuyvesant. Newfield and other white news outlets created images of violent youth, poverty, and decay.¹⁶ Though these white liberal journalists felt they were helping the community by shining a light on these issues, they failed to fully examine the causes that led to them because they could not interpret how decades of systematic racism and oppression from various sections could lead to such conditions.

Belafonte asserted that when Black Americans appeared on television, their depictions are always negative or mythical characters stemming from white perceptions of Blackness.¹⁷ These depictions asked the Black community to assimilate and accept a European hegemonic standard of beauty, and culture while at the same time reinforcing negative stereotypical depictions of the Black community. However, by creating space for self-determination Black centered public access programs gave the Black community a forum in which to reject these depictions and create their own ideas of Blackness and Americanism.

In the 1968 interview of seniors from Boys High School they discussed college plans and what they planned to do for the community in terms of uplift after they returned from Harvard.¹⁸ They were not rebellious hoodlums, nor were they stricken by urban poverty. They were young men who, while not rich, expressed the struggles they were having with urban policy, but still wanted to push forward and attain the American dream.

Like *Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant*, *Say Brother* episodes sought to create alternative narratives about the Black community that would ensure Black community control over its own narrative and identity. The August 1970, program 63 of *Say Brother*, “New Bedford,” focused on

¹⁶ Harry Belafonte Interview, Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant, 1968, Broadcasting While Black Thirteen Media with Impact <https://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileblack/uncategorized/harry-belafonte-on-inside-bed-stuy-1968>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the African-American community in New Bedford, Massachusetts and its response to issues that led to a riot in early July of the same year. The 90-minute episode sought to take the narrative out of the hands of white media, which only focused on incidents of violence, and examined the deeper social, cultural, and economic issues that led to the rebellion. The segment opened with host Ray Richardson calling out the white media for focusing on “incidents” of the uprising and not exploring the roots of the issues. Richards observed, “We all know how it sounded—Black folks have gone wild again, you know like we do every summer?”¹⁹ On July 16, the *Sedalia Kentucky Democrat* headline read “New Bedford Riot Senseless,” and the story called protesters “hotheads” and “agitators.”²⁰ News outlets such as these did not bother to focus on the many issues that caused the riots, or on the aftermath in the African American community.

In contrast, the staff and producers of *Say Brother* spent six days in New Bedford determined to get the Black perspective. The program thus was full of critiques and first-hand interviews on social, racial, economic, and political issues faced by the Black community in New Bedford. While mainstream white-helmed newspapers described it as a rebellion and linked it to negative connotations associated with Black Power, the producers at *Say Brother* sought to create a different narrative. Though the episode was unedited and had profanity it still aired giving viewers giving straightforward perspectives from Black residents on the cause of the riots, including police brutality, unemployment, discrimination, the welfare system, and housing.²¹ Men, women, and youth gathered around the *Say Brother* crew to relate their perspectives and share stories of discrimination in housing and employment. Men spoke of not being able to find

¹⁹ New Bedford Say Brother!, Episode 63. July 23, 1970 The Say Brother Collection.

http://main.wgbh.org/saybrother/programs/sb_0063.html.6

²⁰ Tiede Tom, “New Bedford Riot Was Senseless,” *The Sedalia Democrat*, July 26, 1970

²¹ New Bedford Say Brother! Episode 63, July 23 1970 The Say Brother Collection

http://main.wgbh.org/saybrother/programs/sb_0063.html

jobs in their trade because of discrimination. One man described being trained for a trade that is even classified in the handbook of the Department of Employment Security. However, instead of being offered a job that fit his qualifications when he sought employment, state officials marked him as a common laborer.²² Women complained of discrimination in employment as well at the welfare office. One woman spoke about the hypocrisy of state officials wanting her to get a job yet not offering a way for her to afford childcare to be able to further her education or work outside of the home. The children interviewed complained about liberal social programs that did the bare minimum to help them gain access to better resources. Though there were job programs and training, they did not offer job placement. Although housing programs existed adequate housing was not provided with residents living in rough conditions.²³

The “New Bedford” episode gave the power of narrative and experience to the Black community by going to them directly for their stories. Offering the community control of its own narrative, the episode also highlighted racism and discrimination within that same system meant to support the community. Shortly after the program aired in its original entirety with the profanity left in and against the wishes of WGHB, WGHB fired lead host Ray Richardson and the show was almost canceled for its use of profanity.

Much like Stockley Carmichael had stated in his 1965 interview with *Ebony*, Black Power came from the community working together, and Black public access television shows were a way to document that. *Soul!* created a space in which Black performers, artists, and public figures could discuss current affairs and all things related to Black culture. When discussing Black Power, it is important to understand that it was not just about attaining economic, and

²² “New Bedford” Say Brother! Episode 63, July 23, 1970, The Say Brother Collection
http://main.wgbh.org/saybrother/programs/sb_0063.html

²³ Ibid.

political power, but also the power of narrative, identity, and culture. *Soul!*, *Black Omnibus*, and *For You Black Woman* are three shows that provided spaces for that type of power. Offering thoughtful and in-depth dialogue on black liberation these shows also created a space for artists and performers of the Black Arts Movement to discuss gender, sexuality, the black family, and Black women's liberation. Drawing influence from the Harlem Renaissance ,the Black Arts Movement consisted of a combination of artist, musicians, writers' poets, who used their art form to examine issues within the Black community, explore Black identity and create Black narratives.

Spanning from 1960-1975 the Black Arts Movement was short yet left a lasting impact on the state of black literature, culture and identity that called for self-determination and agency. Sometimes referenced as the artistic sister of the Black Power Movement the Black Arts Movement sought to build upon the tenants of cultural nationalism and serve as literary and artist memory keepers and expression of Black identity. Though prominent scholars such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. have deemed it the “shortest and least successful movement in African American cultural history” the Black Arts Movement shaped Black cultural thought and creation of identity and historical narrative.²⁴

In January 1969, the front cover of *Ebony* featured a dark-skinned Black woman in a gold blouse overlaid by a white vest with white pants. Staring out at the viewer, she was draped in gold jewelry and her hair is in a naturally curled afro. The headlines said: “What Blacks Can Expect from Nixon,” “Are Black Americans Welcome to Africa?” “My First Year in Office—Mayor Carl B. Stokes, Mayor Richard G. Hatcher,” and “The Natural Look—Is it Here to

²⁴“Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge,” *Time* October 10, 1994, 20.

Stay?”²⁵ Just a year earlier, in 1968, Kathleen Cleaver was asked about embracing the “Black is beautiful” aesthetic. That same year, James Brown released the hit “Say It Loud. I’m Black, and I’m Proud.”²⁶ If Black Power meant more than just political and economic power, what else did it mean? For many in the Black community, the terms began to encompass other movements, and power and revolution came to mean various things. Who had power, how to attain it, where it came from, and how to wield it were questions explored within various forms of Black-produced material culture.

The terms “power” and “revolution” overlapped the most when it came to the power of identity, narrative, and gender. While the Black community as a whole was having a conversation about the political meaning of power and liberation, there were other nuanced conversations about power in different sectors of the Black community. In particular how would Black women attain power and liberation, and what that would look like, began to be a conversation during this time.²⁷

²⁵ *Ebony* January 1969, Google Books

²⁶ James Brown “Say It Loud” King Records, 1968.

²⁷ Within the historiography of the Civil Rights Movement, there has been a push toward exploring the lives of women leaders. These studies focus on Black women in the Black Freedom Struggle. *Davis W. Houck, David E. Dixon, ed, Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), Viki L Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, Barbara Woods Broadus Butler, Marymal Dryden Melissa Walker, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*,(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Bettye Collier-Thomas, Vincent P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*,(New York: New York University Press,2011); Ella, L.J. Edmonson Bell, Stella M. Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*(Boston: Harvard Business School, 2003); Faith S. Holsaert, Martha, Prescod Norman Noonan, Judy Richardson, Betty Garman Robinson, Jean Smith Young, Dorothy M. Zellner ed. *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*,(University of Illinois Press, 2012).



Figure 10. Cover of Ebony, January 1969

By the late 1960s, the Black aesthetic was changing in America as the Black Arts Movement and Black Power Movement were taking shape and African Americans were moving into a new phase of the long Civil Rights Movement. This phase of the movement shone a light on economic disparities and race relations in the United States as the narrative shifted from dismantling the legal structures of Jim Crow to issues of labor, feminism, the Vietnam War, the urban crisis, economic issues in the Black community, and the mobilization of the “silent majority” and the “New Right.” In August 1969, *Ebony* developed a special issue around the theme of “Black Revolution.”²⁸ Articles such as “Unity of Blackness,” “How Black is Black?” and “Revolution in Sound,” examine ideas of Black identity and social and political changes impacting the African-American community at the end of the 1960s that would carry over into the new decade. After such monumental triumphs in the 1960s, Black Americans found themselves dealing with the same institutional racism that was systematic and embedded in all aspects of American life and culture, not just politics. Combating this would require creating a narrative that focused on the Black experience specifically creating a sphere of conversation for Black Americans to examine Black history and identity free from the imperialist narrative so embedded in American culture.

The dominant culture grounded in imperialist thought and action not only enabled the ubiquitous and pervasive use of negative African-American stereotypes in all aspects of American culture, but reinforced negative historical and cultural narratives that lead to imaged memory and history, thus becoming part of the systematically oppressive system that Black Americans saw as the next battle for liberation. Artists and performers of the Black Arts Movement were not the first to attempt to correct this cultural narrative. The image of the

²⁸ “The Black Revolution,” *Ebony*, August 1969.

mammy, sambo, and picaninny permeated advertisements of consumer products and were featured in American cultural production.

