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**INVENTING THE MULTICULTURAL MUSEUM:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF *HARLEM ON MY MIND***

by

SUSAN E. CAHAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2003

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract**INVENTING THE MULTICULTURAL MUSEUM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
*HARLEM ON MY MIND***

by

Susan E. Cahan**Advisor: Professor Romy Golan**

The *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969, was the first major museum show to respond to the call for racial equality in American society. The exhibition presented a multimedia history of Harlem and put before a large audience images of black America that had never before been granted cultural legitimacy by the museum establishment. The exhibition recast the role of the museum from connoisseur to participant in contemporary cultural politics. In addressing issues of race and culture, and attempting to reconstruct power relations within the museum, *Harlem On My Mind* was a watershed in the development of multicultural exhibition practice. Yet, in its effort to expand the Metropolitan Museum's constituencies and mission, the show became one of the most controversial ever mounted by an American museum. This dissertation explores how the reception of *Harlem On My Mind* affected the subsequent development of multicultural museum practice in the United States.

Chapter one explores the ways in which the Civil Rights Movement impacted arts institutions in the mid- to late-1960s. Chapter two investigates the process of developing *Harlem On My Mind*, charting the key moments of the unfolding drama, from the museum's first exuberant announcement of the show in late 1967 to early

criticisms by artists, Harlem residents, and community leaders, to the ultimate crisis that erupted shortly before the exhibition opened in January 1969. Chapter three reconstructs the exhibition's contents and design, and analyzes the influence of specific curatorial decisions on the reception of the show. Chapter four looks at the immediate aftermath of *Harlem On My Mind* in the early 1970s and the ways in which mainstream museums responded to the demand for increased representation of diverse constituencies. And finally, chapter five addresses ways in which *Harlem On My Mind*, as a lightning rod for controversy and a catalyst for vociferous public debate, affected ways in which multiculturalism would be articulated and enacted in American museums.

Acknowledgments

The inspiration for this dissertation began in 1978 when I worked as a High School Apprentice in the Community Programs Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The department had been created in 1971 by director Thomas P. F. Hoving in the aftermath of the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition in order to make the museum more accessible to a broad cross section of New Yorkers. During the course of my apprenticeship, Philippe de Montebello succeeded Thomas Hoving as director in April 1978 and the Community Programs Department was disbanded. Even as a young student, both before and after the demise of the Community Programs Department, I could see that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had an uneasy relationship to the diverse communities of New York City. I am grateful to Randy Williams, an artist and educator in the Metropolitan Museum's High School Programs Department, who took me under his wing and encouraged me to ask critical questions about the social role of museums. Those questions were the beginning of this dissertation.

I would like to thank my advisor, Romy Golan, for her coaching and guidance throughout the writing process. I also appreciate the support and encouragement that I received from the other members of my dissertation committee—Professor Patricia Mainardi, Distinguished Professor Stanley Aronowitz, and Professor Richard Meyer—whose work has been instrumental in guiding my own.

Allon Schoener, the curator of *Harlem On My Mind* generously provided access to his archive of materials on the exhibition and spent many hours talking with me about the show and the various issues surrounding it. Benny Andrews allowed me access to his personal journals from 1968 to 1971 and spoke with me at length about activism in the art world in the late-1960s and '70s. Many other individuals who were involved with the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition graciously shared their memories of the exhibition and reflections on the issues facing museums during this period. I would like to thank Thomas P. F. Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Harry Parker III, former Vice-Director for Education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Museums; Arthur Rosenblatt, former Vice-Director for Architecture at the museum who later went on to become the founding director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and is now an architectural consultant for museums; and Susan Coppello Bader, former Community Relations officer for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and now Director of Education at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

I am also grateful for my conversations with Lowery Stokes Sims, a former staff member in the Metropolitan Museum's Community Programs Department, later a curator in the museum's Department of Modern Art, and now the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem. Mary Schmidt-Campbell, a past director of the Studio Museum and currently Dean of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University shared her insights into the history of the Studio Museum. Julie Ault generously shared her own research on the alternative arts movement in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Martin Beck

offered invaluable critiques and suggestions. Conversations with Karin Higa, Chief Curator at the Japanese American National Museum, helped me determine the scope of this study. I also thank Thelma Golden, Bruce Yonemoto, Danny Martinez, Eungie Joo, for our ongoing dialogues about art, artists, and arts institutions. Norton Batkin, Director of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, invited me to participate as a resident fellow at the Center in 2002, an appointment that provided crucial time and support for research, writing, and the ultimate completion of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Art Museums and the Civil Rights Movement

Multiculturalism, more than an attitude but less than a theory, was a propelling force behind American art of the last two decades. It will define the 1990's in the history books as surely as Pop defined the 1960's.

Holland Cotter, "Beyond Multiculturalism, Freedom?"
The New York Times, July 29, 2001

This assertion is taken from an article written by art critic Holland Cotter in the summer of 2001.¹ There are several provocative ideas contained within this short statement, but the one that stands out the most is the correlation between "Multiculturalism" and "Pop." Cotter presents the two terms as parallel entities: Pop dominated art practice in the '60s, multiculturalism reigned in the '90s. Advocates of cultural equity might be encouraged by Cotter's assessment that multiculturalism has played an important role in the mainstream art world. But the problem with this hypothesis is that the two terms are not equivalent. Pop was an art movement with an identifiable style, a particular aesthetic, and the capacity to be absorbed into the canon of art history. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is an attempt to destabilize the very structures that elevate one style of art or one group of artists over another and create the linear succession of dominant art styles that comprise the historical canon. It is precisely this hierarchical and linear notion of art history that has prevented work by artists of color to be considered part of the official story. Multiculturalism is not a style that came and went, but a condition of social existence.

Cotter's assertion that multiculturalism is "less than a theory" is also problematic as it ignores the fact that the artists and curators who made the biggest impact in the 1990s grounded their work in the theoretical writings of such figures as Cornel West, Homi Bhabha, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, and other theorists of the cultural politics of difference.² As these theorists have so thoroughly explored, multiculturalism did not begin in the 1990s, rather its roots are found in the post-colonial independence movements around the world, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the nationalist movements that followed in the late 1960s, the era that Cotter assigns to Pop. In the '60s a new aesthetic of social responsibility emerged in the work of many artists in the United States and a new climate of self-criticism arose among those who worked in museums. Debates raged about the role of the museum as an active force in shaping notions of history, identity, and social relations. There were dozens of exhibitions of work by black artists, some organized by black artists and curators in a spirit of self-determination, others organized by white arts professionals.³ Just as the basic assumptions informing other American institutions were changing so too were institutions of art.*

Harlem On My Mind was the first major museum exhibition to respond to the call for racial equality in American society. The show, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969, presented a multimedia history of the Harlem neighborhood of New York City

* This text uses a lower case "b" in the words "black art" or "black people" except in cases where quotations are used and the original author opted to use a capital "B." There are also exceptions made for proper terms such as "Black Art Movement" or "Black Art."

and put before the largest audience in the museum's history images of black America that had never before been granted cultural legitimacy by the museum establishment. The idea was developed by Allon Schoener, an art historian and the Director of the Visual Arts Program at the New York State Council on the Arts who proposed the exhibition to Thomas P. F. Hoving just after his appointment as director in 1967.

Harlem On My Mind offered a social history of Harlem exclusively through documentary photographs and newspaper texts, which were presented in the form of slide projections, photo blow ups, audio tapes, text panels, and videos. The aim of the show was to demonstrate the Metropolitan Museum of Art's willingness to embrace a broad spectrum of community and cultural interests and recast the role of the museum from connoisseur of precious objects to participant in contemporary cultural debate.

In attempting to address issues of race and culture and reconstruct power relations within a major mainstream museum, *Harlem On My Mind* may be called the first multicultural exhibition. But the story of *Harlem On My Mind* is a tragedy, not a triumph, in which high ideals gave way to crashing failure. Despite its egalitarian objectives, *Harlem On My Mind* failed to galvanize support among cultural activists or African American artists, nor did it garner the confidence of the museum's conservative audiences and patrons. Instead, the show became one of the most controversial and reviled exhibitions ever mounted by an American museum. A group of emerging African American artists, who believed that the Metropolitan Museum of Art's first foray into African American culture should focus more squarely on art, lobbied the museum for representation. When their efforts failed, they formed an organization

called the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, picketed the museum, and staged media events to publicize their criticism of the exhibition. The Harlem-based scholars and community leaders engaged to advise on the project felt their input was neglected and two months before the show opened, Harlem's most powerful arts organization, the Harlem Cultural Council, withdrew its endorsement of the show. In addition to these protests, when the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition opened the Jewish Defense League, the Anti-Defamation League, and the American Jewish Congress accused the museum of propagating anti-Semitism, citing offensive statements in the exhibition catalogue. Under pressure from the American Jewish Congress, New York Mayor John Lindsay denounced the catalogue and city government officials threatened to rescind the museum's city funds.

In hindsight, the reaction against *Harlem On My Mind* stands as its greatest legacy, a legacy more powerful than the show itself. The exhibition enraged many of the museum's constituencies and motivated African American artists to mobilize and act collectively to affirm their place in American art. According to Lowery Stokes Sims, who was hired at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 shortly after the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition and who would continue to work there for twenty-seven years before becoming director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, "The reaction against *Harlem On My Mind* is comparable to Woodstock, the march on Washington, all these large manifestations that really gave people an inkling of their entitlement and their ability to make change within institutions."⁴ This dissertation explores how the debates that emerged in response to *Harlem On My Mind* and in relation to other museum

exhibitions of the late 1960s and early '70s laid the foundation for what would become multiculturalism in the 1980s and '90s.

In the past two decades, much has been written about museums as political arenas in which definitions of identity and culture are asserted and contested. Foremost among these publications is the two-volume series *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Smithsonian Institution Press in cooperation with the American Association of Museums, 1990) and *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Smithsonian Institution Press in cooperation with the American Association of Museums, 1992). These books provide a theoretical framework for understanding the politics of museums by applying the Gramscian notion that museums participate in the creation of hegemony through the production of cultural and moral systems that legitimate the existing social order. Both books include an array of case studies of contemporary exhibitions and projects that aim to counter the Eurocentrism of the traditional American museum. However, neither of these books explicates the relationships between discourses of racial and ethnic equality of the 1980s and 1990s and cultural activism of the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ Thus, they overlook the ways in which current debates about multiculturalism and museums grew out of earlier successes and failures, and the ways in which strategies for achieving cultural equity have often been hotly debated.

Among recent texts that address the politics of museums, only one connects *Harlem On My Mind* with later developments. An essay by Steven C. Dubin in *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York University Press, 1999) discusses ways in which the strategies and arguments of the 1990s “cultural wars” were displayed much earlier in the controversies that surrounded *Harlem On My Mind*. However, Dubin’s primary interest is social history, not art. This is demonstrated by his comparisons of *Harlem On My Mind* with controversial history exhibitions, such as the 1994 Enola Gay display at the National Air and Space Museum, *The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II*. Dubin’s omission of aesthetic issues in his analysis of *Harlem On My Mind* reflects an inherent bias toward the conservative argument that exhibitions dealing with race and ethnicity represent a form of “social work” devoid of artistic interest. One of the issues to be addressed in this dissertation is the way in which the “social work vs. art” dichotomy is itself part of *Harlem On My Mind*’s legacy. *Harlem On My Mind* has never been the subject of a major study. The definitive book on the history of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* by Calvin Tompkins (Dutton, 1970) devotes only one brief paragraph to the show. Thomas Hoving’s memoir about his years as director of the Metropolitan Museum, *Making the Mummies Dance* (Touchstone, 1993), chronicles the exhibition, but in an anecdotal style that offers little analysis.

In this study of *Harlem On My Mind*, several key issues will be addressed. First, in considering the context for art and exhibition practice in the 1960s, how can we go

beyond generalities about political events such as racial uprisings, the Vietnam War and other news headlines in order to focus more squarely on the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on cultural practices and arts institutions? What were the models for democratizing museums in the late 1960s and how did *Harlem On My Mind* impact on public perceptions of which strategies were likely to bring success or failure? Second, how did artists' disappointment with *Harlem On My Mind* galvanize a community of black art activists and what was the subsequent impact of their actions on the art system? Third, how did the exhibition both embody and further legitimize the perception that exhibitions that expand beyond the Eurocentric canon constitute a form of social work, and the perception that the dichotomy between "aesthetics" and "social work" was rigid and fixed? And finally, how have the issues raised by *Harlem On My Mind* been addressing in the ensuing decades?

The word "multiculturalism" evokes a wide range of meanings and implications.⁶ At its worst, "multiculturalism" has been taken to mean little more than a fad that captivated liberals in the art world in the late 1980s, launched a handful of careers by allowing a few artists of color into the occasional museum exhibition, and finally passed into oblivion in the 1990s with the much maligned 1993 Biennial exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art—the so called "multicultural Biennial"—which is widely viewed as having dealt multiculturalism its death blow. As early as 1989, performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña wrote that many had already grown leery of the word:

[Multicultural] is an ambiguous term. It can mean a cultural pluralism in which the various ethnic groups collaborate and dialog with one another without having to sacrifice their particular identities and this is extremely desirable. But it can also mean a kind of Esperantic Disney World, a *tutti futti* cocktail of

cultures, languages and art forms in which 'everything becomes everything else.' This is a dangerous notion that strongly resembles the bankrupt concept of the melting pot with its familiar connotations of integration, homogenization and pasteurization. It is why so many Latino and black organizations are so distrustful of the term.⁷

At its best, multiculturalism challenges and rejects racism in the content of museum programming and institutional practices, including staffing, governance, management, and community relations. Beyond this, multiculturalism uses the museum as a site for critiquing larger social and political conditions that create injustices in the culture at large. As R. Perez-Torres has written:

Multiculturalism does not simply involve the recuperation of "lost" traditions in order to prove the richness and diversity of "America"... Rather, multiculturalism interrogates which traditions are valorized and by whom, which serve to empower marginalized peoples, and which serve even further to disempower, which traditions provide strength, how traditions provide agency, when traditions provide knowledge.⁸

Arts Activism in the 1960s

In the 1960s, before "multiculturalism" became a catch word to describe any type of initiative that aspired to diversify the museum, cultural practitioners were creating new models of cultural change. The Civil Rights Movement affected arts institutions in myriad ways, from experiments in "decentralization" (bringing arts resources from major institutions to "underserved" neighborhoods) to the creation of self-governing community museums. These developments were informed by the underlying belief that access to culture—one's own and the cultures of other groups—was a public right. Art itself was seen as a site of contestation and a tool in the struggle for the recognition of one's experience, history, and very humanity. Many artists produced work documenting the issues affecting race relations in the United States and the relationship

between the First and Third Worlds throughout the globe. They organized, protested and held independent exhibitions,⁹ negotiated with the large art institutions and created new, smaller ones. Beyond this, the late 1960s and early 1970s was a time when artists were involved in political organizing to an unprecedented degree. Poet Sonia Sanchez, artist Jeff Donaldson, poet Richard Hatcher, and most visibly, Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones) were leaders in both the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement (which some would argue were inseparable.) As Lerone Bennett, Jr. has written, the Black Revolution or the Freedom Movement was

...a double revolution, a revolution in the streets and a revolution in symbols, images, and ideas—a revolution in a word, of the word. The two revolutions unfolded at the same time and were complementary facets of the same reality: the historical explosion of a people in the sudden labor of self-discovery, self-determination, and self-legitimization. Seen from this vantage point, Movement was a rebirth of the Black soul, a reinvention of Black identity, and a challenge to white identity.¹⁰

The belief that artistic expression and access to culture were basic rights of all American citizens was articulated powerfully and concretely not only by artists and art activists, but by government as well through the creation of public arts funding agencies. The first government funding agency in the United States since the era of the Federal Art Project of the WPA (which had also provided new opportunities for black artists) was the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). NYSCA was a pilot project begun in 1960 by New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller to explore the role that a state agency could play in supporting the visual and performing arts. The members of the Rockefeller family had long been major arts philanthropists and Rockefeller used his powers as governor to extend this philanthropic activity into the public realm. When the Council was formally established in 1965 after a five year

exploratory phase, its statement of purpose stressed artistic enrichment in an affluent society. The law establishing the Council reads: "...[M]any of our citizens lack the opportunity to view, enjoy or participate in living theatrical performances, musical concerts, operas, dance and ballet recitals, art exhibits, examples of fine architecture, and the performing and fine arts generally. It is hereby found that, with increasing leisure time, the practice and enjoyment of the arts are of increasing importance...."¹¹

By 1967, however, America had changed and so had the Council's mission. No longer was NYSCA's aim one of icing the cake of affluent America, but rather using the arts to heal social rifts and ameliorate social ills. That year, the New York State Legislature appropriated \$300,000, an increase of almost 40% over its 1966 budget of \$772,000, to have the Council "investigate how the arts could help illuminate some of the frustrations of the ghetto." In his annual statement, Executive Director John Hightower wrote:

Too often museums and orchestras as well as opera and dance companies have been limited to the cautious stewardship of our cultural past. Until now public funds have not been available to permit them a concern for what is immediately critical, even explosive, in our society. In the next decade, however, the attitude of arts institutions will change. One of the reasons will be the amount of public funds available for productions, exhibitions, and performances that relate directly to current problems of our society.¹²

At NYSCA, this meant an emphasis on programs for blacks and Puerto Ricans exemplified by the Council's newly created "Ghetto Arts Program," which provided arts management training to "ghetto students" and free performances of "relevant" theatrical material to "ghetto residents" throughout the State.¹³ The Council also offered grants to organizations that blended art with community development initiatives.

Among the 1968-69 grantees were the Puerto Rican Community Development Project, which presented theatrical performances designed to make Puerto Ricans more aware of their cultural heritage, and the Brooklyn Museum for the creation of a community gallery.¹⁴ As the country's first state arts council, NYSCA was exploring the roles such an agency might play in civic cultural life. In the late 1960s, the organization was still very much in its formative, experimental phase. Many of NYSCA's grants supported new organizations and initiatives that eventually became fixtures of New York City's cultural life, such as the Dance Theater of Harlem, which was created in 1968 and received a grant for choreographers' fees in 1969. But other NYSCA initiatives were merely a hodgepodge of good intentions, such as the 1968 traveling exhibition entitled *Black Heroes Past and Present* which consisted of portraits of black historical figures including George Washington Carver and W. E. B. DuBois painted by physically handicapped elementary school children with an introductory text by Reverend Milton A. Galamison, a militant black educator who had led a "people's takeover" of the New York City Board of Education in 1966.¹⁵ Under the auspices of a program entitled "Experiments in Presentation," the Council "lent" Allon Schoener, its Visual Art's Director, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to organize the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. From 1967 to 1969 Schoener continued to be employed by NYSCA but spent his time researching, developing, and organizing *Harlem On My Mind*.

The belief that access to culture was a public right led to the call for decentralization of cultural resources. The idea was that the "centralized" cultural institutions, that is, the major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art,

the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum did not reach people in “the communities,” and when they did, it was only to impose elitist culture. The answer was to “decentralize” cultural institutions and create community controlled arts centers run “by and for the people.” The intentions behind these initiatives were similar to those motivating the decentralization of other functions of government and the redistribution of institutional power. In New York City, Mayor John Lindsay pushed a policy of decentralizing school governance to address the failure of the City’s school system to meet the needs of poor and “minority” students. In November 1967, the Mayor’s Advisory Board on Decentralization of the New York City School made the recommendation that the large city-wide school bureaucracy be replaced by a system of local community boards. A vicious battle was waged throughout the 1968-69 school year resulting in a complete reorganization—and decentralization—of the City’s school system. Mayor Lindsay also called for the creation of “Little City Halls,” neighborhood offices throughout the city to give residents a line into City Hall when they wanted answers or action on problems like better street lights, vandalism, or landlord-tenant disputes. Some critics disparaged the idea as “nothing more than municipal service stations for minor repairs,”¹⁶ but by the end of 1967, Mayor Lindsay managed to start six Little City Halls in Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan; Flushing-Corona and Flushing-Hillcrest in Queens; Brownsville and Fordham-East Tremont in the Bronx; and East New York in Brooklyn.

Many museums answered the call for decentralization by opening satellite museums or lending staff and expertise to the creation of community art centers in neighborhoods

designated as “underserved.” The Anacostia Museum,¹⁷ originally called the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, was the first satellite museum of a major cultural institution; it opened to the public on September 16, 1967 as a branch museum of the Smithsonian Institution. The museum, located in Southeast Washington in a building that had once been a dance hall, was overseen by 30-year-old director John Kinard. The inaugural exhibitions included a Mercury space capsule that visitors could enter and operate; a small theater with closed-circuit television over which children could watch themselves rehearse and perform; a walk-through reproduction of an Anacostia store of the 1890s furnished with goods that visitors could touch; a “bone room” with skeletons of animals that could be assembled; and a small zoo. The museum constantly searched for ways to be relevant to the everyday concerns of the people living in Anacostia and, in 1969-70, director John Kinard mounted an exhibition entitled *The Rat: Man’s Invited Affliction*, which addressed the impact of these rodents on urban life and which art historian Edmund Barry Gaither has described as a “pioneering and audacious act that brought new meaning and relevance” to exhibition practice.¹⁸ In New York the push was toward establishing art centers outside the culturally rich area of central Manhattan, particularly in Queens, the Bronx and Brooklyn with the creation of organizations such as El Museo del Barrio founded in East Harlem in 1969, which was housed in different neighborhood sites including a public school classroom before settling into its current home at Fifth Avenue and 94th Street; the Bronx Museum of Art founded in 1971 and originally situated in an empty room in the Bronx County Courthouse before moving into its current space on the Grand Concourse; and the Jamaica Arts Center and Queens Museum of Art, both founded in 1972.

Even outlying museums that already had neighborhood constituencies took the call for decentralization to heart. The Brooklyn Children's Museum, established in 1899 as the world's first children's museum, was located in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and originally served a white, middle-class audience made up primarily of Italian, Jewish, and Irish immigrants.¹⁹ In the 1950s the population of Crown Heights began to change and by the late 1960s was almost entirely African American.²⁰ In 1967 the old museum buildings were torn down due to deterioration and disrepair and a debate ensued as to whether the museum would be rebuilt in its old location or moved to a new location. Community residents organized a sit-in at the office of Mayor John Lindsay to keep the museum in Crown Heights. The mayor backed the community and the museum's board followed suit rather than risk the loss of city funding. While the new museum building was under construction a temporary facility called Muse opened in 1968 as a storefront museum. Its programming was designed to reflect the needs of area residents through arts and science projects integrating the performing arts and social and civic issues. When the new Children's Museum building eventually opened in 1977, Muse was incorporated as a separate entity, and operated under the name New Muse until 1988.

Another important way in which the Civil Rights Movement affected museums was through the creation of culturally-specific arts centers that offered arts education programs as well as exhibitions and performing arts programs of work rooted in particular cultural traditions. The establishment of culturally-specific art centers

reflected skepticism about the goals of integration. According to cultural critic Gerald Early, “The biggest problem with integration was that it was accepting a white value system. It was accepting a system of white aesthetics...It totally devalued what you were or what you were bringing to the mix....”²¹ Black and Puerto Rican arts organizations promoted ideas of self-creation and self-formation. Many of these organizations began as satellite museums of larger institutions but eventually became independent.

One of the most influential museums for African American art—though originally conceived as an interracial organization—was the Studio Museum in Harlem. The primary venue for African American art in the late 1960s and ‘70s, the Studio Museum was founded in 1967 by an interracial group of artists and philanthropists including Frank E. Donnelly, a social worker; Carter Burden, a socially prominent lawyer who had been a legislative assistant to the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy; Eleanor Holmes Norton, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union; Theodore Gunn, an artist; Betty Blayton Taylor, an arts educator; Charles Cowles, the publisher of *Artforum* magazine; Robert Macbeth, director of the New Lafayette Theater; and J. Frederic Byers III, collector and sponsor of Bykert Gallery. The museum’s advisory board included Thomas P. F. Hoving, newly appointed director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Bates Lowry, who was then the director of the Museum of Modern Art. Also involved was Kynaston McShine, who at the time was temporary director of the Jewish Museum in New York, but would spend most of his career at the Museum of Modern Art as one of the country’s few black curators based in a major mainstream museum.²²

The Studio Museum's first director was Charles Innis, a young Dun & Bradstreet executive who left his job to lead the museum.

The Studio Museum was intended as a resource for the Harlem community and a venue for artists that provided studio space through an artist-in-residence program, a film program for young people and exhibition opportunities. The museum opened to the public in its first location, a loft space on Fifth Avenue and 125th Street on September 26, 1968 with a show of work by Tom Lloyd, an African American artist who created abstract light sculptures.²³ The selection of abstract artist Tom Lloyd for the inaugural show left some artists with the impression that "white" styles and standards were being imposed on Harlem. Differing factions associated with the museum disagreed on the question of whether or not the museum should be devoted exclusively to black art and, if so, what kind of black art. A month after the opening, founding director Charles Innis resigned amidst debate about the museum's policies. After its initial phase as an interracial organization, the Studio Museum began to embrace a nationalist philosophy that would eventually eliminate the participation of artists who were not black and would even exclude black artists whose work did not evidence Black Nationalist politics.²⁴ This orientation would continue through the late 1970s.²⁵ This nationalist philosophy would eventually wane, as nationalism itself gave way to new models of empowerment in the cultural at large during the late 1970s and '80s, but in the late 1960s, nationalist ideology was a galvanizing force at the Studio Museum. The museum would eventually become the primary venue for African American artists in the United States.

