

Re-accessing the Power of Art in the Discipline of Pan-African Studies

by

Pearlie M. Johnson, Ph.D.

pearlie.johnson@louisville.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of Pan-African Studies

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

Abstract

The visual arts and art history in general provide a powerful lens to understand the Diaspora. Regardless of what aspect of the Diaspora one examines, images of varying types can add depth to how someone can understand of power and experience. In this article I examine the role visual arts played in the Black Power movement and the positive impact it has had on the field of Pan-African Studies. I accomplish this examination through the discussion of several works of art to illustrate the importance of incorporating more visual arts into the field and its curricula.

Introduction

This essay begins with a brief overview of the Civil Rights movement, which led to the Black Power movement that simultaneously gave rise to the Black Arts movement. Drawing from the writings of a number of different scholars, including sociologists Clovis E. Semmes (1985) "Minority Status and the Problem with Legitimacy" and Fabio Rojas (2007) *From Black Power to Black Studies*, and art historians Nell Painter in *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (2006), Sharon Patton in *African American Art* (1998), and Lisa Farrington in *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (2005), the essay examines the role visual arts played in the Black Power movement and the positive impact it has had on Pan-African Studies as a discipline. Various works of art have been selected to accompany this essay, which will be discussed within an art historical, social and political context. Such works include: Charles Alston *Walking* (1958), Jeff Donaldson *Aunt Jemima & the Pillsbury Doughboy* (1963) and *Wives of Shango* (1968) OBAC and *The Wall of Respect* (1967), Elizabeth Catlett *Negro-es Bello II* (1969), David Hammons *Injustice Case* (1970), Betye Saar *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), and contemporary quilter Yvonne Wells in *Being In Total Control of Herself*.

Although African American women and men had served in wars for freedom since the American Revolution (1770-76), those who served in World War II (1939-1945) returned an empowered people. Putting their lives on the line for the freedom of people unknown to them, and at the same time fighting racism and discrimination with fellow soldiers while abroad, African Americans were ready to take a stance against oppression in their own country - in their own neighborhoods. Hoping that their service in the War would lead to better job and housing opportunities, most Black soldiers returned to find only disappointment. The Service Adjustment's Act, informally known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, was a law established to provide returning soldiers with financial support in their efforts to adjust to civil life. One key was low-interest rate mortgages, which eventually led to suburban life for the majority of White America, but would lead to urban renewal, gentrification, and ghettoization for the majority of Black America (Herbes-Sommers, 2003).

This type of separatism continued to support the long-established "separate-but-equal" doctrine solidified in *Plessy* (1896). The fact was that one's residence governs where one is allowed to attend school, which often determines the quality of one's education. African American families across the country fought for equal schools and equal education for their children. Based on the Fourteenth Amendment, *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. The *Brown* decision would eventually lead to the desegregation of Jim Crow schools throughout the South, as well as become a catalyst for the Civil Rights movement.

The modern Civil Rights movement is often associated with the Montgomery bus boycott. It started at the grassroots level and was organized through Black churches. Women played an important role in the boycott, which included Jo Ann Robinson, professor of English at Alabama State, Rosa Parks who willingly went to jail, and ordinary women dedicated to the cause. Men and women from both the domestic and professional classes were involved; thousands of people avoided riding city buses and instead walked to work.

Post-war artist Charles Henry Alston captured their determined spirit in *Walking*, 1958 (Figure 1). Alston was born in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was formally trained in studio art at Columbia University, where he earned his B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees (Painter, 2006, p.417-18). He was a supervisor with the WPA and a founding member of the 306 Group (the black avant-garde), where African American artists (painters, sculptors, and writers) would meet to discuss and exchange ideas about what their art should be and do (Bearden, 1993, p. 234-35). Thus, he played a critical role in raising the level of black consciousness in African American artists in New York.



Figure 1: Charles H. Alston *Walking*, 1958
Oil on canvas. Collection of Sydney Smith Gordon, *Creating Black Americans*, 238, 442

Alston was introduced to African sculpture early in his formal training. He also gained hands-on experience with African art objects while working with Alain Locke to curate exhibitions for public libraries in Harlem (Bearden and Henderson, 1993, p. 261). Alain Locke was one of the first philosophers and art critics who called for African American artists to turn to Africa for inspiration in their work (Locke, 1925). For Locke, if European artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Andrea Derain, and Amedeo Modiglianai could capitalize from using African elements in their work, then so should African American artists, especially since it was their own heritage. Bearden and Henderson's essay on Charles Alston includes part of an interview where Alston talks about his experience with Locke and African Art:

When Locke put on a show of African art at the 135th Street Public Library, one of its earliest exhibitions in the United States, he called me. I helped him arrange things, which gave me a chance to feel them and look at them and examine them (1993, p. 261).