The Black Arts Movement left a lasting impact on the state of Black Literature, culture, and identity that called for self-determination and agency. It sought to build upon the tenants of cultural nationalism and serve as a literary and artist memory keeper for Black identity. Artists and performers of the Black Arts Movement focused largely on African American identity and power through novels, poetry, artwork, and journals that specifically focused on the Black experience. These artists were able to find a platform in both print media and on public access television.

Soul! Black Omnibus, *For You Black Woman*, *Colored Peoples Time*, and *Black Journal* found themselves as platforms for the Black Arts Movement and Women's Liberation Movement. For some, Black power came to mean love of and acceptance of Black identity and culture. This meant throwing off the boundaries of what was considered acceptable aesthetically and embracing the Black aesthetic. Across the country, the Black community chimed in about what it meant to be Black and what Black identity was, and they readily gave their answers in print media, television, and through the arts and music.

Although the official host of *Soul!* was Ellis Haizlip, poet and writer Nikki Giovanni was often a guest host for both *Soul!* and *Black Journal*, with segments on black women's liberation, sexuality, and the Black family. A special 1970 segment of *Black Journal* featured a panel discussion with Nikki Giovanni, actress and singer Lena Horne, Johan Harris, Vertamae Grosvenor, Martha Davis, Marian Watson, and Amina Baraka on Black women's liberation and

identity. The release of the Moynihan Report particularly angered many in the movement.²⁹ In the program the panelists discussed the role of the Black women in and outside of the home and in creating and supporting Black identity and culture. Public access television also created space for Black women to have conversations about how they could gain and wield power in the Black community. When looking at the term Black Power and discussing Black liberation, researchers and.

For example, in March 1971 *Ebony* created a special issue examining Black Women's Liberation. The issue, much like the public access segment, examined the role of Black women in both the Black revolution and in the Women's Liberation Movement. The article, as well as the special *Black Journal* episode, presents three different viewpoints on Black Women's Liberation. Actress-educator Amina Baraka saw the Women's Liberation Movement as a distraction, while Aileen Hernandez, the president of National Organization of Women, argued that Black people cannot be free until women are free, and the writer presented the narrative of Black women trying to find a balance between restructuring their identity and their place within the feminist movement while supporting black men.³⁰ In an interview for the article, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm pointed out that Black women do not see themselves as part of the Women's Liberation Movement because they consider it "a white middle-class thing."³¹ Because Black women have always been in the workforce and were often heads of households, they were at once fighting for equality outside of the Black community and inside it as well,

²⁹ *The Moynihan Report: The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, was completed in March of 1965 and released August of 1965. Though the report did address the economic difficulties of African Americans launched debates within the community as it focus on racial inequality was farmed within the structure of the African American family. Moynihan's report featured two pieces 1. The prevalence of cultural norms such as dependency on government, family organizational structure and crime as the legacy of slavery. 2. That unemployed Black deemed them undesirable for marriage and thus led to single, woman headed households.

³⁰ Helen K. King, "The Black Woman and Women's Lib," *Ebony* March 1971,68-75.

³¹ *Ibid.*,74.

while at the same time supporting black community issues. While the article did present three different sides of the issue and how Black women feel about Women's Liberation, it was clear that Helen H. King, the author of the article felt that the women's liberation movement was not meant for Black women. King suggested that black women should support Black men first and foremost.

Ebony continued the conversation around Black women and Black Power throughout various issues during the 1970s. The July 1973 issue, for example contained an op-ed piece by Alemana Lomax that examined Black women's place in the Women's Liberation Movement and within the Black Power Movement. After interviewing more than 15 Black women, Lomax's article concluded that Black women's relationship to both movements was complex due to historical injustice and racism within the American system. As one woman stated, "I don't need an organization to tell me I'm equal to this man because we've always been liberated because we've always had to take the lead. They wouldn't let our men."³² Other women felt Black women should support Black men in the quest for Black Power and for Black men in particular to gain power. Doing so would allow them to give power and recognition to Black women that had been denied to them by the white world. *Ebony* received a plethora of responses from readers about their thoughts on the special issue and Black women's role in the Women's Liberation Movement. These letters to the editor, as well as the special segments of *Black Journal* and *Soul!*, demonstrate how print media, and other forms of popular culture created a different conversation about Black Power and liberation that centered around Black women. Finding the 1971 article dismissive, some readers disagreed with various parts of the author's conclusion. Although they felt that the Women's Liberation Movement often did shut Black

³² Alemana Lomax, "Women's Lib Reductio Ad Absurdum," *Ebony*, July 1973, 122-140.

women out, Mary Kenyatta from Chester, Pennsylvania stated that if Black women do not find their own identity, their new role will be that of submission, obedience, and remaining in the background. She concluded “It is not enough that black men be free—black women cannot afford to wait till ‘after the revolution’ to deal with our oppression as women.”³³

Feeling as though King’s article only presented two opposing sides—pro-black or anti-woman—Sharon Smith wrote, “Why does a black woman have to be anti-woman to be pro-black?” She asserted that she thought the article only presented these views because men were afraid that if Black women pursue true equality, they would not have time to raise babies. “I think the reason male run magazines such as *Ebony* are so strongly against the women’s movement is summed up in your quote from Ashley Montague about women taking care of babies: Any interference with this is very dangerous.” Similar to other readers who wrote in, Smith believed that Black women should both embrace their Black identity and gender in order to truly bring equality to the world. “Remember how white men don’t want black men to get jobs because they are scared of the competition. Now black men and white men have united in a common cause to make women opt out of the job market because they are scared of our competition. Just how weak and tender is the poor little man that his male pride requires you to devote your life to making him succeed.”³⁴

In the special *Black Journal* segment from 1970, the women of the panel have their various opinion on the Black woman's a place in the revolution and Black Power. While Vertamae Grosvenor argued that it was up to the Black woman to walk behind the Black man in order for him to lead the Black revolution, host Joan Harris questioned how revolutionary that

³³ “Letters to the Editor, Women’s Liberation,” *Ebony*, May 1971, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid*,22.

could be and whether that was truly giving the Black community power.³⁵ *Soul!* also produced special episodes that specifically focused on gender and black women's relationship to black nationalism and Black Power. The "Salute to the Sisters" episode of 1971 featured female artists, historians, poets, and actors. Black women read poems that specifically spoke to the Black woman's experience and examined their role in Black nationalism, the Black revolution, and their power and gender.

While some readers felt that Black women should take part in the Women's Liberation Movement, others agreed that black women should put Black men and race first and foremost. Mrs. C.D. Haynes wrote, for example, "I feel this feminist activity is most definitely aimed at decreasing the emphasis on the Black Power Movement."³⁶ Mary Bryant from Wyandanch, N.Y. wrote, "I agree with the Black women who said that we should stay close to our black men." Marie Harris argued, "I think Women's Lib is just a step in castrating our men by putting the Queen of Spades in position to beat the King of Spades. How can the black woman feel that she is free if her man is not?"³⁷

While Black women were having conversations in different spaces about their role in the revolution and what Black Power meant to these spaces, print media and television also offered them a way to gain power by rewriting the narrative of beauty and femininity. These conversations and examinations took place not only in national print media but also local media and on college campuses as well. At the Tennessee State University newspaper, *The Meter* students were asked how they felt about the new Black aesthetic and what it meant. *The Meter*, in 1969, included an article titled "Naturally Yours," featuring photos of black women with

³⁵ "The Black Woman," Episode 4, *The Black Journal* 1970.

³⁶ "Letter to the Editor," *Ebony*, October 1973, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 19.

natural hairstyles. The article stated, “On campuses across the nation students are revolting against the social structures of America. They are demanding that Black History be taught in the colleges and universities in order to gain better insight into the past and their culture. Along with these demands, they are seeking Black Identity on their own”³⁸ The last part of that statement “seeking Black identity on their own is telling and useful to the examination of Black identity. Here we have students talking directly to their peers about Black identity.

The article goes deeper to interview different women on the Tennessee State University campus to ask why they went natural, what wearing a natural hairstyle means to them, and how it represents power and pride. Student Harry Williams said, “I think that the trend to wear an Afro now among Afro-Americans is reflecting a long-needed reform among people who have so long been taught that the only things beautiful and right are the things the white man saw as beautiful and right. I would like to see more.”³⁹

Freshman Eleanor Leonard said, “I went because it wasn’t a fad for me it was a way of expressing my own self directly.” Junior Gloria Wood said, “It gives you a new outlook on life. It seems that Black men respect us more. They approach you with ‘sister’ instead of ‘Hey Baby.’ It makes you feel Black, and when you feel Black, you feel good.”⁴⁰ These views of Blackness and Black identity as pride and resistance were also expressed on television shows such as *Colored Peoples Time*, featured in satirical sketches titled “Public Service Announcements” that examined Black identity. Other than focusing on political and economic concerns in the Black

³⁸ “Naturally Yours,” *The Meter* 17 (No. 4 1969), 2-6. Tennessee State University

³⁹ Ibid, 4

⁴⁰ Ibid. 3

community, an objective of shows such as *Colored Peoples Time* was to provide a counter-narrative to the negative stereotypical images of Black people in popular culture.