One catalytic event in the process of developing and defining the Studio Museum was the exclusion of black artists from a show where their participation was clearly warranted.²⁶ In the fall of 1968 the Whitney Museum of American Art opened an exhibition entitled *The 1930s: Painting & Sculpture in America* organized by William Agee. The show included over one hundred works by 80 artists, but failed to include a single work by an African American artist, even though this had been a period when a relatively large number of African American artists were known to be working in the mainstream through the WPA art projects. Omitted from the show were such senior and established figures as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence whose work had both merit and relevance. “In presenting a period where black artist were active and were part of the exhibiting scene, to eliminate them was really to distort history, because they were there,” observes art historian Mary Schmidt-Campbell.²⁷ In response to this glaring omission, the newly founded Studio Museum in Harlem, under the leadership of community activist and acting director Theodore Gunn, quickly mounted a counter-exhibition that aimed to redress this absence. The show was entitled *Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the 1930s* and was organized by Henri Ghent, who was then the director of the Community Gallery at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, with the participation of a group of artists. Opening in November 1968, *Invisible Americans* presented about fifty works by over twenty artists who were active in the 1930s including Charles Alston, Richmond Barthé, Romare Bearden, Joseph Delaney, Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden, Malvin Gray Johnson, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, Archibald J. Motley, Jr., Douglas Pippin, Augusta Savage, and Hale

Woodruff.²⁸ *Invisible Americans* not only challenged the 1930s exhibition at the Whitney, it also crystallized the idea that museum exhibitions are sites of contestation in the struggle for civil rights.

In addition to the counter-exhibition *Invisible Americans* at the Studio Museum, thirty or so artists, including Faith Ringgold²⁹ and Tom Lloyd, picketed the Whitney Museum on Sunday, November 17, 1968 in protest against *The 1930s* show, marching back and forth in front of the building with placards that read “Bearden, Lawrence, Lewis, Woodruff Ignored” and “Black is Beautiful too, Bill!” (referring to Bill Agee, the exhibition curator). This was the first of many protests against the Whitney, which would continue to be a main target for art activists throughout the 1970s. In 1971, the Whitney would mount the *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition in response to earlier pressures. But, the show would be boycotted by many of the invited artists who questioned the qualifications of the curator, Robert Doty. Around the same time, the museum’s attempt to placate the artists by mounting a series of small exhibitions by black artists in the gallery off the lobby drew both community interest and derision.³⁰

There was much protest activity at the Whitney, as well as other museums in New York City and around the country. In the politically charged environment of the late 1960s and early ‘70s, which peaked in 1968-69, the year that *Harlem On My Mind* took place, no museum was immune to keen public scrutiny of its exhibitions and activities. As writer and activist Lucy Lippard has recalled, the museum was “both the hand that feeds

and the citadel to be stormed.”³¹ Artists were at the cutting edge of this surveillance and in late 1968 throughout the early ‘70s were a visible presence and an audible voice fighting for access to major museums. The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), a group of African American artists, grew out of months of organizing, negotiating, and protesting against the Metropolitan Museum and its *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. In the words of co-founder Benny Andrews, “The BECC was formed by a group of black artists for the purpose of making sure that there would be no more ‘Harlem On My Mind’ exhibitions foisted on the public, both black and white.”³² After the *Harlem On My Mind* protests, the BECC continued to function as a watchdog group for the black community of artists. The group demanded the inclusion of black artists in exhibitions and collections, though by 1970 the plethora of “Black Art” shows being organized all over the country by curators with varying levels of knowledge and expertise would lead the BECC to conclude that the Black Art Show had exhausted its usefulness and that the most important current need was the employment of curators with real knowledge of African American cultural production. The efforts of the BECC brought about a major exhibition of black art at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Black Artists in America*, which opened in April 1971, though many artists—including members of the BECC—were so disappointed in the show’s curatorial viewpoint that they refused to participate. The members of the BECC were continually re-examining and refining their agenda to address the changing context in which they were working. In 1971 they began to concentrate their efforts on organizing arts programs for prison inmates, a joint venture with the Junior Council of the Museum of Modern Art. In 1972 they published the *Attica Book*, a book of prints by 48 artists

and poems by four poets co-organized with Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam.³³

A more overtly socialist agenda was held by the Artworkers Coalition (AWC), perhaps the best-known group formed during this period. Their agenda, according to critic Lucy Lippard, who was an active member, was anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment, and anti-war.³⁴ The Artworkers Coalition was born in January 1969 at precisely the moment that the Metropolitan Museum was making an eleventh-hour attempt to placate the artists of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition regarding *Harlem On My Mind*. The catalyst for the formation of the Artworkers Coalition was the removal by the artist Takis of his work from The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition "Machine Art." In clear view of museum security guards and onlookers, Takis unplugged his work and quietly carried it outside to the museum's sculpture garden (outside the building, albeit still on the museum's premises) to bring attention to the cause of artists' control of their own artworks regardless of who owned them.³⁵ After this action, a group of artists began to meet in a large artist-run co-op gallery on lower Broadway called "Museum" to discuss ways of strengthening the rights of artists through collective action and addressing larger political issues. Members of the Artworkers Coalition—which included Hans Haacke, Rudolf Baranik, Leon Golub, Tom Lloyd, Nancy Spero, Faith Ringgold, and anyone else who happened to show up at a meeting—developed an evolving list of demands that focused on institutional change at The Museum of Modern Art including equal power for staff members, artists, and patrons in the governance of the museum; free admission all the time; the creation of branch museums and

decentralization of museum activities and resources in black, “Spanish,” and other communities; equal representation of women; special attention given to artists whose work is not shown in commercial galleries; deaccessioning all work in the collection more than thirty years old; and several other items.³⁶ Faith Ringgold and Tom Lloyd, the two most active African American members of the AWC, formed a subgroup called the United Black Artists Committee (UBAC) that focused on issues relating to African American art and artists.

For the purposes of this study, the most interesting demand of the AWC was the creation of a section of the Museum of Modern Art, later referred to by name as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Wing, under their direction of black and Puerto Rican artists and devoted exclusively to their work.³⁷ The proposal to create a Martin Luther King, Jr. Center devoted to black and Puerto Rican Art was spearheaded by Tom Lloyd and Faith Ringgold. Lloyd was often featured as a spokesman for the AWC on issues pertaining to race.³⁸ But this initiative was tacitly opposed by the all-black membership of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition who felt that if their work was good enough to be shown in the museum, it should be shown along with everybody else.³⁹ And although the museum created a committee to explore ways in which the museum could serve a broader constituency, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Study Center was never realized.⁴⁰

Members of the Artworkers Coalition would later found other activist organizations, including Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) started in late 1969, Women Students

and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL) in 1970, and the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee also created in 1970. Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL), a group comprised mainly of Faith Ringgold and her two daughters, Barbara and Michele Wallace, was founded to focus specifically on the issues of black women artists. About her experience working with the AWC Ringgold has said, "It took all that dedication and all that time,...all those years running around...[to] meetings with those trustees... When the time came to negotiate with museum officials and to be interviewed by the press, none of the men could remember my name...."⁴¹ Experiencing similar frustration Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) grew out of the Artworkers Coalition to address the low representation of women in museum exhibitions; the reluctance of galleries to even look at work by women artists; and the resistance with the Artworkers Coalition to addressing these issues when female members tried to put them on the table. The members of WAR, who included Juliette Mitchell, Jackie Skiles, Nancy Spero, Sarah Saporta, Dolores Holmes, Sylvia Goldsmith, Muriel Castanis and Jan McDevitt among others, conducted research and documented the fact that in 1970 65% of art students were women, but women comprised only 3% of artists shown in New York galleries. WAR focused on both increasing the representation of women in mainstream museums and the creation of alternative organizations for the presentation of their work. WAR's activities led to the establishment of the Women's Interart Center, the first women's alternative space. The organization, which received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, provided exhibition opportunities as well as residencies, workshops, and technical assistance. In their declaration of war (pun intended) issued in January 1970, Women

Artists in Revolution proclaimed: “Women artist should be able to be women and wives, creative beings, colleagues, mothers and not find conflict between these roles.”⁴²

The Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee also emerged from the Artworkers Coalition with the specific aim of pressuring the Whitney Museum of American Art to include more women—the group demanded 50%—in the museum’s 1970 Sculpture Annual. Committee members, who included Faith Ringgold, Poppy Johnson, Lucy Lippard, Brenda Miller, Therese Schwartz, and others, made their demand known to the museum in letters and meetings. When these tactics were stonewalled, the group staged pickets and protests in front of the museum and, ultimately, actions such as issuing a fake press release proclaiming that women would comprise half the exhibition that year.

Written responses from the museum indicate strong resistance.⁴³ Yet in reality, representation of women in that particular Whitney Annual shot up from 4.5% the previous year to 22%. The museum denied that the protests had any effect on the composition of the show.⁴⁴

Among the other artists groups affiliated with the Artworkers Coalition was the flamboyant Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), whose core members included Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche. GAAG was both independent and part of the Artworkers Coalition’s “Action Committee,” described by Lucy Lippard as “the most radical and inventive of the AWC’s subgroups.”⁴⁵ In a statement dated May 10, 1968, Jean Toche wrote:

...I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE.
I am a subversive, and I am a saboteur.

I question the very validity of the Art Establishment.
 I question the very validity of that language called "ART".
 ...Has the time come for the artist to make a choice:
 Either to stay the adulated "creative" toy of the aristocracy
 engaged in the most atrocious hypocritical games of corrup-
 tion, [*sic*] domination and violence, and so probably become
 irrelevant and meaningless, like an old rotten core,
 Or, to involve himself more directly in human crises, and
 Maybe become something more complete than just an "artist"...⁴⁶

GAAG performed live interventions in museums throughout the city, including throwing money on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Madison Avenue sidewalks, and the Whitney Museum's lobby as a protest against "money control of art."⁴⁷ One of their most well known protest/interventions was their public removal of Kasmir Malevich's painting "White on White" from the wall where it hung in one of MoMA's galleries. They replaced the work with their own manifesto demanding the sale of art to benefit the poor, the decentralization of museum policy making, and the closing of the museum until the end of the Vietnam War.⁴⁸

An obscure group that was akin in spirit to the Guerrilla Art Action Group, but predated them was the Black Mask Group. From November 1966 through April 1968 the Black Mask Group published two magazines, *Black Mask* and *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, disseminating their ideas and documenting their activities. Its primary members, Ron Hahne and Ben Morea, had a nihilistic approach inspired by the Situationists and tinged with Socialism. Their philosophy is summed up in this excerpt from the first issue of *Black Mask* (November 1966):

A new spirit is rising. Like the streets of Watts we burn with revolution. We assault your Gods...we sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS...our struggle cannot be hung on walls. Let the past fall under the blows of

revolt...Goddamn your culture, your science, your art. What purpose do they serve? Your mass-murder cannot be concealed. The industrialist, the banker, the bourgeoisie, with their unlimited pretence and vulgarity, continue to stockpile art while they slaughter humanity. Your lie has failed....⁴⁹

The Black Mask Group's magazine outlined the position that political change required cultural revolution: "Bourgeois culture is the enemy as is the bourgeois system itself. Not only the Rembrandts and Goethes but the modernists also will find themselves on the scrapheap of western culture."⁵⁰ One of their earliest actions was an attempt to close down the Museum of Modern Art.⁵¹ The group appears to have folded in 1968 due to legal charges resulting from its protest actions.

This impassioned rhetoric and the dynamic interventions and protests of these groups would touch every museum in the country and stimulate national debate about the purposes of American museums. In June 1970, members of the New York Artists Strike Against Racism, Sexism, Repression and War stormed the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums (AAM), an organization representing the broad scope of museums and museum professionals throughout the country, confronting New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller after he delivered an address to the group. The artists thrust a list of demands at the governor, including the call for a national conference examining the responsibility of institutions to address racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.⁵² The contrasting, often conflicting, roles of the museum, were summarized by Grace Glueck, a journalist who closely followed institutional politics in the museum field, in an article published in *Art in America* in 1971.⁵³ Glueck characterized the two dominant models of the museum as the "ivory tower" and the

“discotheque.” The former, according to Glueck, stressed a dedication to “quality,” a sober, scholarly atmosphere, and an aversion to the concept of the museum as an instrument of mass education and appeal. This image of the museum was embodied in the vision of Sherman E. Lee, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. The latter placed the museum in the service of both social forces and contemporary artistic currents and made the museum accessible to previously excluded constituencies, emphasizing “communication” equally with “curating.” This model of the museum crystallized around the personality of Thomas P. F. Hoving.

Thomas P. F. Hoving had been appointed director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1966 and brought a new, progressive agenda to the museum. Since its founding in 1870 up until the 1960s, the Metropolitan Museum had been a bastion of elite culture and a model of stability that had studiously avoided any substantive involvement with contemporary art and social or political issues of the day.⁵⁴ Its trustees and staff preferred to show art made long ago and far away: Egyptian artifacts that had been excavated on museum-sponsored archeological expeditions; Italian Renaissance paintings purchased and donated by the wealthy American collectors on the museum’s board. These treasures were displayed in lavish galleries often designed to evoke the extravagant domestic settings of the collectors’ homes. One such example is the Blumenthal Patio, a reconstruction of a two-story courtyard from a Spanish castle built around 1515 which the Blumenthals bought and had installed as a room in their townhouse on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Seventieth Street. The patio was bequeathed to the museum and transferred there in 1941 upon George Blumenthal’s

death. Another example is the Lehman Wing designed in the late 1960s as part of a master building plan and constructed in the 1970s with rooms designed to accommodate the installation of the works as they had hung in Robert Lehman's home. And of course, the Wrightsman period rooms of 17th- and 18th-century French decorative arts allowed visitors to ogle the lifestyle of the ruling class on the eve of the French Revolution.

The museum's board was stocked with some of the most powerful men in New York, ensuring a steady stream of income and independence from external pressures.⁵⁵ The membership of the board had always included prominent aristocrats, businessmen and financiers often with government connections, such as J. P. Morgan and Nelson Rockefeller. It was not unusual to find among the museum's roster of trustees individuals who had served on the board for twenty or thirty years, or even longer. In 1969 at the time of the *Harlem On My Mind* show, twelve of the museum's thirty-seven trustees had been on the board since the 1940s or early '50s; one since 1934.⁵⁶ The museum was an extension of a small, elite social world. Public openings were not yet a staple of the Metropolitan's culture. Harry S. Parker III, who came to the Metropolitan Museum as the director's assistant in January 1964, described the social milieu as follows:

When I came to the Met, a typical social event would be the acquisitions dinner at which the acquisitions committee and the curators would all dress in black tie for the evening meeting. Everybody would have a couple of drinks and sit at a formal table with all the waiters and the glasses of wine and all the rest of it. One curator would present the object that he thought ought to be bought. And another curator would get up and do the same. But it was all presented as a social occasion for the eight or ten members of the acquisition committee who would sit and debate the presentation...[T]he events were meant to support and sustain [the trustees'] sense of importance and their

collegiality. They all knew each other. They all went to each other's parties and they all were part of a social world...⁵⁷

In the 1960s things at the Metropolitan began to change. Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., who had been on the board since 1952, became president in 1964 and chairman in 1970. His brother was the American ambassador to France under John F. Kennedy. Douglas Dillon, a powerful member of the board who would succeed Houghton as president in 1970, had been undersecretary of State for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. These men were tied into the Kennedy spirit and the idea of a new generation sweeping in a more just society. Indeed, they may have been more forward thinking than many of the staff, who had come of age in an earlier era.

The Metropolitan Museum's director from 1955 to 1966 was James Rorimer, a medieval scholar who had joined the museum's staff in 1927 at the age of twenty-two directly from his studies at Harvard. With the exception of army service during World War II, Rorimer never worked anywhere but the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Like Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, he had studied art history at Harvard with the museum mentor Paul Sachs, who taught a graduate course specifically designed to train future museum curators. Rorimer's specialty was Medieval art and he began at the Metropolitan as an assistant in what was then called the Decorative Arts Department. Rorimer's triumph, an accomplishment that contributed to his ascendance to the directorship nearly a quarter of a century later, was his supervision of the establishment of The Cloisters, a satellite of the Metropolitan Museum located in Upper Manhattan's Fort Tryon Park. The Cloisters had been a pet

project of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., father of future New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller. Rorimer began working on The Cloisters in 1929, two years after joining the museum, and despite the challenges of the Depression, completed the project in 1938. By this time Rorimer had been appointed Curator of the newly created Medieval Department.⁵⁸

Like Rorimer, Thomas P. F. Hoving was a medievalist and widely viewed as a brilliant art historian whom Rorimer met when Hoving delivered a student paper at a Frick symposium in 1959. Rorimer picked Hoving out of the line up and made him his protégé. He hired him to work at the Metropolitan, took him on trips to Europe, and groomed him to be his successor as director of the museum. In 1965 when Hoving took a sabbatical from the Metropolitan to work for the Lindsay campaign, Rorimer was puzzled and hurt. He did not share and could not understand the values that drove Hoving to leave the very position that Rorimer himself had occupied and relished. Rorimer saw politics as a debased arena. When Lindsay was elected mayor and appointed Hoving as Parks Commissioner, Rorimer characterized the post as a lowly form of bureaucratic civil service.⁵⁹

In the spring of 1966 Rorimer died suddenly of a heart attack. During the year-long interregnum, a committee of curators ran the museum under the direction of Board President Arthur Houghton. Hoving was the top contender for the director's job, despite his hiatus from the museum and Rorimer's disdain for his political activities. Many members of the board were ready for a breath of fresh air. Hoving was given the

position in late 1966 and in March 1967 officially took charge as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In a single year a generational shift had occurred. Hoving was thirty-six years old, twenty-five years younger than his predecessor. Although he had had a classic art history background that was sympathetic to the old guard, establishment credentials rivaling any curator in the country, and a first class mind, there was also throughout Hoving's life a rebellion against the standards of the traditional world into which he'd been born. He had been kicked out of prep school. His wife Nancy was working for Pheonix House, a drug rehabilitation program. As Harry Parker puts it, "There weren't many museum curators whose wives were working for drug addicts...Hoving came in full of piss and vinegar supported by trustees who wanted to see change...."⁶⁰

Parker recalls that very few blacks were members of the museum's audience at that time. The only blacks he recalls seeing at the Metropolitan Museum around the time of *Harlem On My Mind* were on the maintenance and custodial staff: "There were no black curators, no black administrators, no black secretaries, and there were certainly no black trustees. It was a totally upstairs, downstairs situation."⁶¹ Arthur Rosenblatt, Hoving's deputy parks commissioner and the Metropolitan Museum's Vice-Director for Architecture, recalls that if a black person approached the museum's door there was a second glance and a reaction of suspicion.⁶² Hoving puts it even more strongly: "When I arrived [at the museum] I found that the Irish guards at the main entrance actually turned away African Americans and Hispanics saying that the MMA was a private club. (I guess it was, but it didn't stay that way very long after I arrived)."⁶³ *Harlem On My*

Mind was designed to transform the museum. “I looked upon ‘Harlem On My Mind’ as a turning point,” Hoving has said. “It was going to justify my view of the museum as a moral, social, and educational force.”⁶⁴

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1. Holland Cotter, "Beyond Multiculturalism, Freedom?" *The New York Times*, July 29, 2001, Arts & Leisure section, 1. 28.
 2. For example, in 1988 The New Museum of Contemporary Art held a series of panel discussion entitled "The Ideology of the Margin" that included such theorists as Cornel West, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and James Clifford. West co-edited the book that resulted from these discussions, Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press; NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who was a trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art at the time, wrote the introduction to the exhibition catalogue for *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in American Art* organized by Thelma Golden and held at the Whitney in 1994. See Thelma Golden, ed. *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in American Art* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). The Whitney Independent Study Program, a pre-eminent training program for artists and curators, routinely hosted Homi Bhabha as a guest speaker throughout the 1990s.
 3. Some of the earliest shows include: *The Art of the American Negro* organized by Romare Bearden in 1966 with sponsorship from the Harlem Cultural Council. The show was held at Kenwood Reter's Furniture Store located at 144 West 125 Street, which would later become the site of the Studio Museum in Harlem. Other shows include *Afro-American Artists, New York and Boston* organized by Edmund Barry Gaither and held at the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston in 1970; *New Voices: 15 New York Artists* organized by the public relations firm Ruder & Finn and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and held in 1968 at the New Greetings Gallery in New York. An expanded version of this show entitled *30 Contemporary Black Artists* had a national tour to five venues in 1968 and 1969, followed by *Contemporary Black Artists*, a further expanded version of the show that traveled to seven venues in 1969 and 1970; *New Black Artists* was organized by the Harlem Cultural Council and held at the Brooklyn Museum and Columbia University in 1969. *Five Famous Black Artists* was held at the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston in 1970. *Fifteen Under Forty* included paintings by young New York State black artists and was held at the Gallery Museum of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in New York in 1970. *Contemporary Black Artists in America* was organized by Robert Doty at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971. *Blacks: U.S.A., 1973* was selected by a jury and held at the New York Cultural Center in 1973.
 4. Lowery Stokes Sims, interview by author, tape recording, New York NY, February 27, 2001.
 5. The one notable exception in these books is the essay by Tomas Ybarra-Frausto entitled "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art" in *Exhibiting*

Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press in cooperation with the American Association of Museums, 1991), 128-150.

6. The term “multicultural” was borrowed from the field of educational theory where it emerged in the 1970s and began to be applied in art contexts around 1980 with the exhibition *Multicultural Focus: A Photography Exhibition for the Los Angeles Bicentennial* directed by Sheila Pinkel. Planning for the exhibition began in 1979 and the show was presented at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park, during the 1980-81 season. Earlier, in the late 1960s and early ‘70s, Dr. Samella Lewis, an art history professor at Scripps College, ran an exhibition space in Los Angeles named called Multi-Cul Gallery. The gallery focused on the work of black artists.

7. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, “The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community,” *High Performance* 12 (Fall 1989): 26.

8. R. Perez-Torres, “Nomads and Migrants: Negotiating a Multicultural Postmodernism” *Cultural Critique* 26 (1994): 161-190.

9. The most well-known of these exhibitions—because the organizers, Jon Hendricks, Faith Ringgold, and Jean Toche, were arrested for desecrating the American flag—was the *People’s Flag Show* held at Judson Memorial Church in New York City, November 5-9, 1970.

10. Lerone Bennett, Jr. Introduction to *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade 1963-1973*, ed. Mary Schmidt-Campbell (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1984), 9-10.

11. Laws of New York, Chapter 181, Section 1, Article 19-1, §526, May 13, 1965. See *New York State Council on the Arts Annual Report 1966-67* (New York, NY and Syracuse, NY: New York State Council on the Arts, 1967), 79.

12. *New York State Council on the Arts Annual Report 1967-68* (New York, NY and Syracuse, NY: New York State Council on the Arts, 1968), 83, 85.

13. See *New York State Council on the Arts Annual Report 1968-69* (New York, NY and Syracuse, NY: New York State Council on the Arts, 1969), 78-87.

14. *Ibid.* The Community Gallery at the Brooklyn Museum was directed by Henri Ghent, a leader among black activists working to democratize museums in the late 1960s and early ‘70s.

15. Schoener to Galamison, August 15, 1968, Archives of Allon Schoener, Hudson, NY.

16. Carol Greitzer, “A Politico Looks at John Vleit Lindsay: What Went Wrong?” *Village Voice*, September 8, 1966.

17. In 1995 the Anacostia Museum merged with the Smithsonian's Center for African American History and Culture.

18. Edmund Barry Gaither, "Hey! That's Mine," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. Ivan Karp, Christine Muller Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press in cooperation with the American Association of Museums, 1992), 60. Gaither is the Director of the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists and held a dual appointment as Curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

19. For a history of the museum see Mindy Duitz, "The Soul of a Museum," *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, 242-261.

20. Now the population in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn is mainly West Indian and Haitian.

21. Gerald Early interview in *I'll Make Me a World*, "Not a Rhyme Time" produced by Blackside, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York (1999).

22. McShine, who is originally from Trinidad, is one of the few black curators in a position of power in a mainstream museum. From 1959 until 1965 he worked as an assistant curator for the Museum of Modern Art's International exhibition program. In 1965 he became a curator at the Jewish Museum in New York, then considered the leading museum of contemporary art. His tenure there overlapped briefly with that of Allon Schoener. In 1967 he was appointed temporary director, a post he held for one year before returning to the Museum of Modern Art as associate curator for the Department of Painting and Sculpture. He has remained at MoMA since then and served as Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture from April 2002 through March 2003.

23. The show was entitled *Electronic Fractions II. light works by Tom Lloyd*. Lloyd, who was born in New York City in 1921, was an active member of the activist group the Artworkers Coalition (AWC) and, along with Faith Ringgold, one of its few black members. Lloyd's most significant project was the AWC Decentralization Study, a survey of arts resources in predominantly African American neighborhoods throughout New York City. This study led to the founding of the Jamaica Arts Center in Jamaica, Queens. See "An Artist's Dream: 8 Cultural Centers, Low Income Areas Consulted on What They Want," *Long Island Press*, August 9, 1970, F18.

24. Ed Spriggs was appointed the museum's second director in July 1969. His tenure was characterized by philosophy an activist, community-based philosophy.

25. The appointment of Dr. Mary Schmidt-Campbell, an art historian and leading scholar of the work of Romare Bearden, as director in 1977 is widely seen as a turning point in the museum's history as it shifted from a primarily "community based" mission

to one that was more conventionally museological. At the time of this writing, Dr. Schmidt-Campbell is writing a history of the Studio Museum in Harlem that discusses the museum's evolution.

26. This show was *The 1930s: Painting & Sculpture in America* held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, September-November 1968.

27. Mary Schmidt-Campbell interview in *I'll Make Me a World*, "Not a Rhyme Time" produced by Blackside, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York (1999).

28. In 1976 Charlene Claye Van Derzee (no relation to James VanDerZee) would mount another show of Black artists of the 1930s and early 40s entitled *The Black Artists in the WPA 1933-1943* at The New Museum Community Museum of Brooklyn. A small catalogue was published by Jaap Reitman Books in New York City.

29. Faith Ringgold was born in New York in 1930. She began her career as a painter and became best known for her painted story quilts that combine painting, quilted fabric, and storytelling. She has been an active feminist and an advocate for the inclusion of blacks and women in American museums. For more information on Ringgold see her autobiography, *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995); *Faith Ringgold: Twenty Years of Painting, Sculpture, and Performance, 1963-1983* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1984); and Flomenhaft, Eleanor, ed. *Faith Ringgold: A 25 Year Survey* (Hempstead, NY: Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, 1990).

30. See *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963-1973*, ed. Mary Schmidt-Campbell (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1984), 56.

31. Lucy Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York since 1969," *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 79.