This sensory experience helped Alston to begin to appreciate African Art and its differences from Western Art. He was captivated with the way Modigliani utilized African spatial concepts, by elongating the neck in his work (Beardon and Henderson, 1993). The elongated necks and mask-like faces reflect the African influence in Alston's art. He also implores a cubist style, where figures are fractured into geometric form.

Cubism was an art style developed by European painters Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Cubism in modern art was introduced with Picasso's 1907 painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, well-known for its appropriation of African Masks. In *Walking*, however, Alston uses bright rich colors to give volume to his forms. Heads held high, steps in unison, his painting illustrates how people were so empowered in their fight for justice that they opted to trudge the arduous task of walking come rain, sleet, or shine rather than be subjected to the racial slurs and demeaning treatment of White bus-drivers, other White passengers and White police. The Montgomery bus boycott was the beginning of what would later become a strategy used during the 1960s in the struggle for liberation, equality, and empowerment.

It might be inferred that empowered veteran soldiers of the 1940s raised their families with an attitude that they were entitled to more. Let us remember, it was the young people of later generations, especially those of the 1960s, who established groups and organizations that would form the front-lines of the Civil Rights movement. This included the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), known for its lunch counter sit-ins and voter registration drives. This also included the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which also believed in non-violence as a tactic against segregation. In 1961, CORE became heavily involved with desegregating interstate transportation through groups known as freedom riders. In addition to A. Philip Randolph, both SNCC and CORE played leading roles in organizing the 1963 March on Washington, which made Martin Luther King, Jr., an iconic figure in the Civil Rights movement (Painter, 2006). The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) also organized a number of protest marches during the 1960s.

White backlash to these events, however, included police attacks, where hundreds of protestors were attacked with police dogs and sprayed with high-powered fire hoses. Jeff Donaldson addresses issues of police brutality, as well as White male violence against Black women in *Aunt Jemima & the Pillsbury Doughboy* (Figure 2). Started in 1963, but perhaps took a few years to complete, Donaldson depicts recognizable consumer icons in the composition: Aunt Jemima, the well-known syrup and pancake mix owned by the Quaker Oats company and the Pillsbury Doughboy, the recognizable mascot for Pillsbury Company. One might find it quite comical to see these two capitalist icons fighting each other for the number one spot in American consumerism. Yet, they make other important statements. For example, the female figure represents a large muscular woman who seems capable of defending herself. At first glance, she appears to be throwing up her hands in a gesture of surrender. Closer examination, however, reveals that she has a balled-up fist cocked and ready to throw a punch.



Figure 2: Jeff Donaldson *Aunt Jemima & the Pillsbury Doughboy*, 1963 *Creating Black Americans*, 278, 442

The red-checkered bandana and the apron identify the female figure as a domestic worker, which reminds us that a majority of Black women during the 1960s worked as maids in White women's homes. Yet, it was these domestic worker women who were the backbone of the Black community and the protectors of family and cultural traditions. Therefore, when the female figure is viewed as a representation of the Black community, and as the Black community becomes awakened to a social and political consciousness, they will fight back. Donaldson reveals in the background emblems of the American flag, questioning America's claim to being an equal and just society.

For some the Civil Rights movement was viewed as a success with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights act of 1965 (Painter, 2006). Yet, this accomplishment prompted massive retaliation. With the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, masses of Black Americans became disappointed with integration, assimilation, and even non-violence. James Meredith (the first African American student to enroll at the University of Mississippi) had been shot in Mississippi on the first day of the "March Against Fear Campaign." Disillusioned with non-violent tactics, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) changed the direction of the movement when he blasted the words "Black Power," which quickly gained momentum across the country (Painter, 2006).

In 1966, two college students, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, answered the call for Black Power by forming the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California. Chapters began springing up in major cities across the country. The year 1966 ushered in a number of empowering organizations and movements. For example, Maulana Karenga formed the US organization and created the Kwanzaa holiday, which is celebrated December 26 through January 1 of each calendar year. Also in 1966, Amiri Baraka established the Black Arts movement in literature and theatre. Jeff Donaldson, however, is credited with the visual arts component of the movement. His 1963 work depicting Aunt Jemima and the Pillsbury Doughboy actually predates the Black Arts movement, and already called for social and political awareness.