One such public service announcement titled “Free Your Mind” tackled the use of skin whitening creams. The short segment featured a young black woman sitting in front of a mirror with a large jar of skin whitening cream when a chorus of voices echo in the background “black don’t rub off.”⁴¹ Much like writers of the Black Arts Movement, who expressed appreciation for the Black aesthetic and Black culture, Audre Lorde’s 1974 poem “Naturally,” first published in *New York Head Shop and Museum*, spoke to the aspects of power found in the beauty of Black women and the rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards. “Since Naturally Black is Naturally Beautiful I must be Proud, And Naturally Black and Beautiful,” she wrote.⁴²

Writers like Audre Lorde and Black public access television explored Black Power through Black aesthetics and culture. Ethelbert Miller understood the Black Arts Movement as a form of power because the artist was putting narrative and identity back into the hands of the Black community. Creating positive images and narratives of memory and history that were counter to Eurocentric ones gave the Black community a tool to create their own powerful narratives⁴³

The Black Arts Movement, along with *Soul! For You, Black Women*, and *Colored Peoples Time*, pushed for reconstruction of black identity and historical narratives that placed

⁴¹ Colored Peoples Time Episode 5, “Free Your Mind,” Public Service Announcement Skin Lighting Cream, November 14 1968, American Black Journal Documenting Detroit & American History from African-American Perspectives Digital Archive <http://matrix.msu.edu/~abj/videofull.php?id=29-DF-25>

⁴² Bracey, John H., Sonia Sanchez, and James Smethurst, eds. “SOS -- *Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reade.*” (BOSTON: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk2mr>.

⁴³ The Black Arts Movement: The Aesthetics of Black Power: An Oral History with E. Ethelbert Miller Oral history interview with E. Ethelbert Miller by St. Andrew's Episcopal School student Mona Rai. In this interview Miller presents the turbulent times and themes of the Black Arts Movement from the perspective of a student at Howard University at the peak of this cultural movement. Dreyfuss Library, St. Andrew's Episcopal School.

power in the hands of the Black community. Although during the 1970s there were movies and television shows that attempted to recreate the Black identity white men either produced or wrote them. Often lacking in complexity, these characters offered the audience a glimpse of either the magical negro, the brute, oversexualized or desexualized images of Black women, or troublesome inner-city youth.

In a *Soul!* special episode, “Salute to the Sisters,” the focus of the show was not only on examining black power nationalism and black women but also exploring ideas of beauty and putting the power of identity in the hands of black women. *Soul!* also did this with its episode that featured Cicely Tyson where she talked about her role in *Sunder*. During the episode Tyson critiqued the media on their portrayal of Black women and urged Black women to take control of their identity because there is power in it. Tyson talked at length about her hair and her choice of beauty aesthetics. Going in-depth about her choice to go natural, Tyson took pride in it and saw it as way to decide for herself what was beautiful and what should be her beauty standard. As Devorah Heitner argues, *Soul!* provided a space to demonstrate a range of approaches to personal aesthetic expression as a part of Black liberation.⁴⁴

Creating a space in television conversation that centered on the Black experience, was not only expectational because of the content, but also because many of these programs featured Black writers, producers hosts, and guests who inserted the Black narrative and experience into the dialogue. Though many episodes from a number of these shows are lost enough survive from these programs that one can be able to examine the themes, of liberation, womanhood, Black identity, and power. In 1969 not long after the premier of *Soul!* the show was threatened with

⁴⁴ Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV*, (Durham: Duke University Press) 44.

cancelation and viewers wrote in support of the program. Norman Catlett wrote: “All the training schools of Orange County dig your show. We use it as an incentive and educational outlet for our boys.”⁴⁵ Bryan Y. Thrasher agreed with the educational merits of the show stating “I am now looking at a very enlightening show, both educational and entertaining. I am now listening to Leroi Jones and it sounds good. It is wonderful to hear my people express themselves in many ways.”⁴⁶ These shows connected with viewers as positive, and educational spaces in which to express frustrations and have conversations about the next steps for the Black community. Thus, they served as forms primary resource materials that should be used when reexamining the meaning of Black Power and the goals of the Black community.

⁴⁵ Norman R. Catlett, “Letter written in support of Soul! Television Show” May 2, 1969, The Thirteen Media With Impact, Soul! Digital Archive, <https://www.thirteen.org/program-content/letters-written-support-soul-1969-73/>.

⁴⁶ Bryan Y. Thrasher, “Letter written in support of Soul! Television show” May 1, 1969, Thirteen Media With Impact, Soul! Digital Archive. <https://www.thirteen.org/program-content/letters-written-support-soul-1969-73/>.

Chapter V

Memory Identity and Power in Visual Media. Teaching with Graphic Novels

A symbiotic relationship exists between popular culture and American historical memory and identity. Popular cultural productions on their own do not teach history but serve as a memory keeper of historical narrative, and a means to insert histories into larger cultural narratives. Visual media such as movies, television, and graphic novels create spaces for historical memory and narrative which reinforces public assumptions about history. The films *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939) were cinematic attempts to center the historical narrative around southern myths of the Lost Cause and racism about both the war and Reconstruction. Both fed ideological and racist assumptions in the dominant culture: (1) by creating negative stereotypical images of African Americans that reinforced and condoned racism; (2) by perpetuating images of the jezebel, mammy, dangerous brute, or happy hapless servant; (3) by reinforcing the idea of white honor and protecting white womanhood; and (4) by reinforcing the historical narrative of white men's God given privilege to control what America meant, which meant oppression of African American equal rights and access to economic and social opportunity.

Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) instantly understood how these dominant cultural productions could rewrite and marginalize in the present African American life and opportunity. The NAACP conducted several campaigns against the movie *Birth of a Nation* knowing the movie would create negative caricatures of African Americans and inaccurately portray the actual history of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Branches across the United States from California, New York, and Ohio led

efforts to rebuke the film stating, asserting that the film was “a public nuisance and without doubt tends to stir race strife and race hatred.”¹ The NAACP California Branch rightfully feared that the movie would (1) revive differences between the North and the South which led to the Civil War; (2) belittle the cause of the North and glorify the deeds and cause of the South, justifying its racial violence; and (3) reinforce negative stereotypes thus justifying enslavement and mistreatment of African Americans.²

This study is hardly the first to explore the impact of cinema on African American life but it turns from this rather known story to explore one that is not so well known, that of the impact of graphic novels. These cultural productions can be used to explore different aspects of the Black Freedom Struggle and also sometimes serve as subversive means of resisting popular historical narratives that filter out aspects of American history. While the previous chapters have examined the different ways, the African American community has had conversations about Black Power and created spaces for those conversations, this chapter will focus on the creation of historical narrative through popular culture and how forms of popular culture such as graphic novels can be used to have new conversations about these narratives. As examined in previous chapters the Black Freedom struggle can be analyzed through various cultural media forms. Thus, the Black Freedom struggle in its various phases can also be examined through visual media including graphic novels, television, and movies.

¹ Documents relating to NAACP reaction to and protest of *Birth of a Nation*, opinions of censorship boards, and NAACP protest campaign, Jan 01 – April 30, 1915, Papers of the NAACP, Part 11: Special Subject Files, 1912-1939, Library of Congress; Reactions to *Birth of a Nation*, Jan 01, 1915 - Dec 31, 1918, Papers of the NAACP, Part 16: Board of Directors, Correspondence and Committee Materials, Series A : 1919-1939. Group I, Series A , Board of Directors File, Correspondence, Library of Congress.

² Black caricatures in *Birth of a Nation* and NAACP censorship efforts. Jan 01, 1915 - Feb 28, 1915 Papers of the NAACP, Part 11: Special Subject Files, 1912-1939, Series A : Africa through Garvey, Marcus Group I, Series C, Administrative File, Subject File, Library of Congress.

The use of graphic novels and comics as a means of teaching and examining the Black experience and historical narrative, while not new, is still in development. Many studies that explore the use of graphic novels as teaching tools more often tend to focus on characters and narratives that reinforce already established historical narrative or explore how this medium examines ideas of Americanism. However, they often leave out the minority experience. Examining graphic novels can help reinsert the African American experience into a popular historical narrative.

Comic books and graphic novels have long held a place in popular culture. Primarily marketed to children and adolescents, consumers of comics range in age. The subject matter of the medium is often far more serious than many imagine, which makes comics important in the dialogue about the impact of popular culture. As artifacts of ideas, ideology, social debates and political issues, comic books and graphic novels offer a different avenue in which to explore history memory, identity and cultural, and social ideology. This chapter will use the framework and study of different scholars who have explored the use of graphic novels and comic books to examine ideas of perspective and narrative. Using the theory of focalization and ocularization, two visual techniques of narrative perspective, this chapter will examine how perspective of narrative and use of frames create a space in which the reader can experience the narrative. Focalization in narrative relies on the relationship between the viewer (focalizer) and the graphic text (which is focalized).

In the introduction of *War Politics and Superheroes: Ethics Propaganda in Comics and Film*, Marc Dipaolo argues that, unlike other forms of media generated for mass consumption, comic books raise more questions and tackle more social and political issues. Since the introduction of Batman in *Detective Comics* in 1939, comic books have used the mythology of

the hero and the fictional universe as representative spaces for the real world. Though political, social and culture issues have changed over Marvel's seventy-five-year existence, some tropes have remained the same. Heroes still fight for justice, they still face moral and ethical dilemmas, and there is always a villain who pushes the hero to question their purpose. As David Reynolds notes in *Superheroes: An Analysis of Popular Cultures Modern Myths*, between World War II and today the tales of superheroes act as legitimizing forces for underlying foundations of society. Superhero tales also help to reinforce cultural institutions in the collective unconscious.³ Graphic novels can also be used a way to disturb the American historical narrative by inserting the Black perspective in two different ears of the historical narrative. As Derek Parker Royal argues, comics are a composite of text made up of words and images and thus have an impact far different from that produced by more traditional modes of narrative such as the such as the short story or novel.⁴

The first three chapters of this study have examined how to look at different material cultural mediums of the late 1960s-1970s to explore the idea of Black Power identity and memory. This chapter reexamines Black Power and the Black Freedom struggle through the use of the graphic novel and comic book. Like *Ebony* magazine and Black public access television shows, graphic novels and comics push the Black cultural narrative to the forefront by focusing

³ Other books on comics and graphic novels: Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes: Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011); Jeffery K. Johnson, *Super-history: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012); Matthew Pustz, *Comic Books and American Cultural History: An Anthology* (New York: Continuum International, 2012); Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Randy Duncan, Matthew J. Smith and Paul Levitz, *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury 2015); Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow Paperback, 1994) ; and, Tim Leong, *Super Graphic: A Visual Guide to the Comic Book Universe* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2013).