32. Benny Andrews, "The BECC: Black Emergency Cultural Coalition," *Arts Magazine* 44 (Summer 1970): 18-19. Andrews was born in 1930 in Madison, Georgia and moved to New York City in 1958. He is a painter and printmaker, as well as a cultural activist and former professor at Queens College of the City University of New York. From 1982 to 1985 he served as director of the Visual Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information on Andrews and his work, see J. Richard Gruber, *American Icons: from Madison to Manhattan, the Art of Benny Andrews, 1948-1997* (Augusta, GA: Morris Museum of Art, 1997). A survey exhibition of Andrews' work is currently being planned at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Hartford, CT.

33. *Attica Book by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam*, eds. Benny Andrews and Rudolf Baranik (South Hackensack, NJ: Custom Communications Systems, Inc., 1972).

34. Lippard, 81.

35. Takis had wanted the museum to include a larger, more recent work of his in the exhibition and the museum decided to represent him with a smaller work in the museum's collection. See John Perrault, *Village Voice*, April 10, 1969, and Lippard, 83-84.

36. The artists also demanded rental fees for works exhibited at the museum whether owned by the artist or not, a percentage of the profit realized on the resale of an artist's work, and a fund for artists created from a tax levied on the sale of work of dead artists. The complete list of demands included the following:

A. With regard to modern art museums in general and the New York Museum of Modern Art in particular, AWC makes the following demands:

1. The Board of Trustees of the Museum should be made up of one-third Museum staff, one-third patrons, and one-third artists, if it is to continue to act as a policy-making body of the Museum.
2. Admission to the Museum should be free at all times and it should be open in the evenings to accommodate working people.
3. The Museum should decentralize to extend its activities into the Black, Spanish, and all other communities. It should also support events which these communities can identify with and control.
4. The Museum should abandon its plans to build a skyscraper in one of the most expensive real-estate areas of the city. Instead, its fund-raising campaign should aim at the conversion of many existing structures all over the city into relatively cheap, flexible branch-museums that will not carry the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society.
5. A section of the Museum under the direction of Black and Puerto Rican artists should be devoted to showing the accomplishments of Black and Puerto Rican artists.
6. The Museum should encourage female artist to overcome the centuries of damage done to the image of the female as an artist by establishing equal representation of the sexes in shows, museum purchases and on selection committees.
7. The Museum should maintain available to the public an up-to-date- registry of all artists.

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8. Museum staff should take positions publicly and use their political influence in matters concerning the welfare of artists, such as the Lower Manhattan Expressway, rent control for artists' housing, and legislation in favor of artists' rights.
 9. The Museum's exhibition programs should give special attention to works of artists which for one reason or another are not being shown in commercial galleries. The Museum should also sponsor the production and exhibition of such works outside its own premises.
 10. Artists should retain a disposition over the destiny of their works whether or not it is owned by them [*sic*], to ensure that it cannot be altered, destroyed, exhibited, or reproduced without their consent.
 11. In order to remain a Museum of Modern Art, the Museum should follow the general principle of acquiring and exhibiting only works which are no more than 30 (thirty) years old. All other works in its possession, and all those that eventually pass this age limit should be sold to museums whose collections record the history of art. The proceeds of such sales should be used for the requirement of the present and future.

B. Until such time as a minimum income is guaranteed for all people, the economic position of artists should be secured in the following ways:

1. Rental fees should be paid to artists for all work exhibited where admissions are charged, whether or not the work is owned by the artist.
2. A percentage of the profit realized on the resale of an artist's work would revert to the artist.
3. A trust fund should be set up from a tax levied on the sales of the work of dead artists. This fund would provide stipends, health insurance, help for artists' dependents, and other social benefits.

37. The name was chosen not only to honor the civil rights leader, but also recollected an exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art from October 31 through November 3, 1968. Six months after King had been assassinated, the museum held this memorial exhibition commemorating King's life and work. The exhibition was a benefit in which the works were sold to raise money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. No black artists were included in the initial artists list, which featured a motley assortment ranging from Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein to Saul Steinberg and Joseph Cornell. In response to pressure, the museum added a number of African Americans including Benny Andrews, Romare Bearden, Sam Gilliam, Daniel Johnson, Tom Lloyd, Richard Mayhew, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Raymond Saunders, Robert Thompson, Charles White, and Jack Whitten.

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38. Lloyd had participated in other groups briefly. He had also attended the first meeting of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition at Jack Whitten's loft at 426 Broome Street on November 29, 1968. But, according to Benny Andrews's journal entry describing this meeting, "Lloyd alienated everyone with his hang-ups over Blacks social works as a means of projecting our work in the public's eye. The others to a man felt that the number one aim must be artistic integrity, Blackness and everything else must be left to others. Tom Lloyd left the group and we agreed to meet again (Dec. 6, 68)." *Benny Andrews journal*, entry #442, November 29, 1968. He was also a panelist at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Symposium on the Black Artist" published in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* XXVII, no. 5 (January 1969): 245-260.
39. Benny Andrews, interview by author, tape recording, Litchfield, CT, July 14, 1999.
40. For information on how The Museum of Modern Art saw its relationship to issues of race and diversity, see the Report to the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art written by The Committee to Study Afro-American, Hispanic and Other Ethnic Art headed by J. Frederic Byers III, trustee. The report was delivered to the Board of Trustees in June 1971 and is available in John Hightower papers in The Museum of Modern Art Archive.
41. Faith Ringgold, Archive of American Art Oral History, 136-137; "Arts," *Women Artist News* (Summer 1980): 19 quoted in Lisa Farrington, "Faith Ringgold: The Early Works and the Evolution of the Thangka Paintings (Ph.D. dissertation: Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1997), 227.
42. *Women Artists in Revolution. A Documentary Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution*. New York: Women Artists in Revolution, 1971; reprint, Pittsburgh: Women's Interart Center, 1975., n.p.
43. For copies of correspondence between the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Group and Whitney Deputy Director Stephen E. Weil see *A Documentary Herstory of Women Artists in Revolution*.
- 44 For detailed information on the selection process see the 1970 Whitney Sculpture Annual files in the Whitney Museum of American Art Archive.
45. Lippard, 87.
46. Jean Toche, "Judson Gallery, NYC," *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group* (New York: Printed Matter, Inc., 1978), n.p.
47. Ibid, "Some of the events that led to GAAG's creation," n.p.
48. Ibid, Entry Number 2, October 30/31, 1969, n.p.

49. *Black Mask*, No. 1 (November 1966) in *Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea, and the Black Mask Group* (London: Unpopular Books & Sabotage Editions, 1993), 7.

50. *Ibid*, 50.

51. Documentation is scant and does not specify how they attempted to accomplish the closing of the museum.

52. For a discussion of the protest see Grace Glueck, "Dissidents Confront Rockefeller After Speech to Museum Group," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1970, 42.

53. Grace Glueck, "The Ivory Tower Versus the Discotheque," *Art in America* 59, no. 3 (May-June 1971): 80-85.

54. The Metropolitan Museum of Art did make provisions for the acquisition of modern American and European art, but not until the establishment of the Contemporary Art Department in 1967 (later renamed the 20th Century Art Department), it was always mediated by collaboration with another museum. In 1937 the museum engaged a specialist in American art to advise on purchases, Lloyd Goodrich, who was then a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1942 the Metropolitan Museum of Art entered into an agreement with the Whitney to merge the two institutions. In 1947, while the merger with the Whitney was still in the planning stages, the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art enter into a three-museum agreement in which each institution agreed to focus on its respective area of expertise. This agreement included the infamous provision that the Museum of Modern Art sell to the Metropolitan a total of forty works that no longer fell within the purview of "modern art" (the main criterion was that the artist had been dead for more than fifty years.) The Whitney pulled out of the merger in 1948. The three Museum agreement expired in 1952. For a full discussion see Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 303-313.

55. For a discussion of the formation and evolution of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a full record of its trustees see Tompkins.

56. This trustee was Roland Redmond.

57. Harry S. Parker III, interview by author, tape recording, San Francisco, CA, July 19, 1999.

58. Though located several miles from the museum, The Cloisters was never conceived as a form of public "outreach" intended to bring culture to the "people." Rather, The Cloisters was sequestered on a 56-acre site owned by Rockefeller precisely to avoid the encroachment of urban life. The park was made public in the form of a gift to the city of New York only after Rockefeller agreed to endow its maintenance. Moreover, in order

to preserve the unspoiled view from the site, Rockefeller even purchased the New Jersey cliffs overlooking the Hudson River across from Fort Tryon Park and presented them to the Palisade Interstate Park Commission as a gift.

59. Parker, interview.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Arthur Rosenblatt, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, February 27, 2000.

63. Thomas P. F. Hoving, letter to author, February 29, 2001.

64. Thomas P. F. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 164.

Chapter 2

The Making of a Crisis: Planning and Development of *Harlem On My Mind*

The *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition aimed to demonstrate the Metropolitan Museum of Art's willingness to embrace a broad spectrum of community interests and respond to the massive social and political changes taking place in the United States as a result of the Civil Rights movement. The museum saw itself as working on behalf of African Americans, but those involved in the project never won the confidence of the constituency they were trying to engage and instead the show became one of the most controversial ever mounted by an American museum. This chapter looks at the process of developing *Harlem On My Mind*, charting the key moments of the unfolding drama, from director Thomas P. F. Hoving's first exuberant announcement of the exhibition in November 1967 to early criticisms by artists, Harlem residents, and community leaders, to the ultimate crisis that erupted shortly before the opening in January 1969. Each group involved in the project's development—from the curator, advisory committees, staff, collaborators, and protesters—will be examined in terms of representation and how each group used the museum to lay claim to particular identities. The museum became a staging ground for the same types of political battles that were being waged simultaneously in other sectors of society.

Harlem On My Mind was the brainchild of Allon Schoener, an art historian and curator who was working as Director of the Visual Arts Program at the New York State

Council on the Arts when he proposed the exhibition to Thomas P. F. Hoving in January 1967. Hoving had just been appointed director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. For over a decade Schoener had been interested in the idea of democratizing culture. He had studied art history at Yale University and at London's Courtauld Institute with the Marxist art historian Anthony Blunt. His first museum job, from 1956 to 1959, was at the San Francisco Museum of Art producing a Sunday morning television show called "Art in Your Life." The show presented interviews with artists, painting demonstrations and gallery talks. Foreshadowing Schoener's exhibition technique in *Harlem On My Mind*, the gallery talks were conducted in mock exhibitions created in the studio especially for the program. In place of actual artworks, the production crew used framed photographs of paintings that were printed to actual scale. Although broadcast in black and white and only a faint echo of the actual museum experience, Schoener took pride in the fact that this show reached 80,000 people every Sunday afternoon, half the number of people who came to the museum in an entire year. Working on this television program shaped Schoener's belief in the power of communications technology.¹ His enthusiasm for television was part of a widespread belief in the 1950s that television would be the great leveler, collapsing the distinction between elite and mass culture. Schoener's program in San Francisco was one of the many that delivered dance, theater, music, and the visual arts directly into viewer's living rooms.

Schoener left San Francisco to become curator, and later director, of the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati. He arrived in New York City in 1964 and after brief stints as

an art dealer at Marlborough Gallery and a staff member at the Brooklyn Museum, he landed the position of assistant director at the Jewish Museum, then known as an innovator in the fields of contemporary art and exhibition practice. Director Sam Hunter asked Schoener if he would be interested in organizing a show about the Lower East Side, an idea that had been under discussion at the Jewish Museum for several years. Schoener decided to structure the show as a collage of sounds, and moving and static images that told the story of Eastern European Jews who had emigrated to the Lower East Side from 1870 to 1925, struggled to adapt to American life, and were eventually assimilated into New York City's mixture of cultures. This was Schoener's first opportunity to apply multi-media communications technology in an exhibition context and he relished it. *Portal to America* was by all measures a great success. Crowds lined up around the block to see the show and the critical response was good.

As a social history exhibition about one of New York City's most distinctive ethnic neighborhoods *Portal to America* foreshadowed *Harlem On My Mind*. Like the Jewish Museum show, *Harlem On My Mind* would tell its story exclusively through documentary materials--photographs, videotapes, and primary texts--presented in the form of slide projections, photo blow ups, audio tapes, text panels, and video projections. The idea for the *Harlem On My Mind* show came to Schoener while he was taking two Harlem ministers through the Lower East Side exhibition. The two shows however, were to differ in one key respect. *Portal to America* explored Schoener's own cultural history and the neighborhood where his father had lived as a boy. Harlem was a neighborhood Schoener did not know and to which he had no personal connection.

There he would function more like an ethnographer than an historian. Moreover, the Jewish Museum had an ongoing relationship with the constituency portrayed in *Portal to America*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art had no such relationship with the communities of Harlem.

The title of the show, *Harlem On My Mind*, also grew out of the Lower East Side exhibition. The phrase comes from a song by Irving Berlin written for his 1933 Broadway musical *As Thousands Cheer*. In this production, Ethel Waters performs the song "Harlem On My Mind" in the guise of a character based on the expatriate singer and dancer Josephine Baker. The Baker character sits alone in a Paris café pining for her former Harlem haunts singing lyrics such as, "I've a longing to be low down and my parlez-vous will not ring true, with Harlem on my mind." *As Thousands Cheer* was based on the structure of a daily newspaper; each scene of the show brought a different section of the newspaper to life. (Perhaps its best known number is "Heatwave," which was based on the weather report.) Schoener no doubt saw an affinity between his exhibition methodology, which drew heavily on newspaper source material, and Berlin's musical. Irving Berlin was one of the Lower East Side's most dramatic success stories.

Born Israel (Izzy) Baline, Berlin was a Russian Jewish immigrant who rose to become one the most lauded songwriters in American history. Irving Berlin epitomized the triumph of poor Jews and their full integration into American society. Paralleling the trajectory of Berlin's life, Schoener saw *Portal to America* as a symbolic culmination of

the Jewish immigrant's success story in the United States as the show took place at a museum that was the former mansion of the wealthy and distinguished Jewish family, the Warburgs. Schoener viewed the staging of an exhibition on the history of blacks at the Metropolitan, the country's most exalted museum, as a parallel achievement. "If telling the story of poor immigrant Jews in the former Warburg mansion at 92nd and Fifth Avenue was of interest," he thought, "telling the story of blacks in Harlem should also be of interest, and should happen at the Met."² Berlin's song "Harlem On My Mind" bridged *Portal to America*, the story of struggling Jews, with the story of struggling Blacks he told in *Harlem On My Mind*.

Berlin bore another relation to the project at the Metropolitan Museum of which Schoener may or may not have been aware. In 1926 Berlin married Ellin Mackay, the daughter of Clarence H. Mackay, one of the richest and most prominent men in New York society and a devout Catholic. Mackay had inherited a fortune from his father's Nevada mining business and enlarged this wealth by becoming a controlling investor in utilities and telegraph companies.³ Ellin Mackay became engaged to Irving Berlin, but her father forbade the marriage because Berlin was Jewish. Mackay and Berlin ended up eloping, against the wishes of her father, who disinherited her. Clarence Mackay was a collector of arms and armor, as well as Italian painting and sculpture. He was also a major supporter of the Metropolitan Museum of Art throughout the mid-1920s and a member the Board of Trustees from 1929 through 1932. *Harlem On My Mind* would not only bring images of blacks into the museum, it would also bring Irving Berlin into its hallowed halls, a Jew who had been shunned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's

power elite. The subtitle for the show, “Cultural Capital of Black America,” alluded to the concept of Harlem as the cultural homeland of all blacks in the United States. The phrase was adapted from James Weldon Johnson’s famous essay, “Harlem: The Cultural Capital” written in 1925 and published in *Survey Graphic* magazine. This essay, later anthologized in *The New Negro* edited by Alain Locke,⁴ lays out Johnson’s vision of Harlem as a center of intellectual, cultural and economic power, exerting influence throughout the world.

In 1967 after working at the Jewish Museum for just two years, Schoener lost his job. He suspects it was because he, like Berlin, married a non-Jewish woman.⁵ Shortly thereafter, he joined the staff of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) as the Visual Arts Program Director where was responsible for a broad program that included financial aid to museums, traveling exhibitions, artists’ studio visits for college and university students, and an initiative designed to foster new techniques in exhibition production. When Schoener arrived at NYSCA he was still riding the wave of public success he had achieved with *Portal to America*. At the Council Schoener had the opportunity to further develop his ideas about experimental exhibition practice with the support of its director, John Hightower, a populist who was developing a reputation as a maverick in the burgeoning field of public arts funding. Schoener’s first major project at the Council was a show commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Erie Canal. The project’s main innovation was its location; the exhibition took place on a barge that traveled from town to town along the canal, making stops scheduled to coincide with festivals and “Happenings” organized with the help of an advance team of NYSCA staff

members. Like *Portal to America, Erie Canal: 1817-1967* relied heavily on archival photographs reproduced on large placards. Schoener saw these traveling exhibitions as embodiments of democratic cultural diffusion. Indeed, *Harlem On My Mind* was originally conceived as a traveling exhibition in this format.⁶

As a liberal thinker with leftist leanings, Schoener saw *Harlem On My Mind* as a chance not only to explore new exhibition techniques, but also to be a Civil Rights activist. He had been working in Cincinnati during the early '60s but had not participated in the Freedom Rides and Civil Rights marches in the South like many of his contemporaries with similarly liberal political views. Psychologically and spiritually, however, he felt that he was there.⁷ He asked himself, "What can I do that will contribute to what is happening in the country today? I knew how to make exhibitions, so I thought, why not make an exhibition that's revolutionary?"⁸ By showcasing black culture, *Harlem On My Mind* was designed to legitimize social changes that were happening in American society at large. Schoener's ambitions were grand, but not entirely unfounded. The New York State Council on the Arts had been a model for the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 and for arts councils in every state of the country and most of the U.S. territories.⁹ Schoener had witnessed profound changes in the art system with the creation of these state and federal funding agencies. He hoped that *Harlem On My Mind* would be a similar catalyst for changes in the museum field.

Thomas Hoving, the Metropolitan's newly appointed director, shared Schoener's sense of civic duty and public mission. As New York City's Parks Commissioner under

Mayor John Lindsay from 1965 until his appointment as director of the Metropolitan in December 1966, Hoving had been deeply involved in the racial politics of New York City. His office took a proactive role in quelling racial tensions by sponsoring “Happenings” in public parks that allowed supervised chaos. “Most of my summer games and circuses, concerts and “Happenings,” says Hoving, “were intended to keep the city cool. It worked. New York City didn’t get torched as did so many around the U.S.A.”¹⁰ Hoving also had a history of taking liberal stands on controversial issues. During his tenure as Parks Commissioner he was asked by Mayor Lindsay to assess a plan that would have allowed Columbia University to build a controversial gym in Harlem’s Morningside Park. The plan was controversial not only because it gave a private university use of public lands and thus infringed upon a public entitlement of Harlem residents, but also because its plans to allow gym access by the neighborhood’s black residents relegated them to an entrance on the lower floors of the building in what amounted to de facto segregation. One journalist termed the situation “apartheid.”¹¹ Hoving argued against Columbia’s encroachment on Morningside Park and reported to Lindsay that using public lands for private interests sets “a very, very bad precedent.”¹² The controversy over the building of the gym would, in 1968, spark the student uprising that shut down Columbia University. Hoving’s words would come back to haunt him later when he led an expansion project at the Metropolitan Museum that involved accessing 38,000 square feet of land in Central Park.

As soon as he was appointed director, Hoving started to enact changes at the Metropolitan Museum. His first project was to revamp a building plan that would have

sequestered the museum behind a large gate. Instead, Hoving decided to turn the front of the museum into a public plaza with steps that would later become a beloved New York City landmark. *Harlem On My Mind* was part of Hoving's crusade to demonstrate that museums could embrace a broad spectrum of community and cultural interests. Most pointedly, it aimed to make the Metropolitan Museum of Art more hospitable to blacks. On the surface, *Harlem On My Mind* seemed to fly in the face of the Metropolitan's traditional interests, the great arts of Europe, artifacts from the Middle East, and such traditional issues as connoisseurship and provenance. Many of the pictures included in the exhibition were by unknown photographers and had been obtained from United Press International (UPI) and the local history collection of the New York Public Library. And, most importantly, these photographs were presented in reproduction, not in the original. But *Harlem On My Mind* was designed to educate its audience and this focus on pedagogy also had a distinguished legacy at the Metropolitan Museum. As Hoving reminded readers in the preface to the *Harlem On My Mind* catalogue, the museum's mission was "to relate art to practical life and practical living to art."¹³ Moreover, throughout its history the Metropolitan had gone through phases in which public service was its primary emphasis. From 1940 to 1954 the museum had launched several projects with explicitly pedagogical and populist aims under the direction of Henry Francis Taylor, a pioneer in the field of museology who advocated that museums be places for public education. These included the creation of visitor amenities, such as a restaurant, and a modern theater, the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium for lectures and concerts which was equipped with seating for 750. Taylor instituted special exhibitions in the Junior Museum, a space which catered to children,

and began the “Metropolitan Seminars” booklet series on art appreciation. Under Taylor’s direction the museum mounted several popular international loan shows—a novelty at the time—including a three-person exhibition of paintings by Hogarth, Constable, and Turner; a survey of work by van Gogh; and a show of Chinese court robes entitled *Costumes from the Forbidden City*. These shows were made possible by the availability of art from European museums directly after World War II while many of the museums were being rebuilt.¹⁴ While the tenure of Hoving’s immediate predecessor James Rorimer was marked by retrenchment during the years 1955 to 1966, the Hoving era swung the pendulum back in the direction of public service.

There were other reasons that *Harlem On My Mind* met with a positive reception when Schoener proposed it to the museum. Harry S. Parker III, who was the museum’s Vice-Director for Education and is now the director of the San Francisco Museums of Fine Arts, recalls that the late 1960s was a time when people of conscience felt both a sense of social responsibility and a feeling of empowerment that they could make an impact on society even from within an elite institution like the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As Parker recollects, “You’ve got to put it in context. In the mid-‘60s what we were all saying is that there are some issues that were so important that every institution had to get involved in them. You can’t afford to be saying...that’s somebody else’s problem. So what everyone was crying for was, no, you’re rich, you’re powerful, you’re a big institution. You have to take an interest in problems of the day.”¹⁵ All of this set the background for *Harlem On My Mind*.

To fund the show, Thomas Hoving went to the Henry Luce Foundation for full support. He and Schoener found the foundation's Executive Director Martha Wallace and Luce family member Beth Moore, Henry Robinson Luce's sister, extremely sympathetic to their vision. Socially driven projects were part of the foundation's mission and *Harlem On My Mind* might have held a special appeal for the Luce family because of its affinity with the populist and photojournalistic bent of *Time* and *Life*, two of the magazines from which Henry Robinson Luce, founder of the foundation, had made his fortune. Moreover, the Luce Foundation had just acquired an enormous bequest when Luce died suddenly in February 1967. This bequest quadrupled the foundation's assets to over \$80,000,000.¹⁶ The Luce Foundation joined the *Harlem On My Mind* project as its sole funder by providing \$225,000.¹⁷ The New York State Council on the Arts made an in-kind contribution to the show in the form of Schoener's salary, which came to about \$25,000 a year. Thus support for the show was a public and private partnership.

Once funding had been secured Schoener began to build his team. He hired three African American staff members, Reginald McGhee as director of photographic research, Donald Harper as audio curator, and A'Lelia Nelson as administrator. McGhee was a freelance photojournalist whom Schoener had met through Vinnette Carroll, Director of the Council's Ghetto Arts Program. McGhee had worked as a photographer for the New York State Council on the Arts and the Studio Museum in Harlem, as well as *Jet*, *Ebony*, and the Magnum Agency. Donald Harper had been trained as an electrical engineer and had worked as an audio producer in television and theater. A'Lelia Nelson was a Harlem resident who was a close friend of the family of

the famous turn-of-the-century beautician and entrepreneur, Madame C. J. Walker, and named for her daughter. Schoener was introduced to Harper through another NYSCA staff member, Kenneth Dewey, who was in charge of research and socially-based initiatives. Reginald McGhee brought in A'Lelia Nelson.

From the outset, Schoener knew he needed to enlist the support of opinion leaders in the community to help legitimize the project and its claim that the show was being developed with the participation of “the people of Harlem.” He set about creating an exhibition research committee. Schoener did his homework and stocked this committee with individuals who had both credentials and credibility among Harlem’s intellectual community. First and foremost was John Henrik Clarke, an historian of African American history and an editor of the leftist social history magazine, *Freedomways*. Schoener invited Clarke to work with him on the show in the summer of 1967. John Henrik Clarke had been active in the Young Communist League in the 1930s and this may have appealed to Schoener, who was a self-proclaimed Marxist who had been introduced to Communism through Anthony Blunt, his mentor at Courtauld Institute.¹⁸ Clarke would provide the scholarly backbone of the exhibition, drawing on the frameworks for Harlem’s history that he had previously developed in his two edited anthologies, *Harlem U.S.A.* and *Harlem: A Community in Transition* both first published in 1964.

Clarke was also the director of the Heritage Program of a Harlem-based youth program called Har-You Act, Inc., a community organization developed under the auspices of

the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency which offered programs for young people in art, music, theater, and dance. In their initial conversations, Schoener had promised to cooperate with Har-You Act, Inc. by having the students act as installers for the show. Har-You Act, Inc (originally called HARYOU for Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited) was a government funded community project started in 1963 amid great optimism. Its stated aims were to heal the psychic damage caused by systemic racism by putting the tools of social change and economic empowerment in the hands of young people in Harlem. Those invested in the project included psychologist Kenneth Clark, best known for the research he and his wife and collaborator Dr. Mamie Clark conducted on self-image among African American children that had been used in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision on school desegregation. In an essay anthologized in one of John Henrik Clarke's books, Kenneth Clark wrote that HARYOU seeks to "discourage dependency through an increasing sense of pride, confidence, and initiative in the youth themselves."¹⁹ The organization was started with high hopes. But by the time Schoener met Clarke and began discussing a role for HARYOU's teenagers in the *Harlem On My Mind* project, this optimism had soured. A power struggle over control of the organization led to its merger with Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s Associated Community Teams (ACT) to become Har-You Act, Inc. and according to Kenneth Clark, HARYOU became just another "top down" government program. In an essay published in one of John Henrik Clarke's anthologies, Kenneth Clark wrote that the project failed because "[t]he poor were fought about but not for... The poor were hostages, instruments to the forging of other peoples' profit and power."²⁰ John Henrik Clarke joined Schoener's

committee, but the collaboration between Har-You Act, Inc. and the Metropolitan Museum never came to fruition.