Donaldson was born, raised and educated in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and moved to Chicago where he earned his graduate degrees. He was one of the first African Americans to earn a Ph.D. in African and African American Art from Northwestern University in 1974. As a member of the Visual Art Workshop of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC), Donaldson, along with muralist William Walker, organized the painting of the *Wall of Respect* (Figure 3) in 1967 (Patton, 1998). Social unrest and disagreement developed between OBAC members over the *Wall* as well as the future direction of the group. As a result, Donaldson and Wadsworth Jarrell formed African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCobra) in 1968.



Figure 3: OBAC *The Wall of Respect*, 1967. Organization of Black American Culture 43rd and Langley Streets, Southside Chicago, Illinois. Photograph by Robert A. Sengstacke *Creating Black Americans*, 313, 443.

AfriCobra's primary mission was to develop an aesthetic for art with the following principles: It must be humanistic, the subject matter must be understood, it must identify the problems and offer solutions, and it must educate and instruct (Douglas, 2008). In 1970, Donaldson and his students organized CONFABA – Conference on the Functional Aspects of Black Art, the first working conference on the history of African American art. For the first time, scholars such as Nathan Hare and Larry Neal, along with art historians such as David Driskell and Jeff Donaldson came together with artists of distinction, such as Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and Lois Mailou Jones to discuss the functionality of African American art (Wright, 1998).

The *Wall of Respect*, however, was a collaboration between various artists whose theme was to celebrate Black heroes (musicians, writers, and political leaders). It was a 20 x 60 foot mural executed on the exterior wall of an inner-city liquor store located at Forty-third and Langley Streets on the South Side of Chicago (Abdul Al Kalimat, 2014). Interior murals produced by African American artists have been documented since the New Negro movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Such works include *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) by Aaron Douglas, *Modern Medicine* (1937) by Charles Alston, and *The Amistad Mutiny* (1939) by Hale Woodruff. These murals, however, were produced with certain restrictions and requirements for viewing in private spaces located inside public libraries and hospitals. The *Wall of Respect*, however, was one of the first outdoor murals created especially for the masses, the common everyday folks who otherwise did not visit galleries, museums, and cultural centers. Thus, *The Wall* is viewed by some as facilitator of the Black Arts movement, inspiring African American artists from around the country to create murals celebrating Black life and achievements (Donaldson, 1998). Inner-city folks were amazed at seeing Black people visually portrayed in public art, much like they were when a Black person was shown on television. These outdoor paintings depicting aspects of Black history inspired people to want to know more, especially Black students who were already attending college.

As stated previously, two college students founded the Black Panther Party, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. Drawing from the ideology of Marcus Garvey and the Nation of Islam, the Party's Ten Point Program was aimed at not only self-defense from police brutality, but also at self-sufficiency, teaching African Americans what they could do for themselves. Jimmy Garrett, for example, enrolled at San Francisco State College (1966-67) with the sole purpose to inspire student activism (Rojas, 2007). A major element of this activism called for a relevant education. Students wanted to learn about the history of their own origins and the accomplishments their people had achieved against the odds.

After a series of protests and sit-ins on the college campus that would later include the activism of professor Nathan Hare, students at San Francisco State College established Black Studies as an academic discipline in late 1968, early 1969. Although there had been a steady increase in Black student enrollment at mainstream White institutions, similar response across the country was protest for relative education (Semmes, 1985).

Psychologist Cedric Clark identified “feelings of not being recognized” and “feelings of not being respected” as two primary facets of the Black experience (1973). Perhaps protest is what it took in order to be recognized and respected. In 1973, Clovis Semmes conducted a study on Black students at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He found that a majority of the problems students faced were related to their relationships with their professors and peers and not having access to courses associated with the Black experience. The struggle to be recognized and respected when living in a White culturally dominated society is fundamental in establishing legitimacy (Semmes, 1985). This included students at predominately White institutions.

