

AFTERWORD: BLACK ARTS MOVEMENTS: ECHOES OF RESISTANCE

BY GENA BROOKS FLYNN

Social movement theory has been characterized as disorganized collective action.¹ Black arts, however, have provided a means for a community to come together around a common goal using inspirational, motivating, and creative works. Described by Larry Neal as the “spiritual sister of the Black Power concept,”² the Black Arts Movement is bold and focused. However, what was once seen as time-bound to the 1960s can now be seen as a constant means by which the Black community exhibits its power and politics—the arts.

Upon learning of the theme for this issue of the *Black History Bulletin*, Volume 80, No. 1, “Poetry, Prose, and Music: The Lyrical Voice of Black Arts Movements,” I immediately focused on the word “movements” being plural. Where, when, and by whom did Black Arts begin to take hold as a powerful protest vehicle? While the poet Amiri Baraka is often cited as the founder of the Black Arts Movement, in what ways did the messages from Black Arts Movement poets get replicated in music and how has that changed over time? And how have we seen the messages presented in the arts echoed in the struggles of others, including within the field of classical conducting? It is in answering each of these questions that this issue finds its strength.

Kirkland and Malone set the tone with a critical examination of the educational system, “the vulnerable” amongst us, and how hip hop presents a clear picture of the challenges facing youth. The problem, as presented, is that the Black community has not taken the time to understand how “the vulnerable” have painted the picture of oppression within the lyrics, which leads to its persistence. Black Arts serve as an education in and of itself, bringing awareness to those who identify with Black culture. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) along with Maulana Karenga connect Black Arts, self-determination, and culture.³ Kirkland and Malone allow us to see that through a different genre, the poetry of hip hop, Black Arts survives and we must listen.

Understanding the relevance for educational institutions is not enough. That institutional context becomes clear once the original voices of the Black Arts Movement are heard firsthand. Judy Juanita, poet, playwright, activist, and educator, allows us to experience the Black Arts Movement of the mid-twentieth century—hearing the emotion, feeling the words, seeing the conditions artists used as inspiration to move a people. The pieces included in this issue illustrate how relevant the movement is today, and have us question whether we are in fact still living within the same movement or whether there have been multiple Black Arts Movements.

Today the Black community has ever-present challenges of representation, claiming space, being heard, and understanding the challenges that need fighting for. Wooten presents a large area of the arts that has not been an activist space: classical music. Yes, there have been successful classical artists like Shirley Verrett and George Shirley, but opportunities to represent the experiences of Blacks in America are limited. Even more rare has been the chance for Black women to claim a space in the work of classical conducting. While there has not been a formal movement engaging the Black community, Wooten makes clear the obstacles that remain for claiming space in a White-dominated field. Also evident is the lack of mobilization to change this fact.

So, what is next? The issue opens with an examination of hip hop as a tool for understanding the state of Black life, especially for youth. It closes with Burns taking another look at hip hop, except with an examination of how hip

hop has returned to its roots in Black Arts Movement reflections of the social and political state of the community and culture. How the lyrical techniques of 1960s Black Arts Movement poets become tightly coupled with musical production to appeal to today's youth. How teachers can use this connection of art and social movements to engage students and encourage reflection on one's lived experience. It is with this piece that the issue goes full circle, like a cypher, awaiting each generation's contribution to the ever-evolving Black Arts Movement(s).

(Endnotes)

1. Aldon Morris, "Reflections on Social Movement Theory: Criticisms and Proposals," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2000): 445.
2. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *The Drama Review* 12, no. 4 (1968): 29.
3. *Ibid.*, 33.



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