A second core member of the exhibition research committee was Jean Blackwell Hutson, a curator at the Arthur A. Schomburg branch of the New York Public Library, located in East Harlem at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue. Hutson was also chair of the Board of Directors of the Harlem Cultural Council, an organization founded in 1964 to support the development and presentation of visual and performing arts by African Americans. Two of the Harlem Cultural Council's best known programs were Jazzmobile and Dancemobile, which presented concerts and performances in the streets of predominantly African American neighborhoods in New York City. Hutson would later become the first African American trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The third key member of the research committee was Regina Andrews. Andrews had moved to Harlem in the early 1920s and had been a librarian at the Schomburg Library during the Harlem Renaissance. She was, in fact, the first black librarian in New York City. This position placed her in contact with many important literary and artistic figures, and her home was a social and intellectual meeting place. In 1949 Andrews had been appointed librarian at the Washington Heights branch of the New York Public Library, a post she held until her retirement in 1967. Regina Andrews's husband, William T. Andrews, was an Assemblyman from Harlem and Andrews herself was a board member of the Urban League.

With his team in place, Schoener had surrounded himself with people who would perform strategic roles. Staff members Reginald McGhee and Donald Harper would coordinate the concrete aspects of the show. Advisors Jean Blackwell Hutson, John Henrik Clarke, and Regina Andrews would give scholarly legitimacy to the project, and A'Lelia Nelson, a well-connected Harlem socialite, would add a bit of luster. As Schoener has recounted, things got off to a rocky start. The first day he went to Harlem to work on the show he went to see the Schomburg Library curator Jean Hutson. Hutson arranged for Schoener to have lunch with John Henrik Clarke. Over lunch Clarke told Schoener about his experience of being a *shabbas goy* working with the Jews on the Lower East Side, performing tasks forbidden to Jews on the Sabbath. "Then he turned to me and looked at me straight in the face and said, if you're another downtown Jew come up here to rip us off, go away."²¹ Recollecting that experience now, Schoener says that he had no clue as to the seriousness of this statement. Schoener just took it for granted that black/Jewish relations were tense.

Did Clarke's comment reflect a "healthy skepticism" based on the experience of years of disillusionment and thwarted hopes or was there something particularly hostile about his remark? Clarke's subsequent career path seems to suggest an unusual degree of hostility toward whites in general and Jews in particular. Clarke was one of the leading scholars of Harlem history, having edited two volumes on the subject and written several essays, and he would go on to become one of the leading figures in the Afrocentric movement. But by the 1990s he would also become a proponent of the

notion that a Jewish conspiracy was responsible the subjugation of blacks and an advocate of the theory of Sun People and Ice people, that is, the belief that white people are vicious because they, unlike the rest of mankind, are descended from the Neanderthals (the Ice People) and that Jews are the “purest,” oldest, and most heinous Neanderthal-Caucasoids.²² In 1969, however, Schoener did not let Clarke’s skepticism deter him and he certainly did not foresee where Clarke’s militancy would take him. Schoener has said, “I never felt guilty about being a Jew and wanting to do this stuff.”²³

One of the biggest issues of contention that arose in the planning of the exhibition was the use of expertise from the Harlem community. African American staff members Donald Harper and Reginald McGhee fulfilled Schoener’s self-imposed requirement that blacks hold staff positions on the project. But neither had lived in Harlem and therefore they did not satisfy the local cultural community’s skepticism that the show would accurately reflect a Harlem-based perspective. McGhee and Harper dismissed these concerns. In an article published in *The New York Times* when the show opened in January 1969 McGhee said,

You know, we get a few people complaining about Don and me because neither of us is *from* Harlem. I’m from Milwaukee and he’s from Chicago. But how many New Yorkers are from any part of New York? What people don’t realize is that there’s an awful lot of pride in Harlem. A black man may live better somewhere else—in better circumstances, you know—but when he gets to Harlem, he knows he’s home. You don’t have to be born there to *know* Harlem. You’ve just got to be black.²⁴ (Emphasis in the original.)

Hoving’s right hand man at the Metropolitan Museum, Arthur Rosenblatt, Vice-Director for Architecture, believes that Schoener surrounded himself with people of questionable qualifications so that he would not be overshadowed by their expertise.²⁵

Schoener vastly underestimated the importance of hiring members of the Harlem community. One of the key issues for black activists in New York City at the time was the concept of community control.

Schoener was shooting from the hip and nowhere was this more apparent than in his invitation to Edward K. Taylor to join the exhibition staff. In November of 1967, Schoener invited Taylor to serve as "Staff Production Consultant." As Schoener stated in a letter to Taylor about the job, "...you will be paid at a monthly rate yet to be established... The exact nature of your duties to be performed during the varying phases of the preparation of the exhibition will have to be defined."²⁶ Taylor was a community organizer, as well as a singer and voice teacher who would later, in early 1968, be appointed Executive Director of the Harlem Cultural Council. This lack of clarity about Taylor's role would prove to be a fatal strategic mistake for Schoener as Taylor, feeling that he and his community had been treated unjustly, would become one of the most outspoken opponents of the show.

By the fall of 1967 the museum was ready to publicly announce the exhibition. Mel Patrick, who was the community board coordinator for Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and who was serving as an informal advisor, recommended doing the initial announcement in Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, an exclusive vacation community for wealthy blacks where A'Leila Nelson had a home. Schoener, Harper and McGhee went to the Nelson house for the initial kick off party. The New York press conference was held later in the fall on November 15, 1967 at the Arthur A. Schomburg

Library. Hoving introduced the exhibition to the press flanked by Mayor John Lindsay and Percy Sutton, the Borough President of Manhattan. Both politicians gave their endorsements to the show. The press release portrayed the show as a fulfillment of the museum's social responsibility:

At no time in this country's history has there been a more urgent need for a creative confrontation between white and black communities than today. In the belief that the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a deep responsibility to help provide the opportunity for such an exchange, an exhibition of Harlem's rich and varied sixty-year history as the cultural capital of Black America will be shown in the Museum's major exhibition galleries in October of 1968."²⁷

The following day *The New York Times* ran a long article portraying the exhibition as a celebration of Harlem's achievements. In keeping with the museum's line on the show, *Harlem On My Mind* was described as a project that would be developed with the direct participation of members of the Harlem community. The research committee members were named and the article chronicled Hoving's achievements to date during his brief seven-month tenure at the Metropolitan Museum. The show was also announced in the January 1968 *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* as an exhibition that would travel throughout the country as part of an "unprecedented movement toward a world community of museums and institutions."²⁸ In a comment that revealed the foreignness of African American culture to the conventional concerns of the Metropolitan Museum, Hoving called *Harlem On My Mind* the museum's "most exotic" exhibition of the coming year, more exotic in his mind than the other shows covered in the same issue, which included displays of artifacts from 4th- to 7th-Century Byzantium, pottery from the 15th- and 16th-Century Ottoman Empire, and bronzes from 3rd millennium B.C. Anatolia.

The exhibition team had a downtown office at NYSCA, which was then located on West 57th Street and an uptown office at the Schomburg Library. With unabashed naiveté Schoener imagined that he was crossing a color line as he rode the subway to Harlem: “I used to have this experience where I’d go uptown to work at the Schomburg and then I’d take [the subway] downtown to where we lived at Lexington Avenue and 90th Street and I used to feel like I was changing color myself. For a short period of time I thought I was able to really identify with black society or understand it.”²⁹

Schoener had the idealistic, some might even say arrogant, belief that he could transcend the social markers of his identity. More recently, he has admitted, “You think you can do it but you never really do.”³⁰ But if Schoener could forget that he was white, others could not. According to Schoener, Donald Harper, a black staff member on the exhibition staff, had a standing joke. He’d say it’s just like the Cotton Club, black talent and Jewish bosses.³¹

Though he was never credited for playing this role, John Henrik Clarke and his two published anthologies, *Harlem U.S.A.* and *Harlem: A Community in Transition*, provided the thematic framework for the show. This framework was a roughly chronological survey of Harlem history that began with the settlement of blacks at the end of the 19th Century; the creation of black organizations and institutions, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the 1910s and ‘20s; the New Negro Movement and Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa Movement”; the Harlem Renaissance; the economic oppression of blacks during the Depression and throughout the 20th Century; the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s; and

militancy in the 1960s. To illustrate this timeline, Reginald McGhee pounded the pavement looking for photographs and memorabilia. He is the one who found photographer James VanDerZee, who was represented by over 50 of the show's 700 photographs. These photographs included the full range of VanDerZee's work from the 1920s and '30s including street scenes; studio portraits of both famous figures and ordinary Harlem families; church groups, schools, and social clubs; and pictures of Marcus Garvey, for whom he was the official photographer.³² Donald Harper made recordings and researched music that provided the "soundtrack" to the exhibition, as well as the basis for a record album sold in a museum shop at the end of the show.

Work on the catalogue had begun before the exhibition team was assembled. Schoener originally planned to publish the book with Holt, Rinehart and Winston, the press that produced the catalogue for *Portal to America*. Schoener had begun negotiations with Holt's editor-in-chief Arthur A. Cohen as early as March 1967. But a series of disagreements plagued Schoener and Cohen's plans for the book, causing Cohen to oscillate between what he described as "continued enthusiasm for the project to extreme bleakness."³³ Cohen wanted to use an established writer for the introduction and a concluding postscript. Without consulting Schoener, he had met with Ralph Ellison, who agreed to do the essays.³⁴ But Schoener was dead set against going this route. In a letter to his literary agent, he complained: "...Ralph Ellison would not have been my choice to write an introduction to the book because he is a literary figure, not a person who has been identified with the social situation in Harlem."³⁵ His preference was to have the catalogue provide a platform for an unknown talent. In June 1967, Schoener

conceded that if an established figure were to be used, he would accept the psychologist Kenneth Clark. But by January 1968, Schoener became adamant once again that he did not want to the participation of an established writer. This time if a known figure were used, he demanded that it be H. Rap Brown, the black activist and national director of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), who was in the process of abandoning his belief in the pacifist tactics of the Civil Rights Movement to embrace the more militant ideas of the Black Panther Party.³⁶

As the conflict with Cohen grew deeper, Schoener sought other options. In January 1968 Reginald McGhee suggested that he read a research paper on Harlem written by a young woman interning in the NYSCA office. The paper, written by Candice Van Ellison, a student at Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, quoted heavily from the anthologies edited by John Henrik Clarke, *Harlem U.S.A.* and *Harlem: A Community in Transition*. Schoener read the paper then sent it to Clarke with a note saying that he'd like to use it as the introduction and appreciated getting Clarke's judgment. The paper was essentially based on Clarke's books. It received the scholar's approval.

In the weeks that followed, differences between Schoener and Cohen came to a head and on January 22, 1968 Holt, Rinehart and Winston dropped the project. In a letter explaining the decision, Cohen contrasted *Harlem On My Mind* with *Portal to America*, pointing out: "The real problem, as an ideological problem (not unrelated to the question of sales) is that by and large the immigrant story is a success story and the

experience of the black community in America is still an unrelieved tragedy.”³⁷ In a prescient statement Cohen also said, “Moreover, it is my feeling, in checking with some of my Negro friends their own reactions to the book as a concept, that there is going to be one helluva lot of political hostility generated by the show and the book. This can work miracles for a \$5.95 book, but I think may work precisely opposite for a \$14.95 book.” The book would ultimately be picked up and published by Random House.

Cohen’s incisive comment about the different experiences of American Jews and African Americans would become the central issue in the show’s failure to analyze and appropriately position the idea of African American identity in the United States. From the 1940s through the late 1960s, the dominant paradigm for understanding race in America was based on ethnicity theory, that is, the view that African Americans in the United States are equivalent to ethnic groups and that their processes of assimilation are like those of European immigrant groups. When ethnicity theory was developed in the 1920s and ‘30s, it represented a progressive step toward greater equality because it displaced biological theories of race that justified slavery on the basis of inherent racial inferiority. The ethnicity paradigm posited race as a social category. Yet this paradigm was solidly based in the framework of European (white) ethnicity and could not appreciate the extent to which racial inequality differed from ethnic diversity.

According to the ethnicity paradigm, assimilation was viewed as the logical and natural course of ethnic groups in the United States. But in the late 1960s after the gains of the Civil Rights Movement removed the legal barriers to equality and yet allowed for

ongoing discrimination, the immigrant analogy was clearly shown to be inappropriate to the experience of African Americans. The trajectory of incorporation did not develop as the ethnicity paradigm had envisioned. As a visible minority that had been subject to forced immigration, the experience of blacks was not analogous to other American ethnic groups. By the late 1960s, the limitations of the ethnicity paradigm had become apparent and led to a more radical formulation of the meaning of race in the form of Black Nationalism.³⁸ Among the whites involved in the *Harlem On My Mind* project, only Arthur Cohen seems to have understood that Schoener's success with *Portal to America* was not an accurate indicator of his ability to succeed with *Harlem On My Mind*. The integrationist model that may have applied to Jewish immigrants in *Portal to America* had lost legitimacy among radicalized African Americans. Instead, ideas of black power, separatism, and Black Nationalism were gaining currency. Schoener never grasped this critical difference.

Throughout the exhibition planning process, Schoener, his staff, and his advisors were forced to grapple with issues of representation: Who is qualified to define the history of Harlem? Who is qualified to speak for whom? Minutes from the advisory committee meetings reveal a tug of war in which the process of "community participation" suffered from an ill-defined structure of leadership. Were the community experts to provide the leadership or was project director Allon Schoener? At a meeting held on May 1, 1968, Schoener told the exhibition research committee that while he knew that they did not represent the entire community, he was relying on their help to insure as complete a view of the community as possible. Regina Andrews pointed out that in

order for the consultants to be effective, they must know more about the structure of the exhibition. Schoener responded by stating that it was impossible to know at that point what different directions the show would take and that those directions would depend on their input. And so the discussions went round and round with Schoener insisting that he wanted “community participation,” but leaving the nature of that participation ambiguous.³⁹ In reality, Schoener had little intention of listening to the advice of the research committee members. He now openly admits that he did not want any interference with his vision, even though the idea of creating the advisory board was his own.⁴⁰ When it became clear to the research committee members that they were being used as tokens, the sting of betrayal was intense. The hypocrisy would provoke profound criticisms of Schoener, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the whole *Harlem On My Mind* endeavor.

A second point of contention that would become a focus of protests against the show was whether the exhibition would include works of art. Black artists in New York were beginning to organize and protest their chronic exclusion from exhibitions in mainstream museums. As previously noted, the exhibition *The 1930s: Painting & Sculpture in America* held in the fall of 1968 at the Whitney Museum of American Art had been a catalyst for action due to its omission of work by black artists, including the work produced by the many important black artists employed in the WPA art projects. When artists in New York learned of the *Harlem On My Mind* project, many felt that this was finally their chance to show their work in a major museum. It was unfathomable to them that an art museum would mount a show about black culture

without including black artists. The news that even a show about Harlem would exclude black artists was experienced as a profound insult.

Schoener never felt the need to reconsider his position. From his earliest conception, Schoener saw the *Harlem On My Mind* show as a social history display, not an art event. At the March 6, 1968 exhibition committee meeting, Reginald McGhee made the well-taken point that individual artistic visions were all to take second place to the larger portrait of Harlem created by the total exhibition.⁴¹ One could argue that the impetus toward a collective “portrait” was a politically empowering choice. Nonetheless, Schoener’s professed objective, “to document the struggle to establish an urban black culture...[and] prove that the black community in Harlem is a major cultural environment”⁴² made the exclusion of visual artists another case in the long history of systemic neglect. Perhaps the most egregious exclusion was Aaron Douglas’s suite of paintings entitled *Aspects of Negro Life*, a series of four monumental works from the 1930s depicting imaginary vignettes from black history from pre-enslavement Africa through slavery and reconstruction in the United States. These paintings hung in the Arthur A. Schomburg Library (now called the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), the very building that housed *Harlem On My Mind*’s uptown office. Art historian Richard Powell has written that the specific intent of these works was “to celebrate past and present African American achievements and to help viewers link art with struggle.”⁴³ Their inclusion would have been consistent with Schoener’s social goals, if not his curatorial strategy.

Not only had the visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Aaron Douglas, been major contributors to American art in the early twentieth century, during the 1960s Harlem was experiencing what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and others have called a second Harlem Renaissance.⁴⁴ Faith Ringgold, Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence all lived there and all made work that intimately and powerfully described the nature of their experience.⁴⁵ These and many other artists all over the country were dealing with themes related to black cultural identity and the struggle for power. The artists who took issue with Schoener's decision to omit the fine arts did not see it as a question of curatorial methodology. Rather they saw it as another case of exclusion. There was a brief period during the exhibition planning process when Schoener agreed to include photo-reproductions of artworks, a course of action that would have enabled him to incorporate this aspect of black cultural production and appease the artists while still adhering to his curatorial vision of a show comprised solely of documents and documentary materials. But to have included photo-reproductions of artworks, rather than the works themselves would have only underscored their absence. Instead, African American culture was represented by the more commonly seen and perhaps stereotypical image of the black cultural practitioner as the singer, dancer, actor, and athlete.

As early as January 1968 exhibition advisor Regina Andrews raised the concern that the omission of visual artists from the curatorial process weakened the project. In March, Romare Bearden was invited to join the exhibition planning team as Fine Arts Consultant, but the artist declined. By May 1968 exhibition research committee member

Jean Blackwell Hutson informed Schoener, his staff, and the other committee members that the Harlem Cultural Council was beginning to question why established artists were not to be included in the show. On May 16, Edward K. Taylor, now head of the Harlem Cultural Council, sent a letter to Schoener expressing consternation about the show. He began by lamenting the ill-defined nature of his role:

In the original letter concerning my formal connection with the exhibit, you called my position one of ‘Staff Consultant’ and said that the *production phase* would start immediately and continue throughout the exhibit...At this point, it is not very clear just exactly what I’m supposed to be doing. It’s obvious that I have not been functioning according to the original premise since so much has happened that affects the production aspects of the show that I have neither been consulted about nor informed of.⁴⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

Taylor went on to criticize the exhibition title. “...[A]fter taking the pulse of community reaction, I feel that the title of the show is an unwise one. There is much adverse feeling towards it because of its lack of *dignity* and *respect* and because of its white Irving Berlin origin.” (Emphasis in the original) But his strongest words were reserved for the issue of artists’ exclusion: “...I find it distressing that a Beardon [*sic*]), Critchlow, or DeCarava has not been added...As one very young photographer put it: ‘How can we have a show of such major proportions without some of the truly great Afro-American artists being involved.’” These conflicts would not be reported in newspapers and made public until six months later in late November. But the damage to the museum’s community relationships was already becoming irreparable. As Taylor states later in his letter, “Much of the controversy that exists within the community with regard to the show would not be there if there was a black group or person from the community assisting in the total coordination [of the exhibition].”⁴⁷

Unbeknownst to Schoener, Taylor and exhibition advisor John Henrik Clarke were sharing their doubts about the show. Clarke wrote to Schoener three weeks after Taylor suggesting that the show either be substantially changed or that it be cancelled:

As I have told you there are several things that the community is just not going to accept, and rather than completely antagonize people, it might actually be best to phase the show out, or else start immediately to work in the interests of the kind of a show that the community as a whole would want.

For one, as I have told you, something must be done as to the title, 'Harlem On My Mind,' and also, importantly, I know the artists are not going to tolerate color transparencies of their work in an Art Museum. As I see it, the sort of show you are putting together should be in the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Historical Society, or some similar place.⁴⁸

Clarke's letter must have carried some weight because five days later, on June 11, 1968, the museum sent artist Romare Bearden a note thanking him for joining the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition staff. The letter, however, was not signed by Schoener. Rather it came from Eleanor Falcon, the museum's public relations manager. Demonstrating a level of naiveté that was typical of the times, Falcon's invitation to Bearden included advice on what to include; she suggested that Bearden consider a bronze bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. by an artist named Ali Warren that had been brought to her attention by the national president of the 369th Veteran's Regiment.⁴⁹ Schoener himself has no recollection of Bearden's appointment to the exhibition staff and his short lived involvement with the museum had no discernible impact.⁵⁰ The curator never deviated from his position that visual arts such as painting, sculpture, or printmaking had no role in his project: "I thought they [black artists] deserved to have their art dignified by being presented in the Metropolitan Museum—I never questioned that...But I didn't see that as my responsibility."⁵¹

Discussions about how to deal with the fine art issue proceeded into the summer. On June 25, the Metropolitan Museum's Community Relations staff member, Susan Coppello, met with a group of Harlem-based artists led by Sol Battle at the Ya-Sanaa Gallery located on West 132nd Street. In a memo to Thomas Hoving following the meeting, Coppello reported that the artists "are tired of exhibits about their past and feel they are the present and the future of Harlem and must be included."⁵² Coppello went on to say, "I made the mistake of telling them the amount of the grant from the Luce Foundation [\$250,000]. They demanded that this money, and in fact the entire exhibit, be put in their hands."⁵³ On September 24, 1968 the research committee met to further discuss the issue. As documented in a follow-up letter by Romare Bearden, written because, as he tartly points out, no minutes were taken at the meeting, several conclusions were reached. Among them, Bearden confirmed that a separate art exhibit was to take place concurrent with *Harlem On My Mind* and he reminded Thomas Hoving that two individuals were recommended by the research committee to serve as members of a selection panel, Dr. James Porter of Howard University and Mr. Carroll Greene of the Frederick Douglass Museum of African Art. The letter also mentioned an agreement between Thomas Hoving and the committee that Hoving would meet with Roy DeCarava to reopen the discussion about including his photos in the exhibition.⁵⁴ It is unclear if this meeting ever took place.

By early November 1968 word had gotten out that the museum was planning an exhibition of black art and Schoener began to receive inquiries from artists. He

dispensed with these unsolicited inquiries by referring the artists to James Sneed, director of the Harlem Art Gallery who had been brought on as an advisor after the meeting with Coppello. Schoener's reply to the artists who contacted him read, "Arrangements are being made with Mr. James Sneed...to assist with the organization of this exhibition. I would suggest that you contact him directly..."⁵⁵ Schoener wanted no part of the art exhibition. A January 12, 1969 *New York Times* article about *Harlem On My Mind* mentioned parenthetically that a contemporary painting and sculpture show was scheduled to open at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in February. An article even appeared in the February 8 edition of the *Amsterdam News* mentioning the title, "Inner World of the Black Movement" and listing the artists: Al Hollingsworth, Tony Northern, Jim Janulo, Ahmado Wachuco, George Wilson, Charles Hudson, John Johnson, and Sneed himself.⁵⁶ And yet, not until March 10, two months after *Harlem On My Mind* opened, was a letter sent by Sneed to "Fellow Artists" inviting submissions for a juried show for which the museum would exert as little curatorial effort as possible. James Sneed's letter said:

All works are to come to the receiving entrance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 84th Street and 5th Avenue, March 17th, 18th & 19th between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Each artist can bring in two paintings. No paintings are to be larger than 40 x 60 inches. Pick out your most powerful pieces and enter them.⁵⁷

Few, if any, serious artists submitted their work. In the end this project turned out to be too little, too late. Of the juried show artist Benny Andrews says, "It was not something that we gave any importance to cause it was not being approached in a way that was really going to *mean* anything....I'd been exhibiting on Madison Avenue like one or two of the other people so we knew what good exhibitions were. We were not that

hungry to have something thrown at us.”⁵⁸ The painting and sculpture show never occurred.⁵⁹ However, the museum did mount a show in its Junior Museum of art by children who lived in Harlem. This show foreshadowed the way in which the Metropolitan Museum’s egalitarian impulses would be later channeled exclusively into the area of education and neglect artwork by contemporary artists of color.⁶⁰

As the exhibition research committee members dissociated themselves from the museum, they built alliances with the artists who opposed the show. But in the growing conflict the museum tried to replenish its troops and strengthen the ranks of its community participants. In September 1968 the museum created an even larger committee of about fifty black leaders and Harlem residents called the Community Advisory Committee, which included politicians, religious leaders, local heads of community groups such as CORE, the Urban League, and the NAACP, prominent lawyers, doctors, and businessmen, and a handful of cultural figures. In the category of Artists and Writers were Romare Bearden, James Sneed, and Larry Neal. This committee, which was described as working in an “advisory and liaison capacity,”⁶¹ allowed Schoener to disengage from the disgruntled circle of initial advisors and start with a fresh group whose charge was simple and clear: to promote the show. A memo sent to the Community Advisory Committee in September read: “The Research Phase of the exhibition is completed. We are now entering a new phase—Community Relations; therefore, we need a new group of consultants with a different orientation.”⁶² The formation of the committee was part of a large and ambitious publicity campaign by the museum.

The first meeting of this expanded committee took place on October 1, 1968. Schoener structured the meeting so that Hoving made the majority of the presentation on behalf of the museum.⁶³ He stressed the philosophy behind the *Harlem On My Mind* project and how it created a new role for the museum. Exhibition staff members Donald Harper and Reginald McGhee described their sound and photo research and the contents of the exhibition, and Schoener gave an overview of the exhibition structure. Hoving then wrapped up by reiterating the role of the committee: to help the museum directly reach the “black community.” The names of the committee members would be announced in a press release and the museum would try to place stories about its formation in African American newspapers such as the *Amsterdam News*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, as well on the local black radio station, WLIB. Subsequently, a second press release would be issued giving information about the exhibition and containing quotes from committee members and their reactions to the museum’s plans. Again, the museum would seek radio stories and editorial coverage, this time in a wider range of publications including the mainstream outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Daily News*, and *New York Post*. The role of these leaders was primarily directed toward enhancing the museum’s public image.