In the documentary *Making Sense of the 1960s* Eva Jefferson Patterson (1991) was interviewed on her thoughts about Black Studies on college campus. Patterson had been a student at Northwestern University, where she served as the first African American president of Student Government. Patterson explains, “It was exciting to learn that African people [our place of origin] were not an ‘iga-booga’ people or an idiot people running through the jungle....I remember reading Lerone Bennett’s *Before the Mayflower*, and discovering that we were an intelligent people who came from high societies.” Patterson also explained how as a result of knowledge, she became comfortable with wearing African influenced dashikis, corn-rolled braids, and afro/natural hairstyles. Jeff Donaldson captures this new empowered attitude in *Wives of Shango*, 1968 (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Jeff Donaldson, *Wives of Shango*, 1968
Water color and mixed media on paper
Creating Black Americans, 296, 443

The women in this composition hold prominent positions on the canvas, which recalls their importance in the struggle for freedom and equality. The age-old, matrilineal tradition of women organizing families and communities dates back to pre-colonial societies in Africa. Women continued with this type of Africana womanism during life on the plantation. Clenora Hudson-Weems, who coined the term Africana womanism, prefers the term “Africana” because it refers to black people all over the world. Hudson-Weems considers womanism communal in nature: women are seen as cultural warriors providing for and protecting, as well as securing rights and privileges, not only for herself, but her family and her community (1993, p. 20). The Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party (just to name a few) were much more successful with the help of women, who prepared the meals, completed paperwork, kept records, and attended to the various details necessary for men folk to operate.

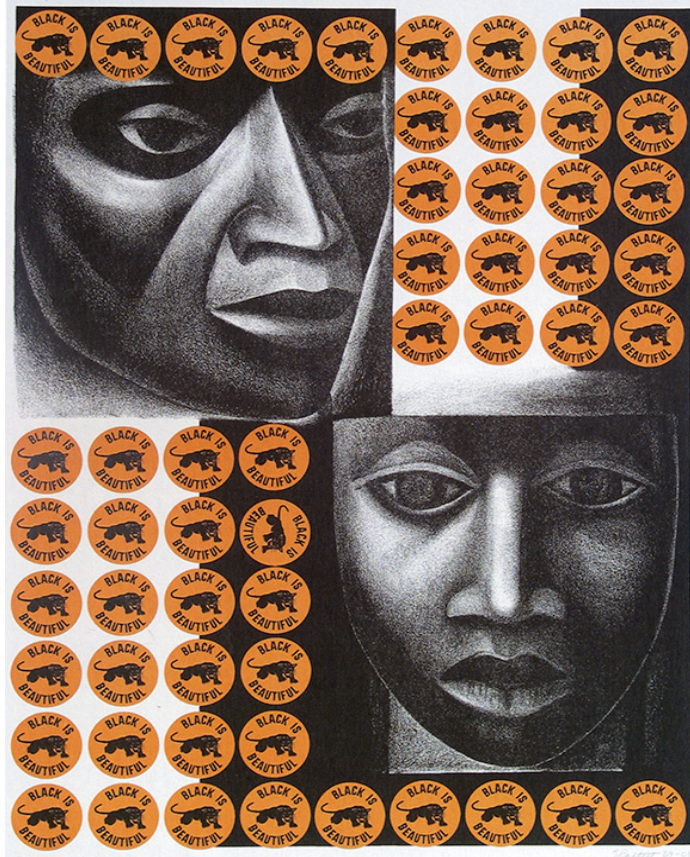
Re-accessing the power of *Wives of Shango* lends itself to a discussion on the power of the image in Black Studies. The goal of Black art was to create an aesthetic that according to Addison Gayle would expose the enemy and celebrate the people (1971). The enemy was seen as the White establishment, the capitalist society set on maintaining the “status-quo.” The Black Power movement, which included literature and the visual and performing arts, sought an aesthetic that would empower the people. For example, if you empower the people through knowledge, perhaps Donaldson’s “Aunt Jemima” would throw her powerful punch against the vestiges of slavery, attacking the shackles of modern oppression.

In *Wives of Shango*, Donaldson depicts a scene of revolutionary people. The women are dressed in cloths and emblems that can be traced back to Africa. The details at the bottom of the woman’s dress on the right depict patterns of African cloth, while at the same time revealing the triangle representation of the sacred trinity. The woman on the left wears an ankh around her neck similar to the jewels worn by African queens in ancient Egypt. The ankh is also symbolic of fertility, which is associated with the continuation of life. Unassimilated by the call for straightened hair, these women sport hairstyles related to their unacculturated identity. Attracted by the idea of protecting their men and family, these two women carry shotguns on their shoulders. Emphasizing that they mean business, Donaldson caps each woman with a bullet-satchel. Hands on hips, in the renowned Black woman’s stance, these women are poised to fight for liberation, equal protection and family.