⁴ Derek Parker Royal, "Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narratives." *MELUS* 32(#3, 2007): 7.

on ideas of memory, especially popular historical memory. They serve as a subversive means of disrupting the popular historical narrative.

One narrative that the graphic novel can be used to explore is that of the Civil Rights narrative. Before the end of the 1960s the Civil Rights narrative was already being examined and canonized within popular culture. By 1968 television and movies helped form public memory about the Civil Rights Movement and create a narrative of togetherness.

The Black Freedom Struggle was over and by introducing Black faces into popular media television in particular was shaping a new narrative of post-Civil Rights America. Though many of these roles assigned to African Americans were still stereotypical and marred in racism, a handful attempted to change the image of African Americans as a signal that America had moved past that ugly blight in its history. Movies such as *In the Heat of the Night* (1968) and *Look Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) created roles that addressed bigotry, a theme also addressed in early 1970s television shows such as *Julia*, *All in the Family*, and *The Jeffersons*. Movies and television, however, never took a deep dive into systemic institutional racism. By the mid-1970s popular culture had created and cemented popular historical narrative about the Black Freedom struggle that would carry on well into the twenty-first century. Made for television movies focused on the end of the Black Freedom struggle instead of the many ways in which the Black community interpret freedom citizenship, power, and identity.

The rise of graphic novels and comics took a different route. Graphic novels and comic authors used science fiction and fantasy tropes to explore the Black experience and insert that experience and its relationship to the American narrative. This tradition began early. African American writer Martian Delany (1812-1885) published *Blake* as a serial in the *Anglo-American Magazine*. Focusing on the study of science and race the serial used alterative history to explore

race enslavement, revolt and the founding of a new community in Cuba. Having the lead character face issues of race, class and gender Martin R. Delany's serialized story would be considered an authentic representation of a Black lead character.⁵ Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899), and Pauline Hopkins' *One Blood* (1902) also explored ideas, of race power, identity, politics, colorism, classism and the Black experience through science fiction and fantasy. Since these early works, African Americans have continued to produce numerous science fiction and fantasy stories that address issues of race, class, gender, and the lived Black experience even as the graphic novel and comic book format, for the dominant culture, have been spaces where Black people have been depicted in negative racial caricature. However, these same mediums can also serve as a means of resistance and as Derek Parker Royal argues are suitable to dismantle those very assumptions that problematize ethnic representations, especially as they find forms in visual language.⁶

Kindred as well as other graphic novels including *Incognegro*, issues of *Black Panther*, *Harriet Tubman Vampire Killer*, and the *John Lewis March* series reinsert the Black narrative and different themes about the Black experience in American historical narrative. The authors embrace ocularization and focalization as a means to draw the reader into the story and the narrative. The use of focalization is much like the use of the close up in films and television. This technique in graphic novels and comic books allows the reader to feel as if they are going on the journey with the narrator. Thus, as the character is learning and experiencing so is the reader and

⁵ Science Fiction and Fantasy novels that examine the Black Experience include Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1980); Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Warner Books, 1993); Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy or Shadows Uplift* (Chicago: Donnelley Publishing, 2010); Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* (North Charleston, SC: Createspace Independent Publishing, 2013); Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren* (New York: Open Road, 2001), Walter Mosley, *Futureland* (New York: Warner Books Inc. Time Warner Publishing, 2001), and Victor LaValle , *Ballad of Black Tom* (New York: Toom Doherty Associates, 2016)

⁶ Derek Parker Royal, "Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narratives." *MELUS* 32(#3, 2007): 7.

thus the graphic novel is inserting historical narrative and commentary into the mind of the reader and adding historical memory.

If looking at the Civil Rights narrative as a phase in the Black Freedom struggle the graphic novel can be used to examine the Black Freedom struggle before 1954 and after 1965. These cultural productions explore what it means to be American, what Black identity is and how Black Americans (by proxy of superheroes) are still struggling to prove their worthiness as American citizens in a country that repeatedly and blatantly fails to uphold democratic ideas. Max Brooks' *Harlem Hellfighters*, Mat Johnson and Warren Pleece's *Incognegro*, and Sana Amanat and G. Willow Wilsons' *Ms. Marvel* are useful representative examples.

Like *Kindred* these graphic novels serve as both a critique on the American historical narrative and as a means of inserting new narratives into it through popular media. Rather than merely a discourse on African American involvement in war or a critique of American historical memory on brutality or an examination of the Black Freedom struggle, evidence from these cultural productions can be included into lesson plans to help both public historians, teachers and even museum educators find new ways to talk about the American historical narrative.

The strongest themes that each examines is that of the idea of Americanism, patriotism, quest for citizenship, identity, power and how they each have been explored through popular media to reinsert certain ideas in American historical memory. One of the primary ways in which these have been explored is through the war narrative. The use of the war narrative to reinforce ideals of Americanism is not new and though in the twentieth and twenty-first century has been used in television and film.⁷ Just consider, as examples, the following films over the past generation: *Dunkirk* (2017), *Fury* (2014), *Lincoln* (2012), *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), *Saving Private*

⁷ Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Ryan (1998), *Platoon* (1986), *Glory* (1989), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). These films bleed into what Paul Cohen and Lisa Hamm term popular memory.⁸ In recent years there has even been a war narrative such as *Bomb Girls* (2012) that focus on the lives of women and their activity during war. Though movies such as *Glory* (1989), *The Tuskegee Airmen* (1995), *Miracle at St. Anna* (2008) and *Red Tails* (2012) have been produced, it is telling that within popular culture most movies and television shows that focus on the ideals of citizenship and American history focus on keeping the memory of white involvement, or immigrant involvement and sacrifice alive while erasing the services of the Black community.

The Harlem Hellfighters as a graphic novel highlights how graphic novels can be used to teach African American involvement in World War I. Combined with other primary source material educators could use the novel to create a course around ideas of citizenship, Americanism and African American involvement in war as a means of claiming citizenship. Nicknamed the Harlem Hellfighters, the U.S. Army 369th regiment was the first African American combat unit to be sent to the front lines during World War I. Based on the 2014 book written by J. Patrick Lewis and illustrated by Gary Kelly, the graphic novel follows the 369th Infantry Regiment and depicts their service in World War One.

The graphic novel looks at not only how African Americans sought to claim citizenship but how race played a part in their determination to fight for their country and protect American democracy. In 1917 Congress approved the Selective Service Act allowing African Americans to be drafted into the United States army. Many African Americans took the opportunity to prove their loyalty and patriotism to American democracy. As the author states in the opening narrative: “Three years after all of Europe’s Lights Winked out Thomas Woodrow Wilson Told

⁸ Paul A. Cohen and Lisa Hamm, *History and Popular Memory: The Power of Story in Moments of Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Congress and every other Isolationist American that The world Must be Made Safe for Democracy. And that's when I answered the call"⁹ Parallel to the panel of the soldier is the recruiting poster asserting that the colored man is no slacker. The original poster depicts African American man taking leave, holding on to his wife as other African American soldiers march behind him carrying the American Flag.¹⁰ Throughout the graphic novel the illustrator invokes the American flag and ideas of democracy to serve as a parallel to the daily reality of what both African American soldiers and African Americans face.



Figure 11. Harlem Hellfighters, Colored Man is No Slacker

⁹ Max Brooks and Caanan White, *The Harlem Hellfighters* (New York: Broadway Books, 2014).8-13.

¹⁰ "Colored Man Is No Slacker," Printed by E.G. Renscher, Chicago, Illinois, 1918, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Art and Artifacts Division, The New York Public Library.



Figure 12. Harlem Hellfighters pg. 12

Throughout the narrative, the author's primary character, Edge, often invokes images of democracy and ideals of Americanism. Multiple times during the narrative Edge notes that he along with many of his comrades believe that by fighting for democracy they will change race relations in the United States. The allusion and references to democracy in the novel are a good way to examine the reality of life for both soldiers and Black Americans. The illustration and dialogue accomplish this by situating or superimposing the protagonist or characters in front of the American flag or focusing on the focalization perspective of the main character on objects of material culture that have ideological meaning rooted in Americanism and patriotism.

With a plethora of primary resource material in both the papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, period newspapers and magazines, educators can create a unit around *The Harlem Hellfighters* that inserts this historical narrative into popular memory.

The characters in the graphic novel each seek to fight to claim citizenship and access to all that comes with it. This act of claiming through involvement in war time effort has happened throughout every war in United States history as the African American community saw participation as a means of claiming citizenship.

Throughout the graphic novel, Edge, his close friends Mark and Henry and their comrades continuously talk about democracy, creating a space in which the novel can be used as a resource to examine, what democracy meant to the minority. While President Woodrow Wilson called for the protection of democracy and freedom, the United States government did nothing to protect or provide those same freedoms and access to capitalism and citizenship to the African American community. While men such as Edge and Mark were off fighting a war at home African Americans were fighting a war within themselves. Using focalization, the reader sees the duality of citizenship and the inner turmoil of Mark who though wants to fight for

America understands to his core the hypocrisy of what he is protecting. Yet he feels as if African American men should fight to insert themselves into the narrative of what it means to be an American citizen and the American historical narrative of patriotism. Mark comes to this conclusion after seeing the film *Birth of a Nation*. The juxtaposition of the white audience laughing and accepting the narrative as historically valid with the African American audience angry or crazy underscores the inner turmoil and fight faced by Mark and his fellow comrades.