As the exhibition grew nearer, tensions continued to mount. Schoener began to sense the seriousness of the pressures and the need for damage control. When public relations manager Eleanor Falcon met with Schoener to discuss media coverage of the show,

Schoener could see the writing on the wall. He responded with a written memo that conveyed his apprehensions:

This will confirm our meeting of the other day concerning publicity associated with the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. It is the firm recommendation of the exhibition staff that every attempt possible should be made to obtain interpretation of the exhibition and its content which is compatible with the point of view of the exhibition and which reflects an attitude that will generally meet with the approval of the Harlem community. We believe that such an approach to publicity is, without question, in the best interest of the Metropolitan Museum.⁶⁴

Schoener's notion of a single "Harlem community" was an abstraction whose approval the museum could never win because the "community" itself encompassed many points of view from the politicians who endorsed the show, such as Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, to community leaders such as Jean Blackwell Hutson, who wanted to see it succeed but felt frustrated and withdrew her support, to more militant constituencies who would probably never have been satisfied by anything undertaken by an elite "white" institution like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, particularly a project led by a white curator. As curator Edmund Barry Gaither has put it, "There are some things that outsiders can't say because it creates rage."⁶⁵ Irresolvable conflicts over the direction of the exhibition had already compromised the approval of the Harlem representatives who had been involved in the show's early stages. It was difficult to see how the show could have averted major criticisms. The memo went on to underscore the need for black voices that would legitimize the project:

Although two articles are under way with *Vogue* and *McCall's*, we regret that it was not possible to insist that black writers, who can meet the specifications which are stated above, were not commissioned by these publications to prepare their articles. Considering the lethargy with which white publications engage black writers to interpret black material, we believe that it is important to insist that with all future magazine publicity opportunities that black writers be engaged to prepare these articles.⁶⁶

The letter included a list of nine suggested writers. There was a certain irony in Schoener's insistence on the involvement of black writers as one of the criticisms of his own working method was that he neglected the advice of the black scholars, artists, and activists who wanted to contribute to the success of his show.

By mid-November 1968 relations between Schoener and the original members of the research committee had reached a crisis point. Convinced that they had been duped by Schoener's claims of community involvement, on November 22, 1968 Harlem's most powerful arts organization, the Harlem Cultural Council, held a press conference at the YWCA on 125th Street withdrawing its endorsement of the show. Grace Glueck reported the event in *The New York Times* on November 23 stating, "Harlem's leading cultural organization has withdrawn its endorsement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's multi-media exhibition, 'Harlem On My Mind,' scheduled to open January 18. The Harlem Cultural Council cited a 'breakdown in communications' between itself and the Metropolitan for the action."⁶⁷ Glueck went on to say that John Henrik Clarke and Jean Blackwell Hutson claimed their ideas had been ignored in favor of those of two "out of towners," Reginald McGhee and Donald Harper. "Both are also Negro," noted Glueck. Joining forces with the defecting advisors were those who were dismayed by the museum's neglect of art, including artist Benny Andrews; Henri Ghent, director of the Brooklyn Museum's NYSCA funded community gallery; Romare Bearden; Merton Simpson, an African art dealer; and Roy DeCarava. The attitude of the group was concisely summed up in a letter from John Henrik Clarke to Romare Bearden written at the end of August: "The basis of the trouble with this project is that it never

belonged to us and while a lot of people listened to our suggestions about the project. Very few of these suggestions were ever put into effect [*sic*].”⁶⁸

On November 26 Schoener sent a long memo to Hoving refuting the criticisms cited in the Glueck article. Schoener wrote, “Although we have an air-tight case against Ed Taylor personally with our correspondence, I would not bring this up directly... To engage in direct controversy with him is to help build his position.”⁶⁹ Schoener discounted John Henrik Clarke’s contributions by saying, “Although we know that John Hendrik [*sic*] Clarke did a bad job for us, this should also not be mentioned. I have found enough critical statements by black writers – Harold Kruse [*sic*] in particular – to put John in his place.” Astonishingly, Schoener refuted the claim that the show should have included works of art by invoking Hilton Kramer’s position on the burgeoning “quality debate.” He said:

Ed Taylor, Henri Ghent, Romare Bearden, and their supporters want to bargain with the white establishment on the basis of their “Blackness,” not artistic merit. Hilton Kramer made this very evident of his review of the Studio Museum show [*Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the '30s* held November 19, 1968 to January 5, 1969]. Kramer’s review is evidence of the falseness of their position and its ultimate futility. If the work is no good, no reputable art organization anywhere in the world will endorse it.⁷⁰

Schoener concludes by chalking up the problems of the exhibition to the historic isolation of blacks and whites: “How can we expect either blacks or whites to perform miracles and do something super by getting along with each other as effective cultural equals – that neither one has ever done?”⁷¹

Thus the museum hobbled toward opening day desperately trying to salvage some semblance of credibility in the face of deteriorating community support. In a last gasp effort to recoup itself, the museum revived the idea of doing a black art show. On November 30, artist Benny Andrews received a letter from the *Harlem On My Mind* research committee dated November 22, the same day as the Harlem Cultural Council's press conference. The letter asked for a resume and visual documentation of his work for a forthcoming exhibition. The leaders of the project were listed as James Sneed, Taiwo Yusef Shabazz, and Dr. Ademola Ologebe-Fola, and the letter was signed by Nyumba Ya Sana.

Tension continued through the start of the new year. On January 7, with the press opening just one week away, Thomas Hoving called Henri Ghent, the director of the Brooklyn Museum's community gallery. Hoving asked about his dissatisfaction with the *Harlem On My Mind* show and requested a meeting with him the next day. Romare Bearden, Henri Ghent, Edward Taylor, and Cathy Aldridge a writer for the *Amsterdam News*, met with Hoving, as well as the Metropolitan Museum's European Paintings Curator Theodore Rousseau, and the Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, John Hightower. The specifics of the meeting were not documented, but clearly the discussion didn't satisfy the artists. On January 9, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Mahler and Karen Ryder, Cliff Joseph⁷² and his family, Ed Taylor, Bill Durante, Joan Sandler, Bob Carter, Russ Thompson, Henri Ghent, and a few others met at Benny Andrews's studio to organize the first of many demonstrations against the exhibition and to form an organization called the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition.

At this meeting, the group decided to picket the museum and to stage media events to publicize their position. Their primary demands were twofold. They protested the absence of African Americans in curatorial positions at the Metropolitan Museum and they rejected the idea that an art museum would have an exhibition of African American culture that contained no painting and sculpture. They called for the immediate cancellation of the show; the appointment of blacks to policy-making and curatorial positions; and a more "viable relationship" between the museum and the "total Black community."⁷³ The group's most articulate statement of purpose, written a few months later, is worth quoting at length. The statement said:

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition came into being in response to what its founders deemed a travesty of the cultural ethic. An institution invested with the guardianship of our society's cultural integrity, on January 18th, 1969, presented an exhibition entitled "Harlem On My Mind." That institution, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, hired Allon Schoerner [*sic*] as the exhibition coordinator. He sought to, "prove that the black community in Harlem is a major cultural environment with enormous strength and potential and that this community has made major contributions to the mainstream of American culture in music, theater and literature." The museum's director, Thomas P. Hoving [*sic*], stated that the purpose of the exhibition was, "a sincere effort to increase the knowledge and understanding of the cultural history of Harlem." Both the exhibition coordinator and the museum director failed to meet their stated objectives.

They failed because they omitted painters and sculptors who also contributed to the cultural development of Harlem, misused and otherwise ignored the body of black advisors to the exhibition, so that their own ignorance assisted by their arrogance, became their only guidelines, imported people from outside the Harlem community to work on the exhibition and ended up producing an audio-visual exposition with neither logical sequence nor adequate explanatory information....⁷⁴

On Sunday, January 12 at 1:00 p.m. the first public demonstration against *Harlem On My Mind* was held directly in front of the museum (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2). The protestors handed out leaflets informing passersby of the issues and imploring them to boycott the exhibition. The second demonstration took place on Tuesday, January 14 during the exhibition's press conference.⁷⁵ These two actions were then followed by a campaign to discourage black leaders from attending the opening night festivities and to send back their invitations and join the protest. Henri Ghent sent telegrams to Mayor Lindsay, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, Kenneth Clark, and the Reverend Calvin Butts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, but failed to enlist their support.

The picketers turned to the media in order to bring more attention to their cause. According to Andrews, "...[T]hat's all we had. We had no money. We had no influence. We had no entree into the white museum structure."⁷⁶ According to Andrews, the media loved the spectacle of picketing blacks so the members of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition did their best to offer good television. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the premier institutions in the country so anything that happened there was news. Moreover, race relations were hyped up and any racial conflict could be made newsworthy with the right staging. Says Andrews, "I'll never forget how little we looked there...Fortunate[ly] for us we got window dressing because the police came, set up barricades...[I]t was almost like giving us some clothing to wear...."⁷⁷ The light-skinned Andrews also recalls, "Henri was our front piece 'cause in my case, with my complexion it was very hard at that time for me to be out there on television... They basically wanted a black person who was very specifically militant in

their minds...and Henri was also articulate, which was an added plus.”⁷⁸ After these first two protests, a small article appeared in *The New York Times* on January 15:

Bearing signs that read, “Tricky Tom at it Again?” and “That’s White of Hoving!” about 15 black and white demonstrators picketed the Metropolitan Museum last evening....Urging the entire black community to boycott the show, the leaflets demanded that the museum appoint blacks to policy-making and curatorial positions, and that the Metropolitan Museum “seek a more viable relationship with the total black community.”⁷⁹

On the night of the opening dinner, Thursday, January 16, the demonstration was ramped up. The racially mixed group of demonstrators included Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Roy DeCarava, Tom Lloyd, Mahler Ryder, Reginald Gammon, Earl Miller, Richard Mayhew, Alice Neel, Tecla, Zeb, Francesca, Calvin Douglass, Felrath Himes, Russ Thompson, Frank Sharpe, Vivian Browne, Mahler and Karen Ryder, Charles Creary, Raymond Saunders, Barbara Carter, Joan Sandler, Bill Durante, John Dobbs, Henri Ghent, Edward Taylor, Benny Andrews, Cliff Joseph and others.⁸⁰

Protestors wore placards that characterized the show as latter day slavery: “On the auction block again—Sold out by Massa Hoving.” They hooted and yelled at the people entering the museum for a dinner at 6 p.m. and a general preview at 9 p.m. Some visitors—black and white—came over to talk with the group and others actually joined the picket line. Inside the museum’s guests toured the exhibition in ball gowns and black tie.

But this protest was overshadowed in the next day’s news by another event. On January 16 during a private daytime preview of the show ten paintings hanging in the Metropolitan’s galleries were scratched with the letter “H.” Based on the speculations

of museum officials, newspaper accounts connected the vandalism with the black protestors outside and speculated that the “H” stood for “Harlem” or “Hoving.” *The New York Times* reported the incident on the front page. A *Daily News* headlines screamed, “11 [sic] Met Paintings Slashed in ‘Racist’ Furor” while in smaller type in paragraph two the article concedes, “damage was slight.”⁸¹ *Muhammad Speaks*, the paper of the Nation of Islam, embraced the idea that blacks were responsible for the acts and defended the incident:

The insult of the ‘Harlem on My Mind’ exhibit at New York City’s Metropolitan Museum of Art was that it mainly portrayed white minds’ attitudes towards Black Harlem. Because of this colonial and condescending attitude, Afro-Americans retaliated by defacing some so-called classical western art in the museum.⁸²

The meaning of the letter “H” and the identity of the perpetrator have remained a mystery to this day. It is interesting to note, however, that in the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* there is a character who is branded with the letter “H.” George is a runaway slave who escapes from the Kentucky house of his master, Mr. Harris to meet his wife Eliza and his son in Canada, and eventually flee to Africa. Traveling to Canada incognito George wears gloves to conceal the letter “H” branded on his hand and passes for a dark-skinned Spaniard rather than a light-skinned African American.⁸³ Whether the “H” was a reference to this description of subterfuge and passing is impossible to say. One way or another, the protestors made amply clear that they would not behave as “Uncle Toms” in Thomas P. F. Hoving’s museum.

The protests on January 16 brought another surprise. As the artists were picketing outside the museum, they were startled to find that they had been joined by other

protesters (Fig. 2.3). Several Jewish groups, led by the Anti-Defamation League and including the Jewish Defense League and the American Jewish Congress, accused the museum of propagating anti-Semitism, citing offensive statements in the exhibition catalogue. What sparked their opposition was a passage in the introduction to the *Harlem On My Mind* book written by high school student and NYSCA intern Candice Van Ellison. In choosing a high school student over a recognized author, Schoener had imagined that using this essay would bring an air of authenticity to the *Harlem On My Mind* project. But in a section of the essay on “intergroup relations” Van Ellison included several comments that incensed organized Jewish groups. The most objectionable sentences read: “One other important factor worth noting is that, psychologically, Blacks find that anti-Jewish sentiments place them, for once, within a majority. Thus, our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.” Jews were up in arms.

This incident merely ignited an already incendiary situation. Tensions between blacks and Jews had come to a head during a teachers’ strike in the fall 1968 and when *Harlem On My Mind* opened in January 1969, the after shocks of the school controversy were still being felt. The crisis had its origin in the increasing frustration of black community organizers and grassroots groups in New York City who were critical of the Board of Education’s slow pace in integrating public schools. This led to a movement to abandon the idea of integration in favor of community control. If minority children, mostly black and Puerto Rican, were to be relegated to “ghetto” schools, these activists argued, at least their parents should have control.⁸⁴ In 1968 with the blessing of the New York

City Board of Education, the Ford Foundation agreed to underwrite the cost of establishing three experimental districts in Harlem, Lower Manhattan, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the United State with a population that was about 70 percent black and 25 percent Puerto Rican, the experiment would result in a head on collision with the powerful and largely Jewish teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers. The confrontation began in May 1968 when the Governing Board of Ocean Hill-Brownsville dismissed thirteen teachers and six administrators. The United Federation of Teachers feared that community control would destroy the power of the union and demanded that the teachers be reinstated. When the Governing Board refused, the teachers union went on strike on Monday, September 9, the first day of the school year. This was the first of three teachers' strikes that would take place throughout the fall of 1968 and cripple public education in New York for over one million students.

The conflict polarized blacks and Jews because the largely Jewish teachers union headed by Albert Shanker was seen as standing in the way of the black community's desire to educate its children the way that it saw fit. On the other side, Jews felt angry at what they saw as the betrayal by liberals, including Mayor Lindsay, who tried to placate both groups and mediate the dispute. Organized Jewish groups, like the American Jewish Committee, saw the experiment in decentralization as subsidized black anti-Semitism.⁸⁵ Having been accused of favoring blacks in the schools controversy, Lindsay came out swinging against the Metropolitan Museum and issued a statement condemning the exhibition catalogue:

[The catalogue's] statements on intergroup relations contains [*sic*] remarks which can only be described as racist. It suggests that black Americans have joined a national majority not by their efforts for justice and dignity, but through anti-Semitic feelings.

This is a slander on both the black and the white community, as well as an insult to the Jewish community...⁸⁶

Lindsay called for the withdrawal of the offending catalogue introduction. According to Hoving, "Lindsay was in deep trouble with the middle class and at that moment with the Jewish middle class. He was beginning his run for the second term and I guess he thought 'book burning' in the form of the Harlem catalogue was hunky-dorey."⁸⁷

Harry S. Parker III recalls, "When it started to deteriorate, it deteriorated very fast."⁸⁸

There was an endless meeting going on in Hoving's office all day as he would call his old friend and former boss Lindsay to ask his advice. Hoving was furious with Random House for agreeing to print the catalogue but then when the controversy got thick, telling Hoving to eliminate the introduction. Arthur Rosenblatt, the museum's Vice-Director for Architecture and a close associate of Thomas Hoving, reports that the publisher Random House was being pressured to withdraw the catalogue by the Metropolitan Museum's own trustees, the conservative members of the board who had opposed Hoving's hiring.⁸⁹

Lindsay's staff was afraid of alienating the Jewish community. During the controversy over school decentralization, Lindsay had been portrayed as favoring African American community activists over the United Federation of Teachers union, which was led by the outspoken Jewish educator Albert Shanker and which had a large percentage of

Jewish members. The Lindsay administration had taken a beating from Jewish leaders and voters. He was up for reelection that year and needed their support. Politically he could not afford to further alienate them. After several days of public conflict, Lindsay not only denounced the catalogue, but also threatened to rescind the museum's city funds which amounted to a whopping three and half million dollars.⁹⁰

The American Jewish Committee issued a press release on January 16 hailing Mayor Lindsay's condemnation of the catalogue essay: "We heartily support the forthright position taken by Mayor Lindsay in condemning what he rightfully called the 'racist' views expressed in the introduction to this book."⁹¹ The Anti-Defamation League took a sharper tone. National Chairman Dore Schary called the introductory essay "an insult and attack on Jews." He went on to excoriate the Met:

Random statements of anti-Semitism always plague the Jewish community and in normal circumstances we would be inclined to dismiss a statement by a 16-year-old girl ridden with frustration and anger. But we cannot ignore a great institution as respectable as the Metropolitan Museum of Art giving such a statement credence or significance.⁹²

The American Jewish Congress took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times*. The headline read "The Enemy is Silence" and their statement began, "It is important that every American understand the anger and dismay that swept the Jewish community when the Metropolitan Museum of Art published the racist catalogue for its exhibit, 'Harlem On My Mind.' We have had a long experience with the big lie—in this case, the lie that the Negro plight is the result of some kind of conspiracy by the Jews... What troubled us profoundly was the silence of those (black and white) who, by failing to

speak out, gave their consent to group libel and the scapegoating of a people....”⁹³ The ad ended with a request for contributions.

At first, Hoving stood behind the catalogue. But as the pressure mounted, on the evening of January 17 the day before the show was scheduled to open, Hoving authorized the insertion of a disclaimer by Van Ellison into the catalogue. Worked out with her by one of Hoving’s assistants, the statement read:

In regards to the controversy concerning the section in my introduction dealing with inter-group relations, I would like to state that the facts were organized according to the socio-economic realities in Harlem at that time, and that any racist overtones which were inferred from the passages quoted out of context are regrettable.⁹⁴

The staff worked all night to duplicate the disclaimer and insert it into the catalogue. When this disclaimer did not quell the storm the museum inserted a second statement five days later, an apology signed by Hoving in which he personally accepted responsibility for his “error in judgment.” The sheet, printed on museum letterhead, explained that the introduction had been written by a high school student, a fact omitted from the book itself. It went on to denounce the essay, stating that when he approved the inclusion of the piece, Hoving “wholly failed to sense the racial undertones that might be read into portions of it....I now fully recognize that her essay was not appropriate as an introduction to the catalogue and offer my deepest apologies to all persons who have been offended.”⁹⁵

Finally, on January 24—less than a week after the show opened—Thomas Hoving agreed to withdraw the catalogue from sale. In retrospect Hoving says, “I never forgave

him [Lindsay] and his advisors for forcing us to stop selling those catalogues. Yet, I caved, so maybe I should direct my anger at myself.”⁹⁶ The museum had purchased 40,000 softcover copies from Random House. 14,000 had been sold. The remaining 26,000 were taken out of circulation and stashed in the museum’s basement. (Later they were given to schools and community organizations.) By the end of February, Random House, which had also inserted a disclaimer, had sold 5,000 hardcover copies. The Book-of-the-Month Club bought 5,000 copies, but never offered them to its members. The essay was effectively squelched.

Schoener insisted that his scholarly freedom was being infringed upon.⁹⁷ He also worried that the withdrawal of the catalogue would be professionally damaging because it implied a failure on his part as editor.⁹⁸ He tried desperately to keep the book available for sale and when he failed, obtained legal counsel in order to try and get the softcover copies distributed through some other means. Later, he tried unsuccessfully to obtain the mechanicals or film that would have enabled him to have the book reprinted on his own. The book, however, was reissued in 1978 by Dell Publishing with Van Ellison’s essay replaced by an introduction written by Nathan Irvin Huggins, widely publisher black writer and editor and an additional chapter on the 1970s.⁹⁹ In 1995 The New Press reprinted the original catalogue for a new generation of readers complete with Van Ellison’s text. Schoener maintains that he had no idea Lindsay was pressuring the New York City Council to withdraw the museum’s funds or that Hoving’s job was on the line with his Board of Trustees.¹⁰⁰

Werner Kramarsky, who was Mayor Lindsay's Special Assistant, the Chair of the Board of Estimate, and the head of Governor Hugh Carey's New York State Human Rights Commission, says that looking back, the withdrawal of the catalogue was probably an infringement on free speech. But there was no one to publicly refute the mayor and the only member of Lindsay's administration to voice opposition was Kramarsky himself. Kramarsky, a First Amendment Rights expert, pointed out the legal and ethical implications to Lindsay. But the mayor held to his position and instead decided to capitalize on the opportunity to curry favor with rich and powerful constituency who opposed the show.¹⁰¹ Did Lindsay have the authority to rescind the City funds? According to Kramarsky, probably not.¹⁰² That would have taken a vote of the New York City Council. Indeed, such a move on Lindsay's part may have even been illegal. But his political purposes were served by making the gesture, a situation remarkably similar to that of Mayor Rudolph Guiliani's actions toward the Brooklyn Museum during the *Sensation* exhibition controversy in 1999.¹⁰³

During all of this, Schoener concealed an important piece of information. The offending catalogue statement had actually been paraphrased from a well-known book by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan called *Beyond the Melting Pot*. In Van Ellison's original term paper, the text had appeared as a quotation: "One other important factor worth noting is that psychologically Negroes may find that 'a bit of anti-Jewish feeling helps make them feel more completely American, a part of the majority group.' (19)"¹⁰⁴ In the catalogue, however, not only were the quotation

marks removed, but the third-person pronoun “them” was changed to “us” and anti-Jewish feelings were characterized as a national prejudice:

One other important factor worth noting is that, psychologically, Blacks find that anti-Jewish sentiments place them, for once, within a majority. Thus, our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.¹⁰⁵

The original passage by Glazer and Moynihan read:

Perhaps for many Negroes, subconsciously, a bit of anti-Jewish feeling helps make them feel more completely American, a part of the majority group.¹⁰⁶

The uproar might have been avoided had the catalogue specified the source of the statements in Glazer and Moynihan’s book, or that fact that the essay was based on a high school term paper. But the author was identified merely as “Candice Van Ellison/Harlem, 1967.” Schoener’s objective in editing Van Ellison’s paper was to capture authenticity. He did not want it to appear that this young black woman was discussing her own identity in terms that were borrowed from white men. As Adophe L. Reed has pointed out, at a time when black cultural nationalism was on the rise, “Truth became a feature of the speaker’s ‘blackness,’ i.e. validity claims were to be resolved not through discourse but by the claimant’s manipulation of certain banal symbols of legitimacy.”¹⁰⁷ Schoener understood this; if he hadn’t, he certainly would not have omitted the citations from Candice Van Ellison’s essay. He legitimized his own ability to speak about black culture by speaking through Van Ellison’s voice. According to Schoener, “Everyone was into Black Nationalism and black identity and it was very important for black statements to be listened to by white people. So for me to say in the introduction that this was a young black women who was borrowing from white intellectuals would have been very inappropriate.”¹⁰⁸ Ironically, by attributing Glazer’s

words to Van Ellison the quest for authenticity brought just the opposite. It was staging of identity that put words into Van Ellison's mouth. Schoener's elimination of the student's citations also transformed her essay from being a product of intellect and research into a "natural" expression of personal angst.

The ultimate source of the offending text was revealed in a small neighborhood newspaper from the Upper East Side, *Park East News*. Writer Morton Lawrence obtained a copy of Van Ellison's original term paper and revealed not only the source of the objectionable idea, but the sources of a number of other borrowed ideas in the text.¹⁰⁹ In her original paper Van Ellison had actually cited nine sources in twenty-four footnotes. In the published *Harlem On My Mind* version, all twenty four quotations were either deleted or paraphrased and all the citations were omitted, including references from John Henrik Clarke's *Harlem: A Community in Transition* and *Harlem U.S.A.* Furthermore, Schoener omitted Van Ellison's introductory statement that the essay was "a combination of fact, observation, and opinion."¹¹⁰ And finally, Schoener "radicalized" Van Ellison's text by substituting the words "black" or "Afro-American" every instance in which she had used the word "Negro."

When Thomas Hoving learned that the controversial statement had been borrowed from *Beyond the Melting Pot* and that Schoener had omitted the source, he was furious. But Hoving himself was not immune to charges of falsifying the truth. In his own preface to the catalogue he had fabricated a fictitious childhood complete with a Negro maid named Bessie who was always "friendly, always gay and warm" and Frank, a dour

chauffeur who was “sour, moody, bitter, silent and mad.”¹¹¹ He claimed that his mother used to go “slumming” in the clubs of Harlem for exotic titillation. And that to him as a kid, “Negroes were people, but they were happy, foot-twitching, smiling and sunny...Negroes, as human beings, did not exist....” Perhaps he felt the need to create these caricatures in order to illustrate for an elite white audience how far he himself had evolved. He has since said, “When I read my embarrassing text in galleys, I asked Schoener if I could rewrite it, but he discouraged me, saying he liked the confessional tone and especially the part about the maid and the chauffeur. So I let the foreword go unchanged.”¹¹² All of the participants in the *Harlem On My Mind* controversy strove to speak from positions of authority. For Hoving, this meant portraying himself as the child of white privilege who had recognized the injustice of racial discrimination and was now able to make amends.