Further messages in *Wives of Shango* reveal that the man standing in the background is Shango. The call for a relevant education included the history of African and African American art. When students for the first time began to see images of art that depicted accounts of their history, they began to understand that their history did not start with plantation life, but had roots in the more ancient societies of Africa. Shango, for example, was and is one of the most powerful Orisha (term similar to Saint) in Yorubaland, Nigeria.

Known as the Yoruba God of Thunder and Lightning, Shango was carried over from Africa as part of the Atlantic-trade in human cargo. Shango is worshipped as a religious deity and honored in the colors of red and/or white. The Yoruba were one of the most prominent groups captured and transported to the Americas. African captives transported to Brazil, the Caribbean (West Indies), and the Southern United States were forbidden to practice their traditional religions. One of the ways in which enslaved Africans were able to retain their religious practices included adopting European Christianity and blending it with African religious traditions. Donaldson renders Shango as an American militant. He has an Afro and is dressed in white, yet he wears a Christian cross around his neck; perhaps symbolic of his syncretized life in America.

Part of the Black Studies' mission was to provide course offerings that were relevant to African and African American students. In addition to learning about the history and achievement of the White Western experience, Black students wanted knowledge that would not only empower them, but also help them serve their communities. Black art that celebrated the black experience, recognized Black accomplishments, and acknowledged a heritage rooted in Africa, were powerful teaching aids in the classroom as well as the community. When people are disconnected from their history, the most powerful text that instantly reconnects them is the power of the image. Art is so important because it is open for interpretation, which allows for different responses and engages students in discussions. Art is also narrative of a common shared experience. Elizabeth Catlett, for example, depicts the beauty of blackness as a shared experience in *Negro-es Bello II*, 1968 (Figure 5).



Benin, Nigeria
5a. Internet

Figure 5: Elizabeth Catlett, *Negro-es Bello II*, 1969

Lithograph

Image courtesy of Stragow Gallery, New York

Photo Credit: A van Woerkom

Creating Black Americans, 290, 443

Through the assistance of Black art, many people whom had perhaps thought of themselves as Negroes began to accept the new nomenclature of “Black.” In addition to discovering that “black” was powerful, they also began to realize its beauty and that it was a beautiful thing to be black. Black people discovered that, to be considered beautiful, they did not have to possess features that were close to standards of European beauty. There was another type of beauty that originated in Africa, and it was good to feel proud of having African features. In *Negro-es Bello*, Catlett draws from the royal sculptures of the Benin culture in Nigeria. The Oba, another word for King, were honored for their wisdom and spiritual powers with memorial heads (Figure 5.a) made of brass and placed on ancestral altars (Blier, 2012).

Catlett's painting teaches us of a place where black standards of beauty originate. She rendered the faces with African features with wide noses, full lips, and serious eyes. This was very powerful because if one is to feel good about one's self, one should also feel good about from where one comes. In addition to the raised fists and the words "black power," the phrase "black is beautiful" was another indicator of empowerment and self-acceptance. Catlett renders these inspiring gestures with her drawing of a black panther on the emblems that many people wore as badges and then circled it with the words "black is beautiful" (Painter, 2006). Art did what it was intended. It celebrated the black experience and it challenged the establishment regarding ideas of equality and justice.

Many artists of the movement, such as Phillip Lindsay Mason in *Deathmakers*, 1968 and Faith Ringgold in *Flag for the Moon: Die Nigger*, 1969 created what is known as protest art. This type of art raised questions about police brutality in the black community, the high number of blacks drafted for war in Vietnam, and the violence faced when fighting for civil and human rights. Protest art often incorporated aspects of the United States flag, America's highest emblem of equality that declared justice and liberty for all. David Hammons, however, challenges these ideas in *Injustice Case*, 1970 (Figure 6). The figure is a body print of Hammons himself framed in remnants of the American flag, confronting patterns of Black male incarceration in American prisons (Painter, 2006). In order to make the silhouetted figure, Donaldson spread margarine all over his body, hair and clothing then pressed his body against an illustration board. Next, he coated the impression with powdered pigments sifted through a strainer (Patton, 1998). According to Patton, Hammons was also calling attention to the way that Black Panther Party leader Bobby Seale was gaged and bound to a chair each day he appeared in court in 1969. Seale had been part of the Chicago Eight conspiracy trial, charged with inciting riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. After Seale was severed from the group it was known as the Chicago Seven. Hammon's *Injustice Case* was also part of the Black aesthetic aimed at liberating Black people both psychologically and physically.