Additional themes that can be explored from this graphic novel included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Anti-Lynching Campaign, Race Riots, ideas of American democracy, methods of the Black Freedom Struggle and the African American Experience during World War I.¹¹ The need to claim citizenship through military service was a conversation held within different outlets of African American media. *The Crisis*, the leading African American publication at the time, published stories about African American soldiers and their value to fighting for democracy. The June 1918 issue of *The Crisis* was dedicated to African American soldiers and their deeds on the front. In "Black Solider," J.B. Watson dedicated the issues to the 100,000 men who were called to arms and declares after fighting there will be a new beginning for African Americans "Never again will darker people of the world occupy just the place they have before. Out of this war will rise an American Negro with the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult."¹²

¹¹ Examination of Lynching: Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the Mob* (Rutgers University Press, 2004); Lisa Arellano, *Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs: Narratives of Community and Nation* (Temple University Press, 2012); William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Illinois University Press, 2006); Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (Modern Library, 2003); Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Harvard University Press, 2011); *Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South*, Michael J. Pfeifer et al eds., (Illinois University Press, 2013); Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹² J.B. Waston, "The Black Solider," *The Crisis* July 1918, 60.

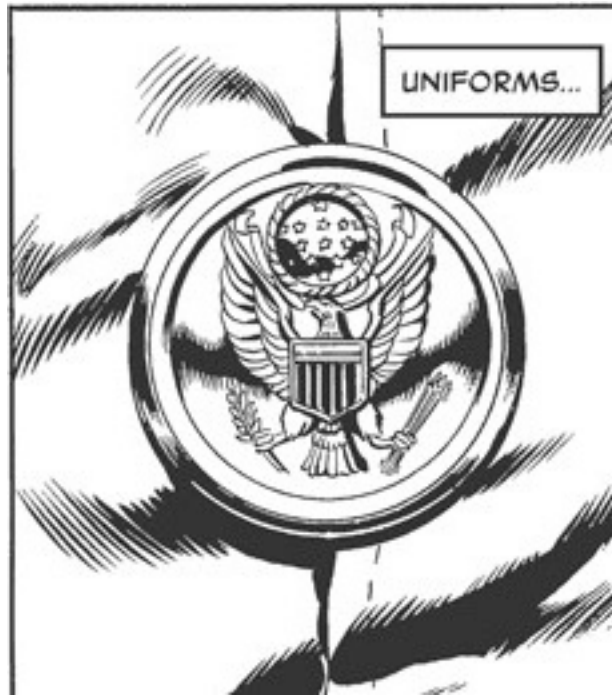


Figure 13. Harlem Hellfighters Medal pg.20



Figure 14. Harlem Hellfighters

Using the NAACP papers along with other primary resources, the graphic novels *Harlem Hellfighters* and *Incognegro* provide a valuable teaching platform for the issue of lynching. Like *Harlem Hellfighters*, *Incognegro* also reinserts a historical narrative that should not be forgotten. By going undercover Zane forces the American public to read about and see the truth about the violence against African Americans.¹³

Passing as white for Zane serves as an act of resistance. Once again, we see the superimposing and use of the American flag in a graphic novel as a way to examine the ideas of democracy, American memory and violence against African Americans. Though Zane states that lynching of African Americans is no longer a story and Edge, Mark and Harry of the *Hellfighters* are fighting for democracy, the historical reality was different. During the early twentieth century white mob violence rocked African American communities. Henry, Mark and Edge from *Harlem Hellfighters* and Zane from *Incognegro* create spaces for conversation about this violence. In 1906, for example, white mobs set out to destroy the Black community in Atlanta following white newspaper reports of assaults on local white women.¹⁴

¹³ Anti-Lynching Campaign reports on anti-lynching legislation, burning at stake, and lynching statistics, Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953 NAACP Papers: The NAACP's Major Campaigns--Scottsboro, Anti-Lynching, Criminal Justice, Peonage, Labor, and Segregation and Discrimination Complaints and Responses.

¹⁴ "Half Clad Negro Tries to Break Into House: Bound Over by Recorder," *Atlanta Journal*, September 21, 1906.



Figure 15. Incognegro



Figure 16. Incognegro pg. 18

While various national newspapers falsely reported on the cause of the riot and showed little sympathy for those affected there were other sources from leading members of the African American community that reported on the violence. In November 1906 *The World Today* presented two articles, “From the point of view of the whites” by Temple Graves, and “From the point of view form the Negroes” by W.E.B. Dubois. Though Temple Graves attempted to reprimand the mob he also condoned their actions because they were protecting white womanhood and were horrified by the weekly assaults on white women. W.E.B Dubois rebuffed Graves’ story by examining the racial issues such as police oppression and racial intolerance that were backdrops to the violence.¹⁵

Atlanta was the first of a wave of white domestic terrorism that destroyed African Americans communities, and took African American lives, across the nation. Soon came the 1907 Bellingham riots, the Nationwide Riots in 1910 after Jack Johnson defeated Jim Jefferies, to win the heavyweight championship, the 1917 East St. Louis Riot, the 1917 Houston Texas Riot, and the Red Summer of 1919 where African American communities were attacked and in multiple sites including Washington D.C., Chicago, and Knoxville, topped by the deviating riots in 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma and 1923 in Rosewood, Florida where entire African American communities were destroyed.¹⁶

Harlem Hellfighters and *Incognegro* as forms of memory keepers help create a untie around the themes of democracy, Americanism the African American experience and various means of activism during this period that are a part of the Black Freedom struggle.

¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Tragedy of Atlanta,” *The World Today*, November 1906.

¹⁶ Primary sources about Race Riots, 1906-1927, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Springfield Branch (Springfield, Ill.). Letter from the Springfield, Illinois branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the St. Louis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, August 13, 1918. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series C: The Midwest.



Figure 17. "Negro Dive sand Clubs Are the Cause of Frequent Assaults" Atlanta Journal, 1906

As a means of exploring historical memory and the Black experience *Kindred* as a graphic novel offers a way for historians to create various conversations around the Black experience and look at the Black Freedom struggle. In notes on her autobiography Octavia Butler wrote why she wanted to write one of her bestselling novels: "I wanted to write to make readers feel the emotional reality of slavery. I got the idea from a friend back during the 1960s who said I wish I could kill all these old Black people who've been holding us back for so long, but I Can't because I'd have to start with my own parents!"¹⁷ Butler also notes that she felt that the current generation was becoming disconnected with not only slavery but the Black Freedom

¹⁷ The Huntington Library, San Marino, California Octavia Butler Papers, Box 18, folder 101 Autobiography Notes 1983.

struggle. One narrative that could be explored as to why at the time *Kindred* was so important is due to the fact that within popular culture and media by the late 1970s a narrative of the completion of the Black Freedom Struggle was being created. However, using the frame work of the meaning of Black Power we can also say that the Black Freedom struggle had various meanings and had not in fact ended in 1965.

First published in 1979 Octavia Butler's *Kindred* was adapted into graphic novel form in 2017. Using the science fiction trope of time travel *Kindred* follows protagonist Dana, a Black woman in the late 1970s who is transported back to Maryland circa 1815. Over the course of thirty years Dana and her partner Kevin are transported back in time to the Weylin plantation in Maryland where Dana discovers that her ancestors are in fact Rufus Weylin (who becomes the plantation owner) and Alice Greenwood, a free Black who later becomes enslaved on the Weylin plantation for attempting to help her then enslaved husband Isaac escape. Dana and Kevin travel back to the Weylin plantation multiple times witnessing the horrors, and reality of slavery and the fight freedom by the enslaved. The novel ends with Dana time traveling back to 1976 after killing Rufus Weylin after his attempt to rape her.

As a critique on American history and popular historical memory *Kindred* offers the reader a focalized view. By placing each frame from Dana's point of view the reader is led to follow the experience and connect with Dana's complexity of emotions, and experiences. Though Dana has her own experiences with the struggles of being a Black woman in the 1970s though time travel Dana as well as the reader is experiencing a form of historical memory through the Black lens. A first-person perspective and illustrations through each panel allow the story to unfold as Dana is experiencing and learning. Using the trope of time travel forces Dana and the reader to become memory keepers of the enslaved narrative. Thus, the reader through

each panel is given the opportunity to experience the historical memory as Dana is learning. In that respect Dana is teaching the reader as she herself is learning, while also serving as a vehicle for memory keeping.

Though Octavia Butler may have felt as if the Black community was becoming disconnected with the enslaved narrative they were not. The conversation of enslavement and American historical memory was taking place. For example, throughout the 1970s *Ebony* magazine created a space in which to talk about enslavement and the Black experience. From 1970 through 1971 Lerone Bennett, Jr., wrote a seven-part series “The Making of Black America” for *Ebony*. Examining the world of Black Americans from the eighteenth through twentieth century the sixth and seventh installments of the series examined enslavement.¹⁸

The series had a great response from its readers who felt that the series was highlighting a part of American history that was in danger of being sidelined now that the narrative of the Black Freedom struggle was declared complete. William C. Henderson wrote: “Bennett’s article, sets the standards and criteria that others will have to follow. It looks beyond the superficial structures of the Black community and gets to the depth of the slave culture.”¹⁹ Mrs. Berniece C. Welsh wrote: “I walked in the shoes of Dandiridge, his wife Nancy and their little girl Mary Ann, America must never forget that it did happen here.”²⁰

¹⁸ Lerone Bennett Jr., “The Making of Black America,” *Ebony*, October 1970, 46.

¹⁹ William C. Henderson Evanston, III, “Letter to the Editor.” *Ebony*. April 1971 16.