The accusation of anti-Semitism at the Metropolitan Museum of Art touched a nerve. Though the criticisms against the *Harlem On My Mind* catalogue are debatable, in point of fact, the Metropolitan Museum of Art had never been particularly hospitable to Jews. Arthur Rosenblatt, Vice-Director for Architecture at the Metropolitan, who was one of the few Jews in an upper management position, says the museum was rife with anti-Semitism: “[We] never dealt with Jewish vendors or Jewish consultants... There was a lot of resistance at the time to hiring me... because I was Jewish and wasn’t part of ‘the club.’” In those days, being part of the club was a very important part... The thought that I survived twenty years at the Met is something of a miracle.”¹¹³

In the final analysis, the conflicts over the *Harlem On My Mind* catalogue and exhibition were not between blacks and Jews. The conflicts were between blacks and the Metropolitan Museum and Jews and the museum. These were struggles over representation and power staged at one of the world's most powerful cultural institutions. The *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition was intended to open the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the African American community of Harlem and to black audience members in general. Ultimately, the museum became a vessel into which different constituencies poured their grievances and aspirations and through which different groups tried to influence the behavior of an institution that stood for ultimate cultural power. To the members of the exhibition advisory board, participation in *Harlem On My Mind* meant the hope of having a real voice in the structure, contents and promotion of a project with high visibility and public reach—and one that purported to define them and their community—a hope that was dashed as the project developed. To the black artists who lobbied for participation and then disappointedly protested the museum, *Harlem On My Mind* represented a lost opportunity to do something truly revolutionary, present the work of African American painters and sculptors at the same status as that of European and European American artists. To Jewish leaders, the exhibition represented a political threat due to the state of black/Jewish relations in New York City at that time. Ironically, the Jewish groups' criticisms of the show enabled the black activists to gain more media attention than they would have otherwise. Not until the catalogue controversy appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* did the Harlem community's criticisms receive wide newspaper coverage. Had Jewish groups remained quiet, the black artists' concerns might have remained under the radar, buried

on page 41 of the newspaper, as was the first article in *The New York Times* reporting their earliest protest¹¹⁴ or relegated to a brief mention in an art review. To Schoener, doing *Harlem On My Mind* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art meant giving a limited role to “community participants” with a project that he knew would be controversial, would attract large audiences and would enhance his reputation. The project was indeed controversial, but its effect on Schoener’s career was devastating. John Hightower, Executive Director at the New York State Council on the Arts accepted him back into his old job as Visual Arts Director. But Hightower himself would be lured away a few months later to become director of the Museum of Modern Art and Schoener would leave the Council and go into relative seclusion in Vermont with his wife.¹¹⁵ He never held another full-time position in the art world. To the idealistic Hoving, *Harlem On My Mind* meant a radical transformation of the role of museums, which would have stood as a beacon for other museums around the country had it succeeded. Instead, the controversies surrounding the exhibition eclipsed the show itself. The words “Harlem On My Mind” would forever be synonymous with one of the greatest fiascoes in museum history.

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1. Allon Schoener, interview by author, tape recording, Grafton, VT, December 17, 1998.
 2. Introduction to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America. 1900-1968*, edited and with a new introduction by Allon Schoener (New York: The New Press, 1995), n.p.
 3. Calvin Tompkins, *Merchant and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), 237.
 4. This essay was originally published in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 301-11. The essay and a related discussion is published in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*, eds. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, (Lanham, MD and Oxford, England: 2000), 290-295.
 5. Schoener, interview.
 6. The only traveling component of the exhibition that was realized was a series of twenty photographs and texts mounted on aluminum panels that were made available for loan to schools through a grant from the Rockefeller Family Foundation.
 7. Ibid.
 8. Schoener, interview.
 9. The legislation that established the Council as a permanent agency of the state of New York on May 13, 1965 was published in the New York State Council on the Arts' Annual Reports of 1966-67, 1967-68, and 1969-70.
 10. Thomas P. F. Hoving, letter to author, February 29, 2001.
 11. James Ridgeway, "Columbia's Real Estate Ventures," *The New Republic*, 18 May 1968 cited in Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 233. See Cannato's chapter entitled "Columbia University, 1968: A School Under Siege," 229-265.
 12. Ibid, 234.
 13. Thomas P. F. Hoving. Preface to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America. 1960-1968*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Random House, 1969).
 14. For a discussion of Henry Francis Taylor's tenure at the Metropolitan Museum of Art see Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces*, 289-294 and 314-325.

15. Harry S. Parker III, interview by author, tape recording, San Francisco, CA, July 19, 1999.

16. Lance Morrow, *The Henry Luce Foundation 1936-1996. Sixtieth Anniversary Report* (New York: The Henry Luce Foundation, 1996), 54.

17. Interestingly, the Henry Luce Foundation's support of the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition is not mentioned in either of the two main publications documenting the foundation's work, *The Henry Luce Foundation 1936-1996. Sixtieth Anniversary Report* cited in note 15 or Walter Guzzardi, Jr. *The Henry Luce Foundation. A History: 1936-1986* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

18. Schoener described himself as a Marxist in an interview with the author. For a statement by John Henrik Clarke about his Communist affiliations see "Portrait of a Liberation Scholar" at nbufont.org/htm/MastersMuseums/JHClarke/ArticlesEssays/LiberationScholar.html. Coincidentally, Thomas P. F. Hoving's uncle Frederick Vanderbilt Field (1906-2000) was a supporter of Communist causes in the 1930's, '40s and '50s and was once described as "the Reds' pet blueblood." See Enid Nemy "Frederick Vanderbilt Field, Wealthy Leftist, Dies at 94," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2000 and Field's own autobiography *From Right to Left* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1990).

19. Kenneth B. Clark, "HARYOU: An Experiment" in *Harlem: A Community in Transition*, ed. John Henrik Clarke, 2nd paperbound edition (New York: Citadel Press, Inc., 1969), 212-213. This essay is based on a speech delivered by Kenneth B. Clark at the Award Luncheon of the Association for the Improvement of Mental Health, Saturday, May 11, 1963.

20. Kenneth B. Clark, "HARYOU-ACT in Harlem—The Dream that Went Astray," in *Harlem U.S.A.* edited and with a new foreword by John Henrik Clarke, (New York: A&B Book Publishers, 1971), 84. First published in Kenneth Clark and Jeannette Hopkins, *A Relevant War Against Poverty* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1969), 1-5, 218-222.

21. Steven Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), 29-30 and n 19, 254.

22. Clarke wrote the introduction to the book *The Iceman Inheritance: Prehistoric Sources of Western Man's Racism, Sexism and Aggression* by Michael Bradley (New York: Kayode Publications, 1991) and the foreword to Bradley's *Chosen People From the Caucasus: Jewish Origins, Delusions, Deceptions and Historical Role in the Slave Trade, Genocide and Cultural Colonization* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1996). See also Henry Louis Gates, "Black Anti-Semitism" in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around* eds. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (Lanham, MD and Oxford, England: 2000), 603.

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23. Schoener, interview.
 24. "Media Mix," *The New York Times* (December 8, 1968): 43-44.
 25. Arthur Rosenblatt, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, February 27, 2001.
 26. Allon Schoener, letter to Edward K. Taylor, November 16, 1967 in the archives of Allon Schoener.
 27. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Harlem's Rich, Varied Sixty-Year History as Cultural Capital of Black America to be Presented in Major Exhibition by Harlem Community at Metropolitan Museum." *Harlem On My Mind* press release, November 16, 1967.
 28. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* XXVI, no. 5 (January 1968), 1.
 29. Schoener, interview.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. For the most comprehensive discussion of James VanDerZee and the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition Rodger C. Birt, "A Life in American Photography," in *VanDerZee. Photographer 1886-1983*, ed. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1993), 57-73.
 33. Arthur A. Cohen, letter to Lynn Nesbitt, January 27, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
 34. Arthur A. Cohen, letter to Allon Schoener, March 23, 1967 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
 35. Allon Schoener, letter to Lynn Nesbitt, June 28, 1967 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
 36. H. Rap Brown's political attitudes at that time are documented in his book *Die Nigger Die!* (New York: The Dial Press, 1969).
 37. Arthur A. Cohen, letter to Lynn Nesbitt, January 22, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
 38. For a full discussion of this topic see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 14-54. First published in 1986 by Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc.

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39. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Meeting minutes from the Exhibition Research Committee for *Harlem On My Mind*, May 1, 1968 in the Jean Blackwell Hutson archive, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
40. Introduction to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*, edited and with a new introduction by Allon Schoener (New York: The New Press, 1995), n.p.
41. Minutes from the *Harlem On My Mind* Research Committee meeting, March 6, 1968 in the archive of Jean Blackwell Hutson, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
42. Allon Schoener. Editor's foreword to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1960-1968*, (New York: Random House, 1969).
43. Richard Powell, "Re/Birth of a Nation," in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 24.
44. Henry Louis Gates, "Harlem on Our Minds," in *Rhapsodies in Black*, 165.
45. For information on Faith Ringgold see chapter one, note 29. Romare Bearden (1911-1988) was an internationally renowned African American artist best known for his collages and paintings incorporating collage elements. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, he was educated at Boston University, New York University, the Art Students League, and the Sorbonne in Paris. He was a leading member of the Sprial Group and had a prolific career as a widely exhibiting artists, as well as curator and writer on African American art. See Myron Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden, His Life & Art*, with a foreword by August Wilson (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1990). Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey and moved to New York in the 1930s. As a young artist he studied at Augusta Savage's Harlem Workshop and his boldly painted narrative images of African and African Diaspora experiences eventually made him one of the most popular African American artists of his century. See Peter T. Nesbett, *Jacob Lawrence: Paintings, Drawings, and Murals, 1935-1999 : A Catalogue Raisonné* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press in association with Jacob Lawrence Catalogue Raisonné Project, 2000).
46. Edward K. Taylor, letter to Allon Schoener, May 16, 1968 in the John Henrik Clarke archive, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
47. Ibid.
48. John Henrik Clarke, letter to Allon Schoener, June 6, 1968 in the John Henrik Clarke archive, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

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49. Eleanor Falcon, letter to Romare Bearden dated June 11, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
50. Schoener, interview.
51. Ibid.
52. Susan Coppello, memo to Mr. Thomas P. F. Hoving and Mr. Joseph Noble. June 25, 1968 in the Jean Blackwell Hutson archive, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
53. Ibid.
54. Romare Bearden, letter to Thomas P. F. Hoving, September 27, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
55. Allon Schoener, letter to Alvin White, November 15, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
56. Jesse Walker, "A Black Art Show Is At the Museum," *Amsterdam News*, February 8, 1968, 1.
57. James Sneed, "Open letter to Fellow Artists," March 10, 1969 in the Benny Andrews archive, Studio Museum in Harlem.
58. Benny Andrews, interview by author, tape recording, Litchfield, CT, July 14, 1999.
59. There is no evidence that the show officially cancelled; it may have been quietly dropped.
60. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibitions of African American art include *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, February 1 – April 30, 1995 organized by Judith E. Stein at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; *Barbara Chase-Riboud*, June 22-September 5, 1999 organized by the St. John's Museum of Art, Wilmington, NC. Both shows were coordinated at the Metropolitan Museum by Lowery Stokes Sims. The Metropolitan Museum's most recent effort is the exhibition *African American Artists, 1929-1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, January 5-May 4, 2003, which includes 70 works drawn from its own collection, primarily from a gift of 204 prints by African American artists donated to the museum by Reba and Dave Williams in 1999.
61. Exhibition planning document, September 1968, archive of Allon Schoener.
62. Unsigned memo, archive of Allon Schoener.
63. See memo from Allon Schoener to Thomas P. F. Hoving, September 30, 1968, archive of Allon Schoener.

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64. Allon Schoener, memo to Eleanor Falcon, October 24, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
65. The comment was made by Edmund Barry Gaither during the discussion portion of the symposium entitled "Race and Racism in the Museum World: Harlem on My Mind" held on October 28, 1995 in conjunction with the publication of the new edition of the *Harlem On My Mind* catalogue.
66. Ibid.
67. Grace Glueck, "Harlem Cultural Council Drops Support for Metropolitan Show," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1968, 41.
68. John Henrik Clarke, letter to Romare Bearden, August 28, 1968 in the John Henrik Clarke archive, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
69. Allon Schoener, letter to Thomas P. F. Hoving, November 26, 1968 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Cliff Joseph became the Co-Chairman of the Black Emergency Cultural with Benny Andrews. Joseph was born in Panama in 1922 and attended the Pratt Institute of Art and the Turtle Bay School of Therapy. He is a painter and co-author of the book *Murals of the Mind: Image of a Psychiatric Community*. For an interview with Cliff Joseph about the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition conducted by Doloris Holmes see the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
73. Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, "Soul's Been Sold Again!!!" protest flyer, January 1969 in the Benny Andrews archive at the Studio Museum in Harlem.
74. Benny Andrews and Cliff Joseph. Open letter, n.d. in the Benny Andrews archive, Studio Museum in Harlem.
75. According to Benny Andrews' journal, Andrews talked to several writers on the day of the press conference including Grace Glueck from *The New York Times*; Eugene Genovese, an historian from Yale writing an article on the show for *Artforum*; Katherine Kuh from the *Saturday Evening Review*; among others. Andrews journal, entry # 484, January 14, 1969. Unpublished journal in the archive of Benny Andrews.
76. Andrews, interview.
77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. "Museum Pickets Assail Hoving Over Coming Harlem Exhibit," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1969.

80. Andrews journal entry # 488, January 16, 1969. Unpublished journal in the archive of Benny Andrews.

81. The defaced paintings were: *Christ with a Pilgrim's Staff* by Rembrandt dated 1661; *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* by Gerard David, 15th Century; *Sleeping Shepherdess* by Francoise Boucher, 18th Century; *The View of the Piazza San Marco* by Francesco Guardi, 18th Century; "Interior Scene" by Pietro Longhi, 18th Century; *View of Ancient Rom*" by Giovanni Paolo Pannini, 18th Century; *Portrait of a Man* by Tomasso Fiorentino, 16th Century; *Coronation of the Virgin*, school of Botticelli; *Crowning with Thorns* by Jacapo Guarana, 18th Century; and *Market in Brittany* by Eugene Boudin, 19th Century. See *The New York Times*, January 17, 1969, 28.

82. *Muhammad Speaks*, February 14, 1969, 28.

83. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 178. First published in 1852.

84. In 1967, Mayor John Lindsay had created an advisory panel to study how to decentralize governance of the city's schools. The panel, headed by McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation, came to the conclusion that the city's schools were caught in a "spiral of decline" due primarily to the large city bureaucracy that controlled the schools. The panel advocated replacing this centralized system with local community boards that would have the power to run its own neighborhood schools. For a complete discussion of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville incidents see Cannato, Chapter 9, "Community Control and the 1968 Teachers' Strike: The Debacle at Ocean Hill-Brownsville," 301-351.

85. Following the school strike, Mayor Lindsay appointed the Special Committee on Racial and Religious Prejudice to evaluate the state of race relations between blacks and whites. The committee's report, made public in January, tried to balance the amount of bigotry found among blacks and whites. Yet it also acknowledged differences stating that "the anti-white prejudice has a dangerous component of anti-Semitism." A second report also released in January written by the Anti-Defamation League which had formed in during the school strike began: "The use of anti-Semitism—raw and undisguised—has distorted the fundamental character of the controversy surrounding the public schools of New York City. The anti-Semitism has gone unchecked by public authorities for two and a half years, reaching a peak during the school strike of September-November 1968 and in the post-strike period. It is still going on." The legacy of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental district was a lingering distrust

between blacks and Jews, two historically sensitive groups who had previously been political allies. See Report of the Special Committee on Racial and Religious Prejudice (Botein Report), 16 January 1969 quoted in Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 233. See Cannato's chapter entitled "Columbia University, 1968: A School Under Siege," 361-62 and n 23, 647. See also "Anti-Semitism in the New York City School Controversy," A Preliminary Report of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, January 1969 quoted in Cannato, 362 and n 24, 647.

86. Mayor John Vleit Lindsay, press release, January 16, 1968.

87. Thomas P. F. Hoving, letter to author.

88. Parker, interview.

89. Rosenblatt, interview.

90. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 169.

91. The American Jewish Committee, press release, January 16, 1969.

92. Anti-Defamation League, press release, January 17, 1969.

93. American Jewish Congress. "The Enemy is Silence, A Statement by the American Jewish Congress," Advertisement in *The New York Times*, January 31, 1969, 21.

94. A copy of this insert can be found in the archives of Allon Schoener.

95. A copy of this insert can also be found in the archive of Allon Schoener.

96. Thomas P. F. Hoving, letter to author.

97. Parker, interview.

98. Letter to Mr. R, Franklin Brown, Wells & Brown dated June 14, 1969 in the archive of Allon Schoener.

99. *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1978*, edited by Allon Schoener with an introduction by Nathan Irvin Huggins (Dell Publishing, 1978). Huggins publications include *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971); *Protestants Against Poverty: Boston's Charities 1870-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971); *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); *Slave and Citizen: The Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980); and *W. E. B. DuBois: Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986).

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100. Schoener, interview.
101. Werner Kramarsky, interview by the author, New York, NY, November 15, 2000.
102. Kramarsky, interview.
103. For a summary of Mayor Rudolph Guiliani's actions regarding the Sensation exhibition controversy see David M. Herszenhorn, "Guiliani's Threats to Museum Make Exhibit a Hot Topic," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1999.
104. Candice Van Ellison, "Harlem: A Study in Depth" high school term paper, 18. The quotation is from Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, (Cambridge: The Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1963), 73.
105. Candice Van Ellison. Introduction to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*.
106. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), 73.
107. Adolph L. Reed, Jr. "Black Particularity Reconsidered," *Telos* 39 (Spring 1979): 86.
108. Schoener, interview.
109. Morton Lawrence, "Met Catalogue Expose: Text Changed in Editing," *Park East News*, January 30, 1969.
110. Candice Van Ellison, "Harlem: A Study in Depth" high school term paper, 1, in the archive of Allon Schoener.
111. Thomas P. F. Hoving. Preface to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1960-1968*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Random House, 1969).
112. Thomas P. F. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 168.
113. Rosenblatt, interview.
114. "Museum Pickets Assail Hoving Over Coming Harlem Exhibition," *The New York Times*, January 15, 1969, 41.
115. Recently Schoener has felt vindicated by the 1995 republication of the *Harlem On My Mind* catalogue by The New Press and a symposium held on October 28, 1995 at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture entitled *Race and Racism in the Museum World: Harlem on My Mind*. A videotape of the symposium proceedings is available for viewing at the Schomburg.

Chapter 3

Harlem On My Mind: A “Communications Environment”

Harlem On My Mind was a political lightning rod. The conflicts that plagued the exhibition generated daily newspaper headlines in the weeks before the show opened on January 18, 1969 and continued in the weeks that followed. The problems seemed to snowball with each passing day, beginning with the Harlem advisors’ denunciation of the project, the African American artists’ protests, the accusations of anti-Semitism, the defacement of artwork, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s attempts to defend itself. The newspaper reports created the public perception that the show was a fiasco, but also conveyed the sense that *Harlem On My Mind* was a spectacle not to be missed. Because the controversies dominated media coverage of the show, much more is known of the political storm surrounding the exhibition than of the exhibition itself. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the *Harlem On My Mind* book was conceived as a companion publication rather than a conventional exhibition catalogue; the book’s contents only partially overlapped with the show. This chapter focuses on the presentation in the museum’s galleries, the show’s contents, design, and the impact of specific curatorial decisions on the show’s reception.¹

Harlem On My Mind was an experiment in multimedia gallery presentation. As curator Allon Schoener wrote in his preface to the catalogue, “The *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition was conceived as a communications environment, one that parallels our daily lives in which we are deluged with information stimuli. Images and

sounds—documentary in character—have been organized into a pattern of experiences recreating the history of Harlem as it happened.”² The show was intended to mirror the disjunctive quality of contemporary experience by overloading the viewer with a collage of stimuli, rather than providing a linear, explanatory experience. The idea was to bombard the viewer with much more information than could possibly be digested at once and put the process of sifting through it all and making meaning into the viewer’s hands.

Conceived as a show with a social mission, the exhibition was comprised entirely of documentary materials—reproductions of photographs presented in various sizes, films, sound recordings and excerpts from newspapers and other primary texts. Schoener first experimented with this exhibition technique in his *Portal to America* show held at the Jewish Museum in 1965, which presented a history of the Lower East Side through documentation and memorabilia. The use of large-scale photo blow ups in *Harlem On My Mind* harked back to *The Family of Man* show organized by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955.³ *The Family of Man* was one of a series of photomural exhibitions organized by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art. Others in the series include the more overtly propagandistic *Road to Victory* show mounted in 1942 to marshal support for the United States involvement in World War II and *Airways to Peace* in 1943. Like its predecessors, *The Family of Man* was a panoramic installation of photo-reproductions based on photographs taken by the most successful photojournalists of the day. The installation was designed by Paul Rudolph to function like a giant picture magazine produced in installation form.

Eric Sandeen has cogently argued that *The Family of Man* was designed to diffuse public anxiety about global tension produced by the Cold War and portray a world of stability and peace. Its message, however patriarchal and Eurocentric it may have been in its concept of family and its extensive use of biblical quotations in the installation design, was that all people are one, all part of the “Great Family of Man.”⁴ As was observed by Roland Barthes in 1957 and widely repeated, *The Family of Man* presented a timeless, universal worldview in which the essence of humanity was captured in the “...actions of daily life of all the countries in the world: birth, death, work, knowledge, play...”⁵ The show, according to Barthes, presented a myth of the human condition, a universal human nature. But mounted just ten years after the end of World War II and two years after the end of the Korean War, *The Family of Man* was also a call to respect the diversity of the world’s population, however sentimental this call may now seem.⁶ Furthermore, the show reflected an awareness of racism in the United States, held just one year after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision striking down segregation in the schools. As Mary Ann Staniszewski has pointed out, “The exhibition’s photo of a young African American boy walking with his arm around a blond Caucasian American boy must have struck viewers in 1955 with particular force.”⁷ Though Schoener denies any influence, *Harlem On My Mind* resonated with *The Family of Man* exhibition in both content and form.⁸

Schoener maintains that *Harlem On My Mind*’s “communications environment” was primarily inspired by the exhibition design theories of Charles and Ray Eames, whom Schoener had met in the late 1950s while he was on staff at the San Francisco Museum

of Art and was the producer of the museum's weekly educational television program.⁹ Charles and Ray Eames came to observe his work for their own research. Although best known for their furniture designs, the Eameses's work of the late 50s focused primarily on exhibitions, books, and films—what they referred to as information and communication systems. These media projects were produced as government, industrial, or educational commissions which drew on the imagery of daily rituals, vernacular culture, and ordinary objects to promote popular culture as a medium of communication.¹⁰ Their projects functioned as cultural ambassadors overseas and interpreters of America culture at home.

Following the Eameses's visit to the San Francisco Museum of Art, Schoener and Charles Eames developed a professional friendship and one day the designer invited Schoener to join him for a showing of his "Circus" slide show at the architecture school at University of California at Berkeley.¹¹ "Circus" was a 180-image three-screen slide show accompanied by a sound track featuring circus music and other recorded sounds. On the occasion of the Berkeley presentation, Schoener ran one of the slide projectors. (At the time, slide projectors had to be advanced by hand, so it took several people to present the show.) The Eameses had begun using slide shows in 1945 as a way of structuring visual and verbal information. The images and sounds they used were assembled over many years and often were combined in different variations. The presentation's central message was that the circus, which appears to be made up of freewheeling spontaneous expressions, is instead a tightly knit and masterfully disciplined accumulation of people, energies, and details.¹² For the

Eameses the circus not only offered a metaphor for the creative process, it also suggested an active role for audience members as it is an event that offers “a multitude of experiences for the visitor—something for everybody, and more than could be taken in in one viewing or visit.”¹³ This philosophy appealed enormously to Schoener, who used a similar strategy in *Harlem On My Mind*. He describes his participation in the “Circus” presentation as a catalytic experience.¹⁴

Through his association with the Eameses, Schoener began to see the potential for creating exhibitions as what he called “spatial films.”¹⁵ In a 1968 article on his exhibition philosophy Schoener described a “new iconography of creativity” based on processes, not objects. To Schoener, the Eameses and their close colleague, the designer George Nelson, epitomized this new aesthetic and in this article he paid homage to their work:

Eames and Nelson used slides, films, sounds, music, narration, and odors to develop high-speed techniques of exposing relationships between seemingly unrelated phenomena. They have continued to approach the mixed media environment as a communication experience in which their designs are based upon a systems approach applying industrial methods. These new media-mix environments can be communication experience, entertainment experience, or simply events in themselves which are to be appreciated as multi-sensory experiences.¹⁶

The project that influenced Schoener the most was *Glimpses of the U.S.A.*, a multi-screen film by the Eameses produced for the American National Exhibition in Moscow for the 1959 USSR-USA Exchange in Sokolniki Park, which they were working on at the time Schoener met them.¹⁷ George Nelson had been approached by the United States Information Agency (USIA) to create a setting for the display of American manufactured products in what would be the first cultural exchange between

the two countries since the Russian Revolution. Nelson in turn asked the Eameses to produce a film on “a day in the life of the United States” which would introduce the industrial display. *The Family of Man*, which was enjoying a long global tour following its showing in New York at the Museum of Modern Art was also presented at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow.¹⁸

Glimpses of the U.S.A. was a montage of 2,200 images were selected to create a collective portrait of American life (Fig. 3.1). The images were presented on seven 35mm film reels projected simultaneously on 20 by 30 foot screens installed in a 250-foot geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller. The presentation ran for ten minutes, beginning with images of the land and people’s various relationships to it. The presentation continued with scenes of Americans waking up, eating, taking different forms of transportation to work, working in different industries, relaxing, enjoying different forms of entertainment, and finally ending the day by saying goodnight. The final scenes showed symbols of love and friendship, and at the very end a picture of a bunch of forget-me-nots. The romantic humanism of this pastiche of images depicted the everyday lives of Americans and was designed to encourage Soviet citizens to identify with their counterparts in the United States while also illustrating the material abundance of the American middle class.¹⁹ In *Harlem On My Mind*, Schoener drew not only on the Eameses’s formal and technical innovations, but also on their social philosophy. Just as *Glimpses of the USA* was a multi-media display that would reach across political and cultural differences dividing the US and the

Soviet Union during the Cold War, so too, might *Harlem On My Mind* bridge the gap between blacks and whites in America.

Harlem On My Mind was held in the second floor special exhibition galleries in the south wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The museum's staff anticipated a large turn-out based on the record-breaking attendance of Schoener's previous exhibition *Portal to America* held at the Jewish Museum a few years earlier. Elaborate traffic flow plans were developed to control the crowd. Schoener envisioned a long waiting line that would wind down the stairs, through the Roman and Greek gallery, to the Great Hall, and flow out of the museum onto the sidewalk. The throng of waiting visitors would form a queue southward down Fifth Avenue. There was, indeed, always a crowd waiting to get in, so in a sense visitors' exhibition experience began outdoors where a big banner hung on the façade of the museum proclaiming the words "Harlem On My Mind" in bold brown, black, and blue type.