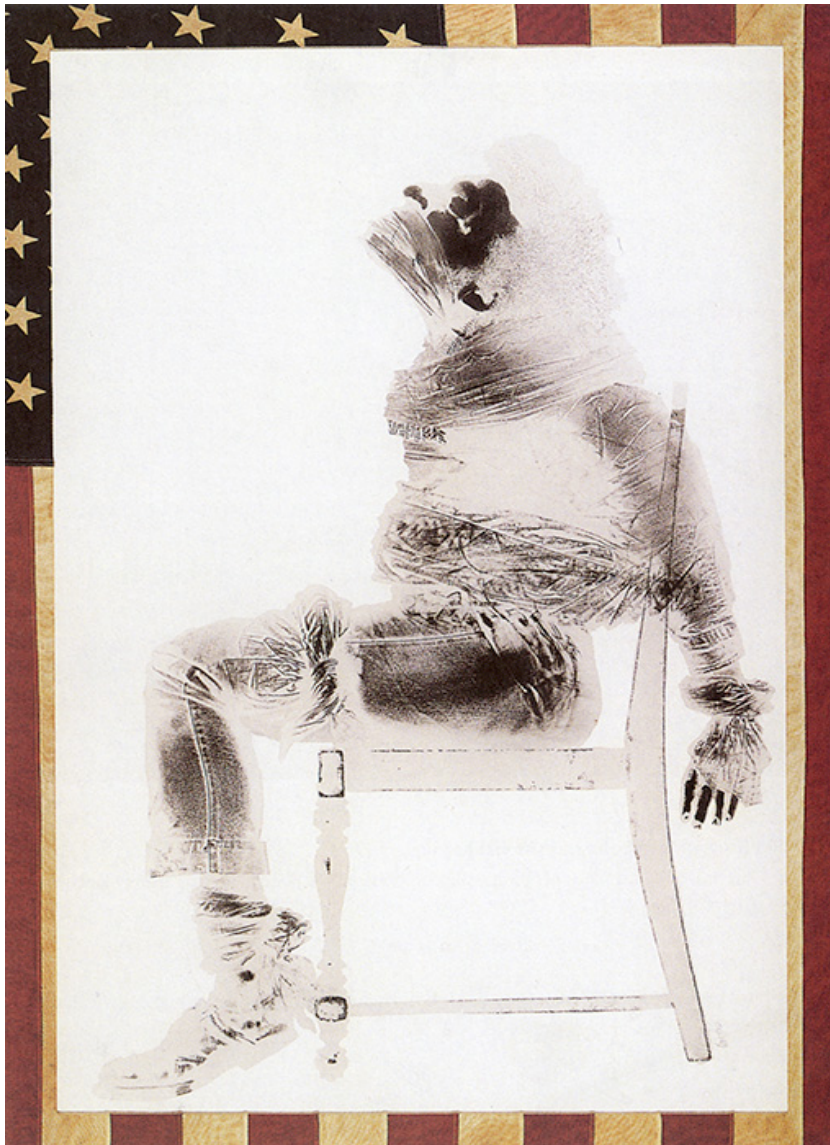


Figure 6: David Hammons, *Injustice Case*, 1970
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Creating Black Americans, 310, 443

Roads toward liberation went in many different routes. The Affirmative Action, for example, put forth by President Lyndon V. Johnson's Executive Order 11246 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 required companies working with the federal government to hire minorities (Painter, 2006).

Black women discovered, when given the opportunity, they were capable of doing much more than working as domestics and caring for White women's children. As a result, many Black women entered the ranks of clerical and administrative workers at companies that supported the affirmative action plan. Betye Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, 1972, (Figure 7) captures the idea of Black Power among domestic women fed up with being relegated to working only as mummies and maids.