²⁰ Mrs. Berniece C. Welsh, “Letter to the Editor,” *Ebony* April 1971 17.



Figure 18. Octavia Butler Kindred pg8.



Figure 19. Octavia Butler *Kindred* pg.41

Kindred inserted a complicated and often times ignored historical narrative into both popular historical narrative and pushed it into the larger American historical narrative. The author's narrative strategy, following Zane Pinchback, allows for exploration of southern lynching in the 1930s. After his brother is accused of murdering a white woman Zane goes back

to Mississippi to uncover the truth. Through the optical perspective of Zane the reader is exposed to the harrowing reality of a part of American historical narrative that is often left out of both popular culture and public history narratives.

While *Kindred* pushes forward the complexity of the slave narrative, *Incognegro*, examines life for African Americans in the twentieth century by using the passing narrative which itself is complicated. Authors have used the narrative of racial passing and its use as either a political or resistance narrative as means of creating a narrative of resistance thus highlighting the hypocrisy of American ideals of race and brutality against African Americans.²¹

Incognegro creates a space using the passing narrative to talk about the complexity of the Black identity and ideas of Americanism. Using the graphic novel format is especially interesting in that it takes the superhero tropes traditionally ascribed to white superheroes and transposes them onto an identity that traditionally is seen as an outsider. Like Superman, and Batman Zane Pinchback functions as a superhero in that he uses his dual identity as a way to expose truths and strive for justice. The author uses the passing narrative to examine the hypocrisy of race theory and superiority by using illustrations to transpose ideals of Superman over that of Klansman such as on page 9. As Megha Anwer observes “dressed in his Klan Uniform with its symbol on his chest belt around his waist” the chief Klansman is evocative of early sketches of Superman who is representative of the white superhero of modernity.²² At the same time the narrative and illustrations transpose the ideals of Americanism and what it means to be a superhero over Zane preparing to go out to his next assignment. Zane’s disguise transforms him into a superhero.

²¹ Mat Johnson, Warren Pleece, and Krzysztof Uliszewski, *Incognegro* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Egmont Polska, 2010).

²² Megha Anwer, "Beyond the Photograph: A Graphic History of Lynching," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 5, no. 1 (2012) 20-40. doi:10.1080/21504857.2012.703960

What is also interesting about these panels is the imposition of the American flag over the rape scene and over Zane. This imagery harkens to Captain America as a American hero, who represents democracy, freedom, and Americanism whose outfit contains the stars and stripes. It forces the reader to reconsider these ideals as Zane as a patriot and American represents a segment of the American population that is not protected by these same ideals of justice.

The graphic narrative inserts a realistic depiction of slavery into the narrative and popular culture that is contrary to that of other popular commercialized depictions such as *Gone With the Wind* or even *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And though the narrative examines the trauma of enslavement, including sexual abuse, separation, and oppression, Butler's narrative as well as the illustrations even add to the cultural narrative of twenty first century commercialization of slavery as depicted in movies such as *12 years a Slave* (2013) *Lincoln* (2012) *Free State of Jones* (2016) and *Amazing Race* (2006). Instead *Kindred* gives a voice to each character, while exploring the slave narrative which follows, loss, oppression, means of resistance and freedom. The author does this by (1) giving a voice to each character and not just inserting them into the narrative; (2) using the trauma of the narrative to address the reality of enslavement and not just as a means to commodify trauma; and (3) exploring white involvement in a way as not to alleviate white guilt over the history of enslavement.

The narrative and illustrations give a voice and lived experience to Alice, Carrie, Nigel, and Sarah and treat them as essential characters to the historical narrative and \create spaces to explore their ideas of, power, family, community, and resistance. As Dana states after being on the plantation "Strangely they seemed to like him, hold him and contempt and fear him all at the

same time”²³ The illustration of panels and narrative show how the characters negotiated the reality of slavery without relying on their trauma to drive the narrative. The panels and narrative show a human community. The best transformation of character that Butler uses to negate popular historical narrative of the enslaved is the way she depicts Sarah the cook. She is not the mammy of *Gone with the Wind* or the loving submissive caretaker of a white family who dries white tears and assuages their guilt. Sarah is angry and fighting to negotiate a space and place to protect her daughter Carrie.

Exploring themes of trauma and historical memory, Butler through *Kindred* is able to examine ideas of Black womanhood, agency and identity during enslavement, the Civil Rights Movement, and Black Power Movement. At the time of the release of *Kindred*, Black women in the United States were having their own discussions about Black womanhood as discussed in the previous chapter.²⁴

²³ Damian Duffy et al., *Octavia Butler Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaption* (New York: Abrams ComicArts, 2017), 202.

²⁴ See other Books that talk about women in the Black Freedom Struggle: Tera Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Live and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1997); Danielle McGuire, *The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance a New History of Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2011); Viki L. Crawford, Jacquelin Anne Rouse, Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1941-1965* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990).



Figure 20. Octavia Butler Kindred pg.80

Jane Donawerth's *Feminisms* refers to *Kindred* as a vital work in that it uses science fiction to recover women's history.²⁵ As a novel and graphic novel *Kindred* does not gloss over the reality of slavery but rather creates a narrative that focuses on the narrative of enslaved women. Focalization allows the concentration of the narrative to be on the protagonist. In this instance the story is told from the viewpoint of Dana thus allowing the narration to reclaim the history and narrative and thus impart it on to the viewer. This strategy creates a space in which Black women can reclaim and examine American historical memory and insert themselves into the historical narrative.

The focus on the novel is twofold in that it gives the reader a glimpse into the reality of being a Black woman in the late 1970s and watching Dana claim power and authority and on the historical memory and reality of enslaved women who want to claim power in an oppressive system. Butler's narrative, along with other primary sources such as Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, allow for the examination of enslaved narrative through the Black women's perspective.

Using Dana as the focal protagonist who travels through time allows Butler and the scholar to use *Kindred* to examine themes of community, Black motherhood, liberation and female agency. *Kindred* is able to examine the narrative of female agency and resistance during enslavement that is not often expounded upon in American historical narrative. *Kindred* focuses on the daily lives of those enslaved and not the experience as through the lens of a white savior. Though Kevin, Dana's partner, is white the focalization is never through his perspective or through that of Rufus. Instead it remains on Dana except for the times it shifts to that of Alice, Dana's enslaved ancestor. In fifth section of *Kindred* Butler shifts the experience of the narrative

²⁵ Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009).

to Alice. After attempting to help her husband escape she and Isaac are both captured. Isaac is sold to a plantation in Mississippi while Rufus denies Alice her freedom by purchasing her. The panels focused on the emotions and psychological trauma that Alice is facing as she attempts modes of resistance to remain free in some form.²⁶

Dana in both timelines looks to find her freedom and liberation in two systems that seek to oppress her because she is a woman and because she is a Black woman. Alice, a free woman, seeks to regain her freedom that was taken, and both women want control over their future and bodies, and economy. Going from freedom to bondage Dana's experience both serves a way to remember the historical struggles of Black women and as a way to look at the struggles of Black women during the 1970s. Though Kevin, Dana's husband, is supportive, his family and the society around her are not. In both the 1840s and the 1970s Dana must attempt means of controlling her body, sexuality, and space.

In that respect Black women then and now are still creating ways to claim power over their bodies, identity, and economic future. Thus, public historians have a new tool, the graphic stories of the women of *Kindred*, to explore the historical narrative of the experience of Black women through different generations. Consider a comparison of the Black feminist aesthetic and concepts of power through the lives of Dana Alice, and Sarah, to the recent popularized narratives such as *12 Years a Slave* and *Free State of Jones*. The films show the lack of power and, oppression of Black women, but they deny agency to the lives of these women and create a space for the white audience to assuage their guilt by cheering for the good white people. create space of autonomy while living in an oppressive regime.

²⁶ Damian Duffy et al., *Octavia Butler Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (New York: Abrams Comic Arts, 2017) 151.

Kindred is a powerful cultural production that interprets the quest for Black women to rediscover their past and understand their struggle for freedom. The experiences of Dana, Alice, Carrie, and Sarah translate into the overall struggle for Black women to find freedom in a society that has always found ways, economically, socially and culturally, to degrade and oppress them. The graphic novel highlights women who seek to gain power when there are few apparent opportunities. The ideals of Black feminism started before the 1970s and went well beyond some of the ideals of the Women's' Liberation movement of that same time. Teaching this narrative would require using the graphic novel as well as Black-created cultural production content from the 1970s to examine how Black women were creating spaces for their conversation about Black Liberation and Black womanhood.

With the rise of readership, and scholarship on the graphic novel and comics indicates that they are becoming a new form popular culture that function as forms of literature and entertainment that can examine historical narratives that are often overlooked. As a form of material culture, the graphic novel and comic, function to examine various aspects of the Black Freedom Struggle. Combined with other archival and primary resources these forms of cultural production facilitate in creating new conversations about the Black Freedom Struggle. Themes such as citizenship, patriotism, Americanism womanhood, and liberation can be pulled from these types of cultural production and reinsert into the African American experience into these narratives in significant ways.

Chapter VI

Teaching with Material Culture.

The creation of historical narratives and popular historical memory through various forms of material culture is a way in which public historians can connect to the public and reexamine various historical narratives. By understanding how material culture serves as a form of memory keeper, public historians can create spaces, of conversation, and examination to talk about historical narratives and experiences that are often forgotten.

As a society, though we go to the movies or read historical novels knowing that certain liberties have been taken with the narrative, the narrative still reinforces and caters to certain historical tropes. Pulling from academic narratives popular historical narratives confirm for the consumer what they think they already know. Thus, when watching a movie about the Civil War, World War II, or the Civil Rights Movement the viewer is given information and tropes that often times confirm their knowledge. When these forms of material culture to challenge the knowledge of the consumer, it often repeats the same tropes. Popular culture itself cannot teach history but as the scholarship show these sources can be used to reinforce, or challenge historical narratives.