The use of banners, which have become a hallmark of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a staple at many other museums, was an innovation of director Thomas P. F. Hoving when he arrived at the museum in March of 1967. Hoving had gotten the idea from a *New Yorker* cartoon that appeared just as he assumed the directorship. The cartoon showed the plaza in front of the museum filled with happy people and the façade of the Metropolitan Museum with a banner saying "Welcome Mr. Hoving."²⁰ The implication was that Hoving would do for the Met what he had previously done for New York City's parks as Parks Commissioner—make the museum accessible and

entertaining to a broad public. Though meant as a joke, the cartoon was totally in keeping with Hoving's populist philosophy, and he decided to adopt the idea.²¹ The first exhibition to employ a banner was *In the Presence of Kings* which opened in April 1967. Organized by medieval art curator Helmut Nickel, the show consisted of objects from royal courts all over the world from 200 B.C. to the 19th Century—paintings, sculptures, gold coins, costumes, guns, furniture, tapestries, manuscripts and other artifacts. The banner for this show was an appropriate sign inviting the public into this “palace of the people.” The banner for *Harlem On My Mind*, on the other hand, functioned rather differently. It not only referenced what was inside the museum, it also served as a constant reminder of the impoverished neighborhood just a few blocks uptown.

The *Harlem On My Mind* installation was divided into six chronologically and thematically structured sections: 1900-1919, From White to Black Harlem; 1920-1929, An Urban Black Culture; 1930-1939, Depression and Hard Times; 1940-1949, War, Hope, and Opportunity; 1950-1959, Frustration and Ambivalence; and 1960-1968, Militancy and Identity. Each section presented a combination of photo blow-ups, voice sound track, music, and texts based on newspaper article excerpts and primary documents. Some rooms presented film and slide projections and each decade included a timeline of significant events. In keeping with Schoener's intent for the exhibition, overlapping sounds and images created a chaotic atmosphere, but the show itself was a highly structured sequence of fifteen consecutive galleries with one point of entry, one path through, and one way out.

Schoener wanted viewers to experience the exhibition as if they were watching a film. He did not want people to dwell on written texts so he decided not to include captions with any of the images. Instead each room contained a single diagram identifying its contents. Schoener felt that anyone who wanted more information could buy the catalogue, which was reasonably priced at \$1.95. Moreover, none of the photographs in the galleries were identified by maker. The point was to draw the viewer into the subject matter of the images, not to showcase individual artistic vision or interpretation. Even in the catalogue few of the photographers—regardless of their race—were identified. By contrast, *The Family of Man* exhibition had included the country of origin and maker of each image on a small label attached to the bottom of each photograph.

At the Metropolitan Museum of Art it was not uncommon to see objects displayed with no attribution. Many of the collections—Egyptian, Ancient Near East, Islamic, Early Christian, Medieval—contain items where the maker is unknown or the object was made by a collective process, rather than by a single individual. What made the absence of photographers' names such an anomaly in *Harlem On My Mind* was that the images were relatively contemporary. By omitting attributions, the show implied that blacks were merely subjects to be looked at, not creators in their own right, a point driven home by the exclusion of black painters and sculptors. Critics of *Harlem On My Mind* found the absence of labels frustrating. Furthermore, by neglecting to identify the subjects in many of the

images, Schoener undermined the pedagogical character of the show and turned it into an even greater spectacle, a sea of black bodies and faces. In retrospect Schoener felt that the omission of captions was a mistake, but at the time his aim was not to disrupt the viewers' flow. Schoener wanted people to "read experientially." He conceived of the museum visitor as an "active participant" rather than "passive recipient."²² "The audience itself," he wrote, was to become a "creative force."²³ In fact, the role creator was displaced from artist to curator.

While Schoener's rhetoric emphasized viewers' reception of the show as a creative act, his vision of how visitors would move through the exhibition was predicated on uniform behavior and calculated with mathematical precision. Schoener estimated the optimum number of visitors that the show could accommodate based on each visitor's spending a predetermined amount of time in each room. The exhibition was designed to take an hour to view altogether and visitors would be "pulsed" through by synchronized slide projections and sound elements timed to loop about every four or five minutes. Schoener calculated that if each person were allocated three square feet of viewing space and each visitor spent one hour in the show, the number that the show could accommodate would be 4,080 visitors per hour or 68 per minute. Schoener used these figures to project the length of the waiting line depending on the number of visitors at any given time.²⁴

The entrance to the exhibition presented the same black, brown, and blue *Harlem On My Mind* logo that visitors would have seen on the banner hanging in front of

the museum building (Fig. 3.2). The logo was projected in slide form and as visitors passed through the hallway they were greeted by a soundtrack featuring street sounds recorded in Harlem. The use of electronic media at this threshold was intended to signal the media experience inside. The first room opened the exhibition with an introduction focusing on blacks in New York during the 18th and 19th centuries prior to the mass migration to big cities in the north from the southern United States and the Caribbean. An array of historical documents reproduced on wall panels charted a skeletal history of African American life from slavery through emancipation. A broadside from 1731 stated regulations restricting the activities of “Negroes and slaves” in the City of New York after sunset. A 1788 runaway slave poster advertised a fifteen dollar reward from a slave owner on Long Island. There was the front page of an 1837 issue of *Freedom’s Journal*, the first African American newspaper in the country, the cover of *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1840* published by the American Anti-Slavery Society located on Nassau Street, a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, and the frontispiece of Sojourner Truth’s *Narrative of a Northern Slave*. A notice from 1867 from the African Mutual Instruction Society in downtown Manhattan offered a school for “colored Adults of both Sexes.” These documents were presented with a soundtrack of Paul Robeson singing spirituals.

The next two rooms addressed Harlem’s transformation around the turn of the century from a white neighborhood to one that was mostly black. The first room contained photographs of Harlem when it was solely inhabited by whites. A picture

from 1902 showed a group of affluent Caucasian women in bustles and large brimmed hats being rowed on the Harlem River by men in sleeveless tops. There were photos of smartly dressed customers sitting in a beer garden in 1912. As if to demonstrate the process of modernization, there were three photographs showing three different modes of transportation: bicycling on Fifth Avenue and 124th Street in 1897, a horse drawn carriage c. 1900, and an early automobile from 1908. There was a grand Victorian House on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 130th Street and a picture of Harlem Hospital.

These photos were followed by pictures of New York's predominantly black neighborhoods at the turn of the century, Chelsea and San Juan Hill, the area on the West Side of Manhattan bounded by 16th Street on the south and 64th or 65th Street on the north.²⁵ Including pictures of these 19th-century neighborhoods created an analogy between the movement of blacks uptown to Harlem and the immigration of ethnic groups to other New York City neighborhoods, such as Eastern European Jews to the Lower East Side. This structure echoed Schoener's *Portal to America* exhibition at the Jewish Museum.

The first rooms depicting black Harlem covered the 1910s. Featured in a film presentation was one of the neighborhood's oldest residents, Alice Peyton Brown, known as "Mother Brown" (Fig. 3.3). A brief text panel explained that "Mother Brown" had been born a slave in Lexington, Virginia on November 17, 1853 and moved to New York City in 1891. In 1907 she arrived in Harlem. The centerpiece of

one gallery was a film projection of “Mother Brown” celebrating her 115th birthday. In addition to a shot of “Mother Brown” surrounded by “friendly faces,” as Schoener called them in his exhibition notes, singing “Happy Birthday,” the film included interview footage shot in various locations including Brown’s apartment, the Friendship Baptist Church to which she belonged, and a Harlem street. The script for the voiceover piped into the gallery added little in the way of information, but presented “Mother Brown” as a witness to history:

Narrator: On November 17, 1853, Alice Payton Brown, the daughter of Louise and Joe Payton, was born a slave on Sam Hollman’s plantation about twelve miles from Lexington, Virginia... Slavemaster Holloman did not believe in schooling for slaves; therefore Mother Brown never learned to read or write. Mother Brown remembers that she was about twelve when the Civil War began and that many slaves ran away to join ‘Mr. Lincoln’s Army’. This is how she remembers being a slave.

Mother Brown: Well, I ‘member sometimes the people was nice to you and sometimes they wasn’t. You don’t find nobody hardly the same nowadays. You work for people—have one thing today and tomorrow it’s somethin’ else.... (Punctuation in the original.)

“Mother Brown” was presented as a symbol of the transition from slavery to freedom and from past to present. Her textual contribution was minimal, but her image and the mere sound of her voice was a testimony to her spirit of survival and added an aura of authenticity to the message of the show. The section on the 1910s also contained photographs of black soldiers from World War I, members of the 369th Infantry who were called the “Harlem Hell-Fighters.” One of these images showed the soldiers marching down Fifth Avenue directly in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, although this detail was not pointed out to viewers. In the next gallery visitors were confronted with a floor to ceiling photo-mural of a Harlem side street with several men staring out at the viewer taken around 1915 (Fig. 3.4). The enormous scale of the

image, the one-point perspective of the cobble stone street, and the intense gazes of the men created the effect of bridging the space between the viewer and the scene portrayed and accentuated the curatorial intention of making viewers feel that they too were witnesses to history. This device recalled the use of photomurals in *The Family of Man* exhibition, which was explicitly designed to encourage identification with the people portrayed in the images.²⁶

The next two rooms focused on the period 1920-1929 and the rise of “An Urban Black Culture” represented by general scenes of daily life and the rapidly growing number of black social institutions in Harlem, such as schools, churches, libraries, and social clubs. One entire wall measuring 18 x 50 feet contained a photo mural of a Sunday school class from the Abyssinian Baptist Church led by Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. enlarged so that the figures were life size (Fig. 3.5). The picture had been taken by James VanDerZee. Allon Schoener used this mural as a backdrop for one of his publicity photos, thus visually inserting himself into this historic scene. Another room presented great men and women of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Florence Mills, Zora Neale Hurston, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others. This section was the only part of the exhibition to include source material by a visual artist, photo-reproductions of woodcut prints by Aaron Douglas illustrating plays by Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory, as well as *God's Trombones* by James Weldon Johnson. There were also cover pages from the magazines *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* and a soundtrack of poetry by writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

An array of photographs of Marcus Garvey, leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Back-to-Africa Movement, depicted the massive black leader riding through the crowded streets of Harlem, a ship from Garvey's business venture the Black Star Line, and Garvey being led off to prison in 1925 when he was charged with mail fraud in connection with the sale of Black Star Line stock (Fig. 3.6). An audiotape of one of Garvey's speeches was piped into the gallery. One of the 1920s galleries was outfitted with tables, chairs, and loud Jazz band music to suggest the atmosphere of a nightclub. Slide projections of record labels and images of nightclubs and bands were flashed on the walls by projectors hanging from the ceiling. Schoener hoped that the atmosphere would prompt people to dance.

Each of the exhibition's rooms was intended to have a different personality and induce a different mood in the visitor. The next two rooms, "Depression and Hard Times," focused on the somber 1930s. A wall-size photo-mural of a bread line ran the full length of one gallery (Fig. 3.7) and rather than having piped-in sounds, this room was completely silent. A second gallery devoted to the '30s showed pictures of Billie Holiday and contained a soundtrack of her music along with photos of Joe Lewis, and Father Divine and his followers. As if to drive home the point that the Depression took a hard toll on blacks, a section of photographs of street scenes depicted shabby buildings and a wino passed out in a shop doorway. The 1930s section would have been an appropriate place to include Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis and other African American artists who had been employed under the WPA art

programs. Yet Schoener had chosen to omit any references to the visual arts and instead represented the WPA Art Program with photographs of the New Lafayette Theatre, which was led by Orson Welles and employed black actors.

In the room devoted to “1940-1949, War, Hope, and Opportunity” images hung from pylons in the center of the room (Fig. 3.8). Once again, there were portraits of major figures including performers Paul Robeson, Pearl Bailey, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, and Count Basie, author Richard Wright, and sports heroes Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Jackie Robinson. A soundtrack of bands of the ‘40s included Dizzy Gillespie. Street scenes showed children playing war in an abandoned lot with wooden rifles, pictures of the 1943 Harlem riot, and Helen Levitt’s enchanting photograph of a building façade with the words “Button to Secret Passage – Press” written in chalk. This image was one of the show’s few moments of poetry (Fig. 3.9).

The next room, “1950-1959, Frustration and Ambivalence” contained over a dozen photographs of Malcolm X during the early phase of his participation in Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam. Other public figures in this section included Ralph Ellison, Willie Mays, and a couple of portraits of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the soundtrack featured cool Jazz by Miles Davis.

Finally, the last three rooms were devoted to the 1960s, the section entitled, “1960-1968, Militancy and Identity.” One room was totally black except for banks of slide projectors casting nine sets of images simultaneously onto mylar screens (Fig. 3.10).

Each set of images was devoted to one year leading right up to the opening date of the show in January 1969 and contained pictures of significant African American figures and texts addressing major events effecting African Americans. Loud rock music was piped into the space. A room dedicated to “Harlem Today” contained the only color images in the show. The pictures were taken by Leroy Lucas, a photographer assigned by Schoener to do a series of street scenes especially for the exhibition.

The last room summarized the show in a “Hall of Heroes,” a grid of photo blow-ups of black faces, many of which were seen earlier in the galleries and cropped to fit the grid format²⁷ (Fig. 3.11). The portraits included “Mother Brown,” W. E. B. Du Bois, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Malcolm X, and Mohammad Ali, as well as anonymous men, women and children. Many of the photographs featured in this section were cropped so that the figures’ faces filled the frame. This gallery bore a strong resemblance to the “Faces” section of *The Family of Man* exhibition, which was designed to encourage identification with the subjects portrayed, an intention underscored by the inclusion of a mirror among the photographs, which was removed after the show opened when it was determined that the device was too heavy handed.²⁸ The “Hall of Heroes,” however, had a more ambiguous character, fostering both identification and confrontation. This ambiguity was reflected in the use of a poem by Yusef Iman entitled “Love Your Enemy,” which chronicled a history of racism against blacks in America. The poem was printed on a placard and recited over the sound system:

Brought here in slave ships and pitched over board.
 Love your enemy.
 Language taken away, culture taken away.
 Love your enemy...

Lynch your father.
 Love your enemy.
 Bomb your churches.
 Love your enemy.
 Kill your children.
 Love your enemy.
 Force to fight his wars...
 Love.
 Love.
 Love.
 Love.
 Love.
 Love for everybody else.
 But when will we love ourselves?

As visitors exited the exhibition, they passed through a room with a sales desk where they could buy the *Harlem On My Mind* phonograph record and the catalogue—that is, until the museum pulled it from the shelves in response to political pressure. The record, produced by the exhibition’s sound consultant Donald Harper, contained a compilation of 20th-century African American music performed by Hank Johnson and the Jazz Heritage Ensemble. The compilation was a lackluster medley that started with Ragtime and continued with New Orleans Blues, swing, Big Band music, Be Bop, Jazz, Bossa Nova, ending with an upbeat pop number reminiscent of the contemporary musical group the Fifth Dimension.²⁹ On one side of the record the music was presented alone. On the other, the same compilation was accompanied by the voices of different speakers recounting their personal memories and recollections of Harlem.

Several elements of the exhibition were envisioned, but never realized. In the last gallery Schoener wanted to have a media room that would play simultaneously all the local radio and TV stations so that visitors would see the Harlem exhibition in relation

to the news of the day and the overall “communications environment” of New York City. This proved logistically impossible. Schoener had also wanted to create a two-way video phone linking the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with 125th Street in Harlem. Since the exhibition was planned as a “participatory-communications experience,” Schoener was eager to build in a means of literal participation. The Harlem unit was to be housed in a mobile studio that would reside at the corner of 125th Street and Seventh Avenue and periodically travel through the streets of Harlem making visits to homes, churches, and other sites. The museum unit was to be placed in one of the exhibition galleries equipped with a camera, several phones, and a large viewing screen. The project was intended to bring an up-to-the minute “portrait” of Harlem directly into the museum and foster dialogue between the people in the museum and those uptown. There was to be a schedule of structured programs and interviews. A typical day’s schedule might have included news, interactive discussions, taped programs offering “day in the life” segments on different aspects of African American life in Harlem, such as work, school, church life, and local cuisine. Though Harlem was only twenty blocks away, this project implied that the metaphorical distance separating the museum from Harlem was much greater than the literal distance of twenty blocks. According to Schoener, the project was never realized due to lack of funds.

Another project that was discussed but never realized was a room that would have paid homage to Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been assassinated on April 4, 1968. When the Exhibition Research Committee met on May 1, exhibition staff member

Reginald McGhee proposed having one gallery at the end of the exhibition exclusively devoted to King. He envisioned a gallery containing a single photograph of the Civil Rights leader accompanied by recordings of some of his speeches. There was little support for his proposal. Exhibition advisor John Henrik Clarke pointed out that there would be many memorials to King in the ensuing months. Clarke and another of the advisors, Jean Blackwell Hutson suggested that if there were to be a dedication, it should be to someone more directly a part of the Harlem community, such as Langston Hughes. A'Leila Nelson countered that the exhibition was not intended to celebrate the accomplishments of one individual, but rather to commemorate the achievements of the Harlem community as a whole. McGhee pressed his point, but in the end Schoener capped the discussion by emphasizing that any dedications would undermine the basic structure of the exhibition, which was the story of Harlem. In the end, the show featured very few references to Martin Luther King, Jr., who was most closely associated with the Civil Rights movement in the South and instead, Malcolm X emerged as the dominant black leader featured in the show. Malcolm X was more identified with Harlem than King and was someone whose politics may have seemed more in tune with the ideology of Black Power that was gaining momentum in the late 1960s.³⁰

The show drew the largest audience of any exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art up to that time. In sixteen weeks 450,000 people visited, including capacity crowds during peak hours. Schoener invited a colleague from the New York State

Council on the Arts to come to the exhibition and critique the mechanisms being used to manage the volume of visitors. He recorded these impressions of the rowdy crowd:

The line inside the museum was routed through the second floor, but overflowed into the main stairway when I got there. There was one guard at the top of the stairs trying to prevent line jumping, asking people to keep to the right for the Harlem show (inaudible to most visitors), while swarms of people went past him, ostensibly to the other galleries, but really to look for a convenient place to cut the line, which they found immediately behind his back. This, of course, was visible to the people who had heard him and complied with his request to line up to the right, and they broke out to join the line jumpers.³¹

The scene outside the galleries was raucous. Schoener had made elaborate traffic flow projections for inside the show and was eager to see if visitors were following the path laid out for them. He invited a second colleague, Meyer Braiterman, to observe people viewing the exhibition and record their movement patterns. Braiterman spent three hours in the show and found that few visitors appeared to be reading the texts. He also noted that middle aged and older blacks tended to spend more time with some of the historical materials.³² Visitors passed quickly through the rooms with photomurals, causing bottlenecks in the more densely hung galleries. These observations are relevant to the issue of crowd control, but Braiterman's observations tell little about the content of visitors' experiences. When the controversy broke, hundreds of members of the museum's audience sent letters expressing approval or dismay, but most referenced only the controversy and not the show itself. Some had not even seen it. To learn how viewers perceived the materials before them, we need to turn to the art reviews of the exhibition.

While New York's daily newspapers kept up a steady beat of articles on the controversies surrounding the show, the art monthlies, such as *Artforum* and *ARTnews*, and the art reviewers for the *Village Voice*, *The New York Times* and other local papers seriously evaluated the exhibition's contents. Most of the reviewers sharply criticized Schoener's exhibition design. Perhaps the most vivid description of the show came from the neighborhood paper, *Manhattan East*. Critic David Noble wrote:

Stepping into the first gallery, one finds himself in the vice-like grasp of the multi-mixed-media wizards who set up the display. And it is not until leaving that one breathlessly regains his sense of intellectual and visual freedom. By that time, the viewer-victim's feeling is one of having been thoroughly worked over, if not pummeled, battered and bruised...[The exhibition] is a mind-fatiguing, futuristic nightmare. Names, dates, images blink on and off against a background of distracting sounds. While one tries to read one poem, another is coming over the loudspeaker and those of us with but a single mind begin to wish we had none as we are swept along in the crowd.³³

Practically everyone who wrote about the show's design found the cacophony confusing, rather than empowering. In his weekly photography column in *The Village Voice*, critic A.D. Coleman dismissed the exhibition as a meaningless jumble and a disservice to the medium of photography:

There is evidence aplenty that Allon Schoener, coordinator of the exhibit, and his fellow workers have read Marshall McLuhan and really tried to do something original and avant-garde. There are photos all over—on towering columns, on walls, on ceilings, on tv screens, everywhere photographs, more than you can shake a stick at. But one can look at just so many photographs on any subject unaccompanied by informative text before they all begin to look the same. Here they are lumped together, in no order save chronology, hung in clumps on the walls, grouped in fives and sixes for no apparent reason, certainly without any visual harmonies or correlations. What a waste of so many fine photographers....³⁴

Critics of every stripe, from the most liberal to the most conservative, denounced the show's political message. Liberals who might have been sympathetic to Schoener's

politics saw his use of photo-reproductions as a means of replicating stereotypes of blacks in mass media and denying them voice in the museum.³⁵ Conservative critics, such as Hilton Kramer, believed that the exhibition jettisoned traditional artistic values in favor of photojournalism and political caricature. In his exhibition review for *The New York Times* Kramer condemned the show as an “amateur exercise in social evangelism” and criticized Hoving for “abandoning art for a cheap form of photo-audio journalism.”³⁶ Kramer cautioned that *Harlem On My Mind* was a threat to one of the world’s great institutions of high art:

There are undoubtedly many intelligent and socially concerned people in our midst who, in measuring the pressures of current social grievances against the often very private and specialized emotions of contemporary art, have decided to wash their hands of art altogether and devote their energies to a more immediately constructive task. What is odd, not to say alarming, is to discover this point of view harbored in the mind of the director of one of the greatest art museums in the world—a mind that shows itself increasingly impatient with the kind of slow, and in the short run anyway, often unmeasurable [*sic*] benefactions that a deep attachment to the art experience bestows on our spirit and on our emotions.³⁷

Taking this exhibition as a sign of Hoving’s aims for the entire museum, Kramer indicted him as an enemy of art. For Kramer, *Harlem On My Mind* eclipsed all Hoving’s other accomplishments, which were formidable even after only two years as director. He had succeeded in winning a government competition to acquire the Temple of Dendur, created a Contemporary Art Department headed by Henry Geldzahler, spearheaded the acquisition of fifteen artworks for the collection, and started a major building renovation and expansion.³⁸ Rather than set the show in the context of Hoving’s overall record, Kramer preferred to take an alarmist tone.

John Canaday, the chief art critic for *The New York Times*, wrote an article arguing why, as an art critic, he was unqualified to review the show since he saw it as an exhibit of sociological documentation. He flatly stated that the show did not belong at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and would be better suited at the Museum of the City of New York.³⁹ Ironically, conservative art critics, such as Canaday and Kramer, were united with the black artists protesting outside the museum in their mutual disdain for the exhibition's emphasis on sociological content. A flyer handed out by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition expressed precisely the same opinion as Canaday's review:

...[T]hose persons coming to the exhibit, in the world's major museum, expecting to see the aesthetic dimensions of the Black American experience will be disappointed—THE MET HAS GIVEN UP ART FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE.