Figure 7: Betye Saar, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, 1972
Berkley Art Museum
Creating Black Americans, 162, 441

The mammy image gained national attention with the widely viewed film based on Margaret Mitchell's Pulitzer-Prize (1936) novel *Gone with the Wind*. Hattie McDaniel won an Academy Award in 1939 for her portrayal of the mammy figure in *Gone*. Actresses who were reduced to playing maids all the time most likely felt that it was better to play a maid than to be one. McDaniel was the first African American to win an Academy Award, followed by Sidney Poitier in 1958 in the *Defiant Ones*. Yet, in efforts to reclaim one's humanity within a society bent on dehumanizing one's very existence, Saar uses the mammy figure to annihilate its power as a stereotype. Saar's "Aunt Jemima" is a spin-off of the Aunt Jemima logo for Quaker Oats pancake mixes and syrups. Perhaps Quaker Oats played on the nostalgic notion that food was better when "mammie" cooked it from scratch, which may have led to the idea that Black women were better in the kitchen than other women, which might have indicated to audiences an even more bazaar notion that the kitchen was where they belonged.

Saar uses the iconic image of Jemima in the background of her assemblage. In the middle, she places a three-dimensional figurine in black face (bulging eyes, thick red lips, grimacing smile, and traditional red-checked bandana). The figure is actually a vintage memo holder. Such collectibles came as salt and pepper shakers, cookie jars, ashtrays, and canisters just to name a few. Saar began to collect black memorabilia during the 1960s in efforts to control circulation of such demeaning items (Farrington, 2005). The figure is toting a shotgun in one hand and a broom in the other, with a pistol holstered on her hip in efforts to make it plain that she is part of the revolution; she's there to provide protection as well as clean up if necessary. Maids who participated in marches and other protest activity during the Civil Rights movement kept a low profile for fear of losing their jobs. Saar's maid in *Liberation* seems to be walking off the job. And if the establishment still does not understand, Saar places a black fist in the lower middle of the composition that might suggest in Malcolm's words "by any means necessary."

The struggle for equality and liberation continues. The same ideas expressed in art during the Black Power movement are expressed in quilted arts today. More and more as quilts gain entry into the world of fine art, we find there is a change in form or medium, but not a change in content and purpose. *Being In Total Control of Herself* (Figure 8) by Yvonne Wells serves as indicator that African American quilters create works of art that illustrate social and political issues. *Being in Total Control* features the United States flag as part of the background, onto which Wells has appliquéd a number of encoded images. The flag itself implies that this work refers to justice, injustices, or equality. Included is an image of a White woman with blond hair appliquéd next to a smaller United States flag. Yet the focal point is the Statue of Liberty figure; symbolic of White America. As such, Ms. Liberty holds what appears to be green money in one hand, a black rag doll in the other, symbolic of Black America. Ms. Liberty stands between the two, keeps them at arm lengths, holds them at bay, and keeps the doll from gaining access to the money (Johnson, 2008).



Figure 8: Yvonne Wells *Being In Total Control of Herself*, 1990
Cotton fabric and mixed media
Hand applique, machine quilted
Photo: The Pearlie Johnson Collection

In closing, the aim of this article is to demonstrate the power of the image in Black Studies, Africana Studies, or Pan-African Studies, as it is titled at the University of Louisville. In 1973, Pan-African Studies was established at the University of Louisville. One of its founding members, Robert L. Douglas, artist and art historian, understood the importance of constructing the discipline as a self-sustaining unit housed in the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition to political science, history, anthropology, sociology, literature, social work, music, and linguistics, Pan-African Studies would adamantly include the history of art.

I have had the opportunity to teach at other institutions where Black Studies had two or more professors of literature, history, and sociology yet offered no courses in the visual arts, or where Africana Studies had art history courses listed as part of its scheduled classes, but those courses were not actually offered. Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville offers and teaches survey courses in African Art and African American Art, which has helped students to tap into a powerful and unique visual learning experience. In addition, some of our art history courses are cross-listed with other disciplines, which attract students from diverse backgrounds and academic majors. Students in fine arts, for example, who may have enrolled in an African American art history course that would satisfy a requirement to graduate, are finding that their education would not have been as well-rounded had they not taken the course.

Art is concrete; it is a tangible record of time. Art provides us with interpretations of historical periods where people expressed profound messages about the human condition. Art is also a narrative of the contemporary society in which we live and work today. Art helps us to see what is expressed in language and letters. Art is fundamental to Pan-African Studies; it serves as a tool for understanding other academic areas. For example, students learning about Jim Crow might have a deeper understanding of these issues if they could see what Jim Crow looked like, while reflecting upon the artist's message. Works of art that address problems related to segregation and inequalities provide a visual of this history. Making the visual arts a primary part of our discipline has helped to make the department of Pan-African Studies at the University of Louisville successful during its first forty-year reign.

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