This scholarship examines how different forms of popular culture can be used to examine various moments in the historical narrative and provide different perspectives. Using different forms of popular culture, the past three chapters have examined how public history scholars can effectively use popular cultural productions to create counter-narratives and create spaces for a conversation that challenges the dominant historical narrative.

The previous three chapters have incorporated various forms of cultural productions and considered how African Americans have used cultural productions to have conversations about various historical narratives. This approach adds to the historiography of material cultural studies by pushing the boundaries of material culture to include, cultural productions such as public access television programs, and graphic novels. Though they are different forms of material culture they are connected in that they strive to, (1) create counter-narratives about the Black Power Movement; (2) Provide new narratives on the Black Freedom Struggle; (3) Demonstrate how different forms of material culture can be used as primary resource material to help reexamine historical narratives. Primarily this study looks and reexamines the Black Freedom struggle by reexamining the Black Power Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and memory. Using magazines, journals, Black public access programs, and graphic novels the previous chapters have not only examined these historical narratives but also how they are remembered.

Viewing these forms of cultural production as primary resources allows the study to examine what the Black community meant by the terms Black Power. The magazines, and public broadcasting programs insert a new narrative into that of the Black Freedom struggle that focuses on the perspective of the Black community and how the Black community defined Black Power. Incorporating Black Power into the overall Black Freedom struggle these primary resources indicate that the Black community had its own conversation about what Black Power meant and how to attain it.

The examination of the sources shows that the Black community used various means to examine Black Power and that they built spaces within print media, and broadcasting to examine these concepts on their own terms. As chapters, two through four highlight Black Power for the Black Community was a fluid and complex term. Black Power was not just a movement or a

group. The evidence shows that for the Black community Black Power was about economic power, the power of self-determination, political power, and cultural power. Conversations of about Black Power were not solely centered around the Black Panther Party or popular members of the party portrayed in many popular historical narratives. Rather through these various outlets, the Black community asked themselves what they wanted to attain, how to attain, it and, how to create a space to express, and manifest the power of community.

Historical events have often been portrayed in cultural productions and used to reinforce or contradict historical narratives. Essentially produced for entertainment, popular movies, television, and literature nonetheless serve as a reflection and commentary on past and current social and political realities. While magazines, journals, and public access television shows have created spaces for conversation, and reexamination of key moments in the Black Freedom Struggle the use of cultural productions also can be used as a resource to examine the Black Freedom Struggle.

Though they may seem inconsequential to some, it is important to keep in mind that these forms of cultural productions are created by African Americans and center around various aspects of the Black experience with the Black Freedom Struggle.²⁷ The use of these primary sources can offer layers of examination in both classrooms and museums spaces establishes a means to examine memory, the creation of historical narratives, resistance, and power.

Public historians urge non-traditional sources to examine historical narratives outside of the traditional confines of the archives and written record. To fully accomplish this, however, public historians and traditional historians must be willing to look at various forms of cultural

²⁷ Benjamin J. JJ., "*Leff Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History*" (University Laboratory High School Urbana Illinois.

productions. In order to use these cultural productions as teaching tools and explore their uses as vessels for alternative historical narratives, lesson plans must integrate various approaches and forms of study.

Chapter Three Lesson Plan

Historical Narratives and Black Power

As discussed in chapters two and three the term “Black Power” is fluid complex and has various meanings in the Black community. The purpose of this exercise will be to examine how the public remembers Black Power and how to reexamine the complex meaning of Black Power.

Using primary resource materials students and participants can examine how the term Black Power was discussed within and outside of the Black community.

- I. Divide students and participants into groups and provide them with the document analysis worksheet and photograph analysis worksheet. Students should be provided with different primary resources from the resources listed.
 1. Looking at newspapers, magazines, and news clips have students examine what type of narrative about the Black Power Movement was being created through various cultural outlets.
 2. After students have examined the primary resources have them as a group answer the analysis questions.
 3. Have students look at different sources that discuss the Black Power Movement, and analyze the message in each source

4. As a group discuss different ways historical narratives are created and how material culture can help insert new historical narratives into popular American Historical narrative.
5. Using the sources have students form their own thesis about what Black Power meant to the Black community. Have students create their own primary resource sets that support their thesis.
6. Using the Primary Resources have students create/ curate their own historical narrative of the Black Power Movement and Black Freedom Struggle.

II. Questions for Analysis

1. What is Black Power?
2. What is the Black Freedom Struggle?
3. What did the term Black Power mean to the Black community?
4. How do the various resources challenge dominant narratives of the Black Power Movement?

Document/News Clips Resources

Baldowski, Clifford H., Papers. "Baldy cartoon on the Black Panthers, Baldy, Ridiculous, Black Power is just a political term 1966." Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia, 30602-1641. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America.

Baraka, Imamu Amiri. "Marxism and the Black Community," Digital Public Library of America. <http://dp.la/item/27e1ae23bce82ba032f42e572e20868c>

- Bevel James. "James Bevel on Black Power." October 29, 1966. Pacifica Radio Archives, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (WGBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC. http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip_28-6688g8fs31.
- Black Power Legislation. From Black Power Forum, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. November 1, 1967. Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, UNCG University Libraries, Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2757>
- Barnes Hill. "The Content of the Economic Opportunity Act. 1964-1966." University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Barnes, Billy E. (Billy Ebert). Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://library.digitalnc.org/>
- Hamill, Robert H. "Black power and White Response." November 6, 1970. Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, NCG University Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America. <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2604>.
- National Broadcasting Chanel. "News Script: Black Power, NBC News Scripts." November 1970, WBAP-TV, Fort Worth, Texas, UNT Libraries Special Collections. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/>.
- Williams, Cassandra. "News Analysis: Black Power Forum." November 11, 1967. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America. <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CivilRights/id/2528>.
- WSB-TV (Television station: Atlanta, Ga.). "Series of WSB-TV news film clips of members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) discussing the "Black Power" philosophy, Atlanta, Georgia" May 23, 1966. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/news/id:wsbn38936>. (Accessed October 23, 2018.)

Print Media Resources

- "300 Youths Roam New Bedford Area Burning Buildings." *New York Times*. July 10, 1970.
- Bennett, Lerone, Jr., "Stokely Carmichael Architect of Black Power." *Ebony*, September 1966, 25-32. Accessed June/July 2018. <https://books.google.com/books>.
- Bennett, Lerone, Jr. "The Making of Black America." *Ebony*, October 1970, 46. Accessed June/July 2018. <https://books.google.com/books>.
- Bennett, Lerone, Jr. "Liberation: Integration or Separation Dilemma Is Called False Choice by Advocates of Transformation." *Ebony*, August 1970, 36-42. Accessed April 2018. <https://books.google.com/books>.
- "Black Power Its Meaning and Measure," *Negro Digest*, November 1966, 20-37. Accessed June/July 2018. <https://books.google.com/books>.
- Bridges Bailey, Joanne, Mrs., Suylman Shahid Mufassir, Roy Malahowski, Claudette Clever, Arnold P. Keith, Sr., and John Sharper. "Letter to the Editor Which Way Black

America." *Ebony*, October 1970, 14-23. Accessed April 2018.
<https://books.google.com/books>.

Gold Smith, Allen. "Toward A Violent Black Revolution." *The News Interm* (Shamokin),
September 5, 1969. Accessed March 2018. Newspapers .com
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/385898446>.

Kaufman, Jonathan, and Don Polizzi. "Letter to the Editor Black Power Must Be Defined." *Life*,
August 12, 1966, 20. Accessed April 2018. <https://books.google.com/books>.

Online Magazine and Journals/Newspapers (Most can be found in Google Books online Database)

Ebony

Jet

Negro Digest

New York Times

Life Magazine

Newspapers.com

Document Analysis Worksheet

1. Type of Document (Check one)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram | <input type="checkbox"/> Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diary | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement | <input type="checkbox"/> Television Program/News |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memoir | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Government document |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine |

2. Date(s) of document: _____

3. Author (s) or creator (s) of the document: _____

4. Other information about the author(s) indicated on the document (position, title, etc.):

5. For what audience was the document written? _____

6. List three things the author wrote that you think are important:

7. Why do you think this document was written? _____

8. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

9. List two or more things the document tells you about the author's view of the physical world.

10. Write a question that the author has left unanswered by the document.

Name _____ Period _____
Photograph Analysis Worksheet

- Caption on Photograph
- Source of Photograph
- URL (entire address)

Analysis Questions

1. Divide the image into four sections. Look closely at each quadrant and describe exactly what you see in each. For example: What people do you see? What objects? What is the setting and season?
2. Describe the style and purpose of this photograph (for example, is it posed or candid?)
3. Based on your observations in Level I and II, who and what is being depicted in this photograph?
4. What questions are raised by this photograph?

Chapter Four Lesson Plan

Public Broadcasting and Creating Historical Narrative.

- I. Analysis of Historical narrative and topics through material culture.

This lesson plan aims to help students and participants examine different viewpoints of historical narrative by examining various Black centered public access television along with primary source sets. Students and Participants will use each television show as a material culture resource and analyze how they show address various topics during the period. The lesson is intended to help students and participants examine each show.

- II. After the introduction of a historical theme or topic students or participants can be split into groups and choose a topic to examine. These can be: Black Identity, Feminism, Economy, Street Protest, and Education. Students and Participants can also focus on events such as the Detroit Riot, New Bedford Riot or the Start of the Black Arts Movement.

- III. Provide students with a list of shows that fit a topic they have chosen use the primary document analysis worksheet to view and analyze the programs.

- IV. To compare narratives, students should research newspapers and other news program archives to look at the national narrative and compare that to the conversation in the Black community. Have students examine both white, newspapers and African American newspapers, magazines, news programs, along with the public access broadcasting program.

- V. After students have examined the primary sources have them as a group answer the analysis questions.

- VI. As a group discuss different ways historical narratives are created and how material culture can help insert new historical narratives into the popular American historical narrative.
- VII. Exercise: Using the online database of newspaper articles and the Digital Public Library of America, and Library of Congress, *Ebony*, and *Crisis*, and *Life*, have students create a primary source set that facilitates the topic and narrative.

Resources

Black Public Broadcasting

List of Black-Produced TV Shows Nationwide, from 1968-on-
<https://www.thirteen.org/broadcastingwhileblack/uncategorized/list-of-black-produced-tv-shows-nationwide-from-1968-on/>

Colored Peoples Time(Later renamed Black Journal) -American Black Journal Digital Archive, <http://abj.matrix.msu.edu/index.php>

Soul!,(episodes can be found the Thirteen Media With Impact)
<https://www.thirteen.org/programs/soul/>

***Say Brother*,**

- WGHB Media Library and Archives -
http://openvault.wgbh.org/collections/say_brother/clips

Say Brother WGHB Archives Collection- <http://main.wgbh.org/saybrother/>

-Basic Black: Say Brother Collection- <http://wwe.wgbh.org/basicBlack/saybrother.cfm>

Magazines- All can be Found on Google Books Archive

Ebony

Life

Digital Archives

Digital Public Library of America - <https://dp.la/>

Books

Heitner, Devorah. *Black Power TV*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2013.

Wald, Gayle. *It's Been Beautiful: Soul! and Black Power Television*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

Document Analysis Worksheet

1. Type of Document (Check one)

Letter
 Diary
 Memoir

Telegram
 Advertisement
 Newspaper

Report
 Magazine/ Journal
 Government document

Television
 Other: _____

2. Date(s) of document: _____

3. Author (s) or creator (s) of the document: _____

4. Other information about the author(s) indicated on the document (title of program, what issues are discussed, how does this fit your topic or event?):

5. For what audience was the document written/created?

6. List three things about the show that you find important:

7. Why do you think this document was written created?

8. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? List three talking points or quotes that support your topic

9. List two or more things the document tells you about the creators, panelist or guest point of view.

10. Write a question that the author has left unanswered by the

document. _____

Chapter Five Lesson Plan

Harlem Hell Fighters African Americans in World War I turn of the century (1900-1930)

Exercise One- Creating Historical Narratives

I. Lesson One: African American Experience in World War I-War Narrative, Narrative of Patriotism

How is history being remembered? Material culture and Archives serve as forms of memory keepers. The purpose of this exercise will be to look at how history is remembered. If popular culture draws from archival sources, then what type of sources are being used as evidence in the created narrative.

Using *Harlem Hellfighters* this Lesson plan will examine the war narrative and narrative of patriotism and inserting the African American experience into the historical narrative.

- I. Divide students into groups and distribute photographs, newspaper sources, and periodical sources.
 1. By examining cultural outlets during this time, students will identify what type of historical narrative is created.
 2. Have students examine both white, centered newspapers and African American newspapers (1917-1919) to look at the war and patriotic narrative.
 3. Have students use the document analysis worksheet to examine the primary resources.
 4. After students have examined the primary resources have them as a group answer the analysis questions.
 5. As a group discuss different ways historical narratives are created and how material culture can identify new historical narratives to be inserted into popular American Historical narrative.

- Using the primary resources have students create/ curate their own historical narrative of the African American experience during WWI.

Questions for Analysis

- What is the historical narrative?
- What is the patriotic narrative?
- How was Americanism defined during the 20th century?
- What did African Americans hope to attain by serving in World War I?
- What was the experience of African Americans during World War I? Through the primary resources and the graphic novel on the 369th infantry have students discuss their story and relate it back to race relations in the United States during this period(1900-1930).

-How were soldiers treated in service?

-How were civilians treated?

-Did African Americans attain the goal of true citizenship and democracy?

Resources

Document/Primary resource worksheets

Primary Resource Set

Jamie Lathan. "African American Soldiers in World War I." 2016. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets?subject=african-american-experience>. (Accessed October 1, 2018).

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Archival Papers

Online Exhibitions

The Library of Congress: The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship, World War I and Postwar Society <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african-american-odyssey/world-war-i-and-postwar-society.html>

The Crisis Magazine- Google Books Archive

“The Soldiers Number,” *The Crisis Magazine*, June 1918, Google, Books Archive

“Black America to the Rescue,” *The Crisis Magazine*, December 1918, Google Archive

“War Bonds,” *The Crisis Magazine*, July 1918, Google Archive

“The Health and Morals of Colored Troops,” *The Crisis Magazine*, August 1918, Google Archive

“The Young Men’s Christian Association and the War,” *The Crisis Magazine*, December 1917, Google Archive

“The Buffaloes” The 367th Infantry N.A.,” *The Crisis Magazine*, May 1918, Google Archive

Library of Congress Digital Archive

The New York Times, Mar. 16 1919. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn78004456/1919-03-16/ed-1/>.
 “Work of Colored Troops” *The stars and stripes (Paris, France), May 30, 1919, Stars and Stripes: The American Soldiers' Newspaper of World War I, 1918 to 1919*
<https://www.loc.gov/item/20001931/1919-05-30/ed-1/>.

The New York Times, May 4, 1919. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn78004456/1919-05-04/ed-1/>.

Photographs/ Library of Congress

Gladstone, William A. Collector. *William A. Gladstone Afro-American Military Collection: Honor Roll, Company A, 15th New York infantry, 369th Regiment, fought under French*. 1917. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss83434060/>.

Unidentified African American recruits for the 15th New York National Guard Regiment heading to Camp Upton, New York. New York., [Between 1917 and 1918] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017648706/>.

Two unidentified African American soldiers in uniforms and campaign hats standing in front of American flag., None. [Between 1917 and 1918] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017648675/>.

Robert Bennett Smith in uniform, overcoat, and overseas cap holding a chair in front of a backdrop. , None. [Between 1917 and 1918] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017648690/>.

Books

Brooks, Max. *Harlem Hellfighters*.

Harris, Stephen. *Harlem's Hellfighters: The African American 369th Infantry in World War I*.

Lesson Two: The African American experience and historical narrative (1900-1940)

This lesson is intended to have students use *Harlem Hellfighters* and *Incognegro* to examine the experience of African Americans during the pre and post-war period. This unit will look at historical memory, and narrative not often addressed in popular culture. Students and participants will engage the narratives and primary resources and examine themes of democracy, Americanism, violence and lynching in the Jim Crow era, the African American Migration protest, and activism and the Black Freedom Struggle.

- I. Before the lesson: Students and participants should read both *Harlem Hellfighters* and *Incognegro*; students should also read *Lynch Law in Georgia* by Ida B. Wells-Barnett
- II. Lesson The two narratives of lynching
 1. How does lynching differ from murder?
 2. Examine the racial motivation of lynching.
- III. After reading both narratives were there anything new you learned? Is this a popular historical narrative? If so where have you seen it? If not, why is this historical narrative not often discussed in academia or within popular culture?
- IV. Introduce students to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People anti-lynching campaign.
 1. How did the NAACP define Lynching?
 2. How did the NAACP protest, lynching, and push the federal government to create anti-lynching laws?
- V. Mob Violence against African American communities
 1. Have students use primary resources to look at accounts of mob violence during various race riots during the 20th century
 2. Using newspaper, and periodical sources from white newspapers and African American newspapers and writers' students and participants should use the documents worksheet to examine the narrative, from each source.
 3. Using Digital Public Library of America have students research and create primary resource sets that discusses lynching riots and mob violence against African Americans communities.

- Atlanta, 1906
- East St. Louis, 1917
- Charleston South Carolina, 1919

- Longview Texas, 1919
- Washington DC., 1919
- Chicago Illinois, 1919
- Knoxville Tennessee, 1919
- Elaine Arkansas, 1919
- Tulsa Oklahoma, 1921

Questions for analysis

1. Considering the primary resources what were some of the reasons for the mass Migration of African Americans to western and northern cities?
2. What were methods of activism the NAACP used to protest and campaign against lynching and mob violence?
3. What are the different narratives found within various primary resources?

Resources

Primary Resource Sets

These Primary Resource sets on Anti-Lynching Campaign and The Great Migration can be found on Digital Public Library of America.

Samantha Gibson. "Ida B. Wells and Anti-Lynching Activism." 2016. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets?subject=african-american-experience>. (Accessed October 1, 2018.)

Lakisha Odlum. "The Great Migration." 2016. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets?subject=african-american-experience>. (Accessed October 1, 2018.)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Digital Papers.

The Crisis Magazine- Google Drive Archive

"Dyer Antilynching Bill," *The Crisis*, November 1922, Google Books

"Lynching in the United States," *The Crisis*, February 1922, Google Books

“Opinions,” *The Crisis*, June 1915, Google Books

“The Battle of the 1920s and Before,” *The Crisis*, March 1921, Google Books

“Migration of Negros,” *The Crisis* June 1917, Google Books

Books

Apel, Dora. *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Arellano, Lisa. *Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs: Narratives of Community and Nation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

Bernstein, Patricia. *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006.

Francis, Meagan Ming. *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Nevels, Cynthia Skove. *Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness Through Racial Violence*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007.

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Zangrando, Robert L. *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

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- Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
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- Bodroghkozy, Aniko. *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012.
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- Braudy, Leo, and Marshall Cohen. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
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- Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
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