According to Benny Andrews, "It looked like an exposition that should take place at a civic center...It didn't look like it should take place in a museum."⁴⁰

Perhaps the most incisive review was published in *Artforum* written by the scholar of African American social history Eugene Genovese, who was teaching at Yale at the time.⁴¹ It is significant that *Artforum*, known for its formalist orientation during the late '60s, chose to commission an historian to review the show, rather than an art historian or art critic. On the one hand, this reflected the prevailing antipathy toward dealing with African American culture in aesthetic terms. On the other hand, since *Harlem On My Mind* was a show about social history, Genovese's credentials as an historian, and particularly a white historian who was a leading authority on slavery in the United States, made him uniquely qualified to fulfill the task. Genovese's article

deconstructed Schoener's representation of Harlem and criticized Schoener's cavalier attitude toward the responsibilities of an historian. He based his argument on a critique of the types of subjects Schoener selected and the weight he gave to each. Using the example of Malcolm X, whose image was not only prominently featured in the show, but whose picture also appeared on the cover of the catalogue, Genovese wrote:

A large amount of space is given to Malcolm X, whose prestige in Harlem remains strong and probably grows stronger. There are pictures of Malcolm the Muslim minister and street-corner speaker and of Malcolm the corpse, together with indifferent excerpts from his magnificent autobiography. The exhibit immediately involved political decisions: Should you emphasize the early or the late Malcolm? Malcolm the uncompromising nationalist or Malcolm the man who ended his life edging toward a new position? ... Who is making the decision to interpret Malcolm?⁴²

Schoener clearly emphasized the early Malcolm, the protégé of Elijah Muhammad, rather than the man who had begun to establish his own independent vision in 1964 with the establishment of the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Genovese questions why W. E. B. DuBois, the most significant black leader in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a figure cited by many African American historians as the most influential black intellectual of the 20th century, is given little space in the show while Marcus Garvey, the father of the Black Nationalist movement is featured prominently.⁴³ Genovese's criticisms carried weight not only because they made sense, but also because of his own position as a white historian dealing with African American history. He had faced the challenge of cross-cultural research and found Hoving and Schoener lacking the level of awareness needed to undertake such a project successfully. In the end, Genovese reaches a conclusion similar to Kramer and Canaday:

Mr. Hoving has a responsibility toward the art world in general, toward those black artists who have been shamelessly neglected for so long, and toward the white and black communities of New York City, but that responsibility consists of strengthening the Museum as a vehicle for the presentation and development of the arts, including Afro-American arts. It does not consist of his intrusion into matters beyond his competence and beyond the Museum's proper institutional function.⁴⁴

Echoing the message that the museum had involved itself in matters that went well beyond its mission, the prevailing reaction of the museum staff's was self-righteous indignation. According to Harry S. Parker III, who was Thomas Hoving's close assistant at the time, the museum's curators saw the negative press as vindication of their misgivings about the show from the outset. Parker recalls that most of the staff said, "What do we think we are? Do we think this institution is all about putting black people in it? No this institution is about preserving the art of the ages. And we don't have a role in contemporary social concerns. That's not our business."⁴⁵

One of the most vexing questions, which baffled critics and staff alike, was why the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a bastion of traditional culture, would do an exhibition comprised purely of photo-reproductions, an exhibition that repudiated high art? The emphasis on photography was particularly surprising given the Metropolitan Museum's lack of previous involvement with the medium. As Benny Andrews, a leader of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, has pointed out, the museum had never done any exhibitions of photography, not even exhibitions of photographs by white artists.⁴⁶ Photography was a staple of museum collections and exhibition programs at other institutions and had been part of the art scene in New York since the

beginning of the century. In 1905 Alfred Stieglitz had opened the first gallery to present photography in an art context with “291,” the gallery of the Photo-Secessionists located on lower Fifth Avenue. In fact, it was Stieglitz who gave the Metropolitan Museum of Art the first photographs for its collection. These became the seeds of the museum’s curatorial department for photography, which was formally established in 1992. Of course the pioneer in legitimizing photography was the Museum of Modern Art, which had been collecting photography since its founding in 1929 and had hired its first photography curator, Beaumont Newhall, in 1935. Cornell Capa would found the International Center of Photography (ICP) in 1974, a few years after the *Harlem On My Mind* show. But by 1966 Capa had already started the International Fund for Concerned Photography, an organization whose goals were to encourage and assist photographers uncovering and presenting forgotten archives and presenting such work to the public. Their purview was not only “art photography,” but photojournalism as well. In 1969 the Metropolitan Museum had barely begun to collect modern painting and sculpture, let alone photography. The conundrum was perplexing and this was one of the most contentious aspects of the exhibition. As Harry S. Parker III recalls:

Here it was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but it ignored African American art. Which was amazing...I remember thinking how stupid we were to ignore art when here that’s the medium that we’re theoretically the most interested in. When the show started to come together why weren’t any of us out there saying, well, aren’t you going to include some art, Allon? This is an art museum...⁴⁷

Schoener had several reasons for focusing on photography and for using only reproductions in his show. First and foremost, Schoener’s approach is a textbook

illustration of Walter Benjamin's thesis that photographic reproduction was an inherently democratic mode of cultural production. In his landmark 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"⁴⁸ Benjamin had distinguished two modes of reception, *cult value* which is rooted in art's origins in religious/magical ritual where the work of art's unique presence is manifested in its aura, and *exhibition value* which involved the gradual changing function of the work of art as it became portable (as in the case of easel painting), and later, duplicable. A secularized cult value characterizes the modern preoccupation with uniqueness and authenticity of art objects. For Benjamin, the aura of the secular work is a function of its embeddedness in the discourse that bourgeois society calls "cultural tradition."

Benjamin saw the development of film and photography as an opportunity to radically transform art's traditional function. Reproduction would give audiences universal access to culture, hence the aura of art would be dissolved. Mechanical reproduction and public access were intrinsically linked. Schoener's work was the embodiment of Benjamin's theory. His traveling exhibition programs at the New York State Council on the Arts were designed to bring culture to the masses. The television program that he had produced at the San Francisco Museum of Art electronically brought art into thousands of homes each week. Moreover, Schoener's use of art reproductions to stand in for real artworks in the San Francisco studio demonstrates that by the 1950s Schoener had dispensed with giving any special reverence to the aura of the original artwork. Like his television show, *Harlem On My Mind* would attempt to privilege the

masses over the values of the elite. Indeed Schoener believed that the arts of painting and sculpture were in and of themselves inherently elitist.⁴⁹

Beyond this, the use of photography reflected another of Schoener's curatorial goals—to show the truth about a social reality. He believed in the veracity and objectivity of photographs as documents: “I considered myself to be an art historian/cultural historian and art historians work with documentary material, they work with visual documents and to me photographs were visual documents and that's the way I see them. I don't see them as art.”⁵⁰ Schoener's selection of journalistic photographs and newspaper texts was intended to convey a feeling of reportage, the sense that the viewer was experiencing Harlem's history “as it happened.” This approach was meant to bring a sense of reality to the presentation, not unlike the way that graininess in a photograph can signal verisimilitude or film footage shot with a handheld camera can convey a sense of immediacy. Aesthetic quality, in formal terms was not a relevant criterion. The photos that Schoener selected tended to have a static quality. He shunned images that evidenced the photographer's artistry. Schoener's methods resembled those of an ethnographer more than those of the curators at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Indeed setting up an office at the Schomburg Library was not unlike going out and doing field research. The murals created by blowing the photos up so large that the figures in them were life size mimicked the use of dioramas across Central Park at the American Museum of Natural History.

A comparison of two sets of images of “Mother Brown” illustrates the way in which Schoener used photographic images as transcriptions of their subject matter.

In Bruce Davidson’s 1962 photographs (Figs. 3.12-14), Brown is shown in different settings, engaged in different activities.⁵¹ The pictures are composed in such a way as to reveal the type of life she leads. By contrast, a set of photos taken especially for the exhibition by Don Hogan Charles in 1968 (Figs. 3.15-17) shows the same woman, with little contextual information.⁵² “Mother Brown” appears isolated and immobile. The settings are difficult to identify. In one picture, the figure stares blankly at the camera. In another, her face is closely cropped so that the folds of her skin dominate the image. In short, Davidson’s photos reveal intimate details about the life of the subject, while the photos taken specifically for *Harlem On My Mind* portray Brown as an object to be looked at.

The use of such codes of authenticity helped to turn these images into what Roland Barthes called mythical speech, images that simultaneously embody the fullness of an actual, unique event (the sign in a linguistic system) and the generic quality of having already been imbued with meaning (the signification in the mythical system). In his landmark 1957 essay, Barthes defined myth as “a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still motivated by the concept which they represent while not yet, by a long way, covering the sum of its possibilities for representation.”⁵³ Effective myths play a “constant game of hide and seek.”⁵⁴ The subject appears as a “rich, fully experienced, spontaneous, innocent, *indisputable* image” (emphasis in the original), but at the same time, this presence is “tamed, put at a distance...”⁵⁵ as the mythical system relies of

pre-existing beliefs about the subject matter. Barthe's key example is a picture of a "Negro" wearing a French military uniform saluting the French flag reproduced on the cover of the popular magazine *Paris-Match*. In Barthe's analysis, the man is emptied of his particular history in order to become a signifier of French imperialism. In *Harlem On My Mind*, viewers were constantly engaged by the ostensible authenticity of the subjects depicted in the show. The installation design created "encounters." Pictures were hung at eye level, given a corporeal presence by being suspended from hanging pylons, and blown up to life-size scale. Voices were piped into the galleries to create the sense that the rooms were filled with actual beings. But at the same time, the exhibition illustrated a story that drained the subjects of their actual presence, a mythic story based on the belief that Harlem is the homeland of all black Americans; that black people are a homogeneous, unified group who exist in a parallel universal uninhabited by people of other races, particularly whites; and, most importantly, the belief that the history of blacks in the United States has been a long, continuous march toward freedom and equality.

Schoener's tendency to treat photography in this manner accounts for Roy DeCarava's absence from the show, even though his photographs of Harlem were perhaps the most famous at the time. Schoener and McGhee knew DeCarava's work. He was an accomplished artist who had been born in Harlem in 1919 and lived there his entire life. DeCarava's absence from the show was a glaring omission. In 1952 DeCarava had received a Guggenheim Fellowship to produce a series of photographs documenting Harlem. In 1955 Simon and Schuster published the photos accompanied

by a text by Langston Hughes in a book called *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*.⁵⁶ The book was a huge success; the initial publication of 3,000 clothbound and 22,000 paperback copies was soon supplemented by a second printing of 10,000 copies. Schoener and McGhee invited DeCarava to be in the show. But DeCarava said that the pictures were meant to be seen as a group. Schoener's concept for the show did not allow for any such groupings the emergence of any individual artist's aesthetic that would disrupt the show's narrative. He refused to comply with DeCarava's request so DeCarava chose not to participate.⁵⁷

DeCarava's approach to photography differed radically from Schoener's. In 1951

DeCarava had written:

I want to photograph Harlem through the Negro people. Morning, noon, night, at work, going to work, coming home from work, at play, in the streets, talking, kidding, laughing, in the home, in the playgrounds, in the schools, bars, store, libraries, beauty parlors, churches, etc....I want to show the strength, the wisdom the dignity of the Negro people. Not the famous and the well known, but the unknown and the unnamed, thus revealing the roots from which spring the greatness of all human beings... I do not want a documentary or sociological statement, I want a creative expression, the kind of penetrating insight and understanding of Negroes which I believe only a Negro photographer can interpret. I want to heighten the awareness of my people and bring to our consciousness greater knowledge of our heritage.⁵⁸

DeCarava's Harlem photographs have a dark, atmospheric beauty, a weightiness that describes feelings as well as physical details. A woman and her children cross a wide empty street (Fig. 3.18), a couple talking on a subway platform locked in each other's loving glance (Fig. 3.19), and a man tenderly holding a baby engulfed in womb-like darkness (fig.3.20). Such poetic images had no place in Schoener's curatorial vision

and in the final analysis, the 1950s section of the exhibition suffered from the absence of DeCarava's work.

In the 700 or so photographs that Schoener brought together for the exhibition, few stand out for their aesthetic power, save those of James VanDerZee. In her definitive monograph on VanDerZee, Deborah Willis cogently argues that VanDerZee's images often projected an identification and intimacy with his subjects that gave his pictures a distinctive feel.⁵⁹ Schoener included many of VanDerZee's works. But his selection and arrangement of images glosses over VanDerZee's aesthetic as they were often juxtaposed with pictures of related subjects taken with a different sensibility.

Often Schoener opted for images that gave an emotionally detached view of their subjects. For instance, the image Schoener selected of opening night at the Lafayette Theatre, identified only as being from the Schomburg Collection, is shot from a great distance (Fig. 3.21). The photograph documents the façade of the theater, its architecture and signage. The photographer has no interaction with the crowd. The faces and expressions of the figures are impossible to discern. A large car parked in front of the theater contains several white passengers inside, who regard the scene from inside their car, also from a distance. By contrast, a photo from the Federal Theater Archive at the Library of Congress shows a completely different type of scene (Fig. 3.22). The image tightly frames a view of the crowd. The faces in the crowd look directly into the camera laughing, smiling and waving. The photograph does not reinforce a sense of segregation between whites and blacks. There are several people

who appear to be Caucasian visible in the crowd and even the white policeman tucked among the sea of faces is engaged by the photographer and looks straight into the camera.

Schoener's disregard for aesthetic and stylistic differences among the photographs in the show helped to conceal the subjective editorial decisions that he had made as the show's curator. Consider Edward Burra's 1934 painting entitled *Harlem* (which, as a painting, was obviously not included in the show) (Fig. 3.23).⁶⁰ The work shows a street scene at the height of the Depression. The woman in the foreground is dressed in a fur coat, high heels, fishnet stockings, and jewelry, and she is carrying a bag full of groceries. The men hanging out on the stoop and reading the paper and smoking dressed in neatly pressed suits and sharp hats. The street is immaculately clean. Busses and trains in the background show a community with ample public services. By contrast *Garbage Cans on a Sidewalk* (c. 1930), an unattributed photograph from *Harlem On My Mind* of a similar street scene from around the same time (Fig. 3.24) suggests a neighborhood in decay. The figures in the background are all out of focus so that the garbage cans in the foreground become the center of attention. The cans are full and they are dented, suggesting the double indignity of poverty and neglect. Which image is more truthful? Surely both offer subjective interpretations of Harlem.

Finally, there is one last coordinate that accounts for Schoener's exhibition methodology. One of Schoener's pet projects as Visual Art Director at the New York State Council on the Arts was a program of traveling exhibitions comprised of

reproductions. These exhibitions could be produced in multiple copies and sent to many sites simultaneously creating what Schoener called “a total information system for the State.”⁶¹

Traditionally, the traveling exhibition has been conceived as unique—a one of a kind installation which must be shipped from point to point and seen in one place at a time. Recognizing that there is a need throughout the State for the same message at the same time, the Council is now working to supplement unique exhibitions by multiple editions to the originals...⁶²

Schoener had always hoped that *Harlem On My Mind* would travel to other venues after its debut at the Metropolitan Museum. In fact, in the January 1968 *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Tom Hoving stated that the show was being designed to travel throughout the country.⁶³ Schoener’s impulses were admirably populist, but his methodologies were ill-suited to the traditions of the art museum and after the show closed, the images in the exhibition, many of which had been mounted on wooden supports, were discarded. Jean Blackwell Hutson, one of the early advisors to the exhibition and a librarian at the Arthur A. Schomburg branch of the New York Public Library located on 135th Street in Harlem, the place where the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition team had kept an uptown office, salvaged the panels.⁶⁴ She brought them into the Schomburg where they remain to this day hanging anonymously on office walls (Figs. 3.25 and 3.26).

The late 1960s was a defining moment for transforming the appropriate mission for museums. As Thomas P. F. Hoving said to his fellow museum directors in a 1969 address to the Association of Art Museum Directors “unless they made their museums relevant to the current life of America and started dealing with certain social issues

they'd be shoved into the rising tide and would drown."⁶⁵ When he had announced the show in November 1967, Hoving had promised, "This exhibition isn't going to be a white hand-out to Harlem...The museum's role is simply that of a broker for the channeling of ideas."⁶⁶ But in the end, the show was the museum's interpretation of Harlem. Among the many blind spots reflected in the show, *Harlem On My Mind* overlooked the transformative potential of art. While they were hanging photo-reproductions in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's galleries, artists of the Black Arts Movement were producing a revolution in the symbols used to convey the nature of their social and political position and radically reinterpreting symbols of American culture. Little did they realize that by rejecting art, Hoving and Schoener would set a precedent for opposing the aesthetic and the political as antithetical terms. This precedent would have far reaching implications for future exhibition practice.

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1. A complete archive of the pictures used in the exhibition is in the Photography Collection of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Installation photographs are from the archive of curator Allon Schoener and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
 2. Allon Schoener, editor's foreword to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* (New York: Random House, 1969).
 3. Other precedents are the Soviet Section at Der Internationalen Presse-Ausstellung (International Press Exhibition) held in Cologne in 1928 and the 1932 exhibition in Rome celebrating the tenth anniversary of Mussolini's march on Rome, the Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista (Exhibition of Fascist Revolution) at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. See Mary Ann Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1998), 45-57.
 4. Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).
 5. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), First published 1957 by Editions du Seuil, Paris. Translation by Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1972, 100.
 6. Staniszewski, 251.
 7. Ibid.
 8. In addition to the overall similarity as photo-mural exhibitions with narrative structures, one strikingly similar aspect was that both show contained sections featuring close up photographs of faces.
 9. Allon Schoener, interview by author, tape recording, Grafton, VT, December 17, 1998.
 10. *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention*. Brochure for circulating exhibition organized by the Interpretive Programs Office of the Library of Congress, 1999.
 11. For a discussion of the Eameses's Circus project see John Neuhart, Marilyn Neuhart, and Ray Eames, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 90-96. First published in 1989.
 12. Ibid, 356.
 13. Ibid, 91.
 14. Schoener, interview.

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15. Ibid.
16. Allon Schoener, "The New Aesthetic: Process Prevails (Art & the Environments)," *Art Voices* (Fall 1968), 9.
17. See *Eames Design*, pp. 238-241 and Hélène Lipstadt, "'Natural Overlap': Charles and Ray Eames and the Federal Government" in *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers in association with the Library of Congress and the Vitra Design Museum, 1997), 160-66.
18. For a discussion of the presentation of *The Family of Man* exhibition at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow see Eric Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1995), 125-153.
19. In her article "Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture," Beatriz Colomina discusses how "Glimpses of the U.S.A." was also designed to showcase American consumer goods and show American superiority in standard of living to Russian audiences. See *Grey Room 02* (Winter 2001), 6-29.
20. Thomas P. F. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 55.
21. From that point forward there have been banners created for every major exhibition at the museum hanging in the central arch above the building's main entrance.
22. Allon Schoener. Editor's Foreword to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*.
23. Ibid.
24. Allon Schoener. *Harlem On My Mind* Progress Report, February 9, 1968 in the archives of Allon Schoener.
25. The area is identified in a *New York Times* article from November 17, 1901, excerpted and reproduced in the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition and catalogue.
26. For a discussion of this aspect of the exhibition see Staniszewski, 244.
27. As noted above, the "Hall of Heroes" component of the exhibition resembled a section of *The Family of Man* show called the "faces" exhibit containing nine individual portraits of people of diverse ages and races. *Harlem On My Mind* mixed anonymous portraits with images of famous people as if to imply that anyone is or can be a hero.

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28. See Staniszewski, 253.
29. The musical numbers are not identified on the album. They appear to be generic renditions in the style of music from different periods.
30. Exhibition Research Committee member John Henrik Clarke was in the process of editing the book *Malcolm X, The Man and His Times*, originally published by Collier Books in 1969. A new edition edited and with an introduction and commentary by John Henrik Clarke was published by Africa World Press, Inc. in 1990.
31. Richard d'Anjou. Memo to Schoener dated February 3, 1969 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
32. Meyer Braiterman. Memo to Allon Schoener dated January 25, 1969 in the archive of Allon Schoener.
33. David Noble, "Met on My Mind," *Manhattan East* no. 17 (January 24, 1969), 1.
34. A.D. Coleman, "Latent Image," *Village Voice*, January 23, 1969, 15-16.
35. It is interesting to note that Schoener included excerpts from a wide spectrum of newspapers from mainstream publications like *The New York Times* to black papers like the *New York Age*. But he neglected to include *Muhammad Speaks*, the paper of the politically incendiary Nation of Islam, despite the fact that it was a primary communication vehicle for one of the icons of the show, Malcolm X.
36. Hilton Kramer, "Politicalizing the Metropolitan Museum," *The New York Times*, Sunday, January 26, 1969, section 2, D31.
37. Ibid.
38. For a complete autobiographic history of Thomas Hoving's years at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see Hoving's *Making the Mummies Dance*.
39. John Canaday, "Getting Harlem Off My Mind," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1969.
40. Benny Andrews interview in *I'll Make Me a World*, "Not a Rhyme Time" produced by Blackside, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York (1999).
41. Genovese's most well-known book is *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* first published in 1974 by Pantheon Books.
42. Eugene Genovese, "Harlem on his Back: An Historian Looks at Hoving's Harlem," *Artforum* 7, no. 6 (February 1969): 35.

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43. See *Let Nobody Turn Us Around*. ed. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 212.
44. Genovese, 35.
45. Harry S. Parker III, interview by author, tape recording, San Francisco, CA, July 19, 1999.
46. Benny Andrews, interview by author, tape recording, Litchfield, CT, July 14, 1999.
47. Parker, interview.
48. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 217-251.
49. Schoener interview, December 17, 1998. See also Allon Schoener, "Art Without Pedestals." *Zodiac* 7 (1960): 22-24.
50. Schoener, interview.
51. Bruce Davidson was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1933. He attended the Rochester Institute of Technology and Yale University. After military service in 1957, he worked as a freelance photographer for *Life* magazine and in 1958 became a member of Magnum Photos, the international photography agency. His photographs of Mother Brown were part of series entitled *Time of Change* produced from 1961-1965. See the recently published *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs, 1961-1965* (New York: Saint Ann's Press, 2002).
52. Don Hogan Charles was and still is a photographer for *The New York Times*. He declined to be interviewed for this dissertation.
53. Barthes, 127.
54. Ibid, 118.
55. Ibid.
56. Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).
57. In 1969 the Studio Museum in Harlem mounted the first museum exhibition of DeCarava's work, *Thru Black Eyes: Photographs by Roy DeCarava*, September 14 – October 26, 1969. He has had over thirty one-person exhibitions, including a major retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art, NY, in 1995.

58. Guggenheim Fellowship proposal reprinted in Peter Galassi, *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 19.

59. James VanDerZee (1886-1983) was a commercial photographer in Harlem recognized late in life for his artistry. For the most definitive account of VanDerZee's life and work see *VanDerZee. Photographer 1886-1983*, ed. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

60. Edward Burra (1905-1976) was a white British painter, stage designer and draftsman who spent a year in New York City in the early 1930s. For more information on Burra see Andrew Causey, *Edward Burra: Complete Catalogue* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985).

61. *New York State Council on the Arts Annual Report 1967-1968* (New York and Syracuse: New York State Council on the Arts, 1968), 34.

62. Ibid.

63. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin XXVI*, no. 5 (January 1968): 193.

64. Schoener, interview.

65. Thomas P. F. Hoving, letter to author, February 29, 2001. See also Helen Borsick, "'Today' Not for Museums, Lee Says," *The Plain Dealer*, March 1, 1969, p. 12A for a response from Cleveland Museum of Art director Sherman Lee. Grace Glueck would portray the two directors as emblematic of two contrasting views of museum practice in the article "The Ivory Tower Versus the Discotheque," *Art in America* 59 (May-June 1971): 80-5.

66. Thomas P. F. Hoving quoted in "Hoving's Metropolitan to Offer Multimedia Look at Harlem History," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1967.

Chapter 4 The Social vs. the Aesthetic: Entrenchment of a False Dichotomy

As the first large-scale exhibition to showcase African American culture, *Harlem On My Mind* became a touchstone for how mainstream museums would approach issues of race and ethnicity. Because it was a socio-documentary show of photo-reproductions and media and not an art show, *Harlem On My Mind* crystallized the dichotomy between aesthetic and sociological approaches to addressing racial themes in exhibition practice. The show didn't "make sense" within the logic of the art museum because it ignored visual art. But precisely because it did so, the exhibition begged the question, what role does aesthetics play in the interpretation and presentation of African American culture and in the political advancement of black people?¹ This question was debated among black artists themselves in the late-1960s and '70s. In 1969, the year that *Harlem On My Mind* took place, artists of all kinds—poets, musicians, playwrights, and visual artists—were promoting the agenda that black art contributes to the improvement of conditions in the lives of black people. Culture had become a battleground for the assertion of black humanity as artists gave visual expression to the distinct African Diaspora experience and African American life in the United States. The Black Arts Movement provided a context for the production of a radical new art. As Faith Ringgold has said, "Now we could paint black life in a political context that was particularly out of our own experience and out of our own philosophy of who and what we were based on the writings of [Amiri]

Baraka and [James] Baldwin and coming at it in a fresh new, exciting way—no holds barred.”²

In 1970 Curator Edmund Barry Gaither proposed a definition of the Black aesthetic. He asserted that there were two kinds of Black Art, art that depicts the experiences and struggles of black people, envisions a better future, and addresses social change, and art that uses forms identified as uniquely African American or derived from African sources.³ These two approaches were not mutually exclusive. As poet Ron Milner points out, “The whole concept of the Black Arts Movement, the whole definition of the art really was an African concept that art should be functional. You don’t carve to carve. You carve a chair, you carve a spoon. You carve something useable and you make that beautiful.”⁴ The idea of functionality extended into the political realm. According to playwright August Wilson, all the poets and artists had to ask themselves, “How does this contribute to the liberation of black people? How does this contribute to Black Power? How does this contribute to us moving forward collectively as a people? If it didn’t contribute in any way than it wasn’t Black Art. It was something else.”⁵ Among black artists, a socially-based aesthetic could be seen in the work of Barbara Chase-Riboud (Fig. 4.1), Murry DePillars (Fig. 4.2), Jeff Donaldson (Fig. 4.3), Melvin Edwards (Fig. 4.4), Joe Overstreet (Fig. 4.5), Betye Saar (Fig. 4.6), Faith Ringgold (Fig. 4.7), Charles White (Fig. 4.8), and many others.

The Black Arts Movement had a parallel in the activities of the Chicano Arts Movement. Like the art of the Black Arts Movement, Chicano art of the 1960s and 70s melded political activism and cultural production and, in the words of art historian Tomas Ybarra-

Frausto, sought “to link lived reality to the imagination.”⁶ Impelled by the efforts to unionize the California farm workers beginning in 1965, the rural-land-grant uprisings in New Mexico, the labor struggles of undocumented workers, and the broader civil rights and anti-war activities, Chicano artists brought aesthetic practice to bear on social realities and were integrated into the various political fronts of the Chicano Movement. Their work challenged the hierarchical distinction between “fine art” and “folk art” and displayed what Ybarra-Frausto has called a “visual biculturalism” through the reclaiming, remixing, and recontextualization of vernacular traditions, handicrafts, mass culture, and fine art.⁷ This strategy can be seen in the political posters of Carlos Cortes, Rupert Garcia, and Ester Hernandez; the collective murals painted throughout Chicano neighborhoods; and in the performances of the ASCO group.

Similarly, by the 1970s, a feminist aesthetic was beginning to emerge in the work of women of diverse backgrounds. Faith Ringgold began to make paintings on cloth that would later lead her to produce painted, storytelling quilts. Ringgold’s quilts infused this traditionally “women’s” medium with urgent contemporary content. In 1972 the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of Arts (CalArts), headed by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, produced *Womanhouse*, a series of installations in which the artists transformed the rooms of a vacant house into artworks addressing—and critiquing—domesticity, nurturance, maternity, and other things associated with womanhood.⁸ Many of the installations used materials and techniques traditionally considered “women’s work,” rather than fine art, such as Faith Wilding’s *Womb Room*, which was made of crocheted rope. Some feminist artists, most notably Judy Chicago, gravitated toward

vaginal or gynocentric imagery. Others appropriated masterpieces by men and injected them with feminist content, such as Mary Beth Edelson's *Death of the Patriarchy/A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson* (1976) in which the faces of the medical students in Rembrandt's famous painting *Anatomy Lessons of Dr. Nicholaes Tulp* (1632) are replaced by women artists and the corpse—"The Patriarchy"—appears very dead.

But even as artists throughout the country were advancing these new approaches to art making, recognition by the mainstream art world was sparse. In a 1969 article published in *The New York Times*, Hilton Kramer proclaimed that:

[I]n the social turmoil that has overtaken American life in recent years, artist and art institutions have tended to play a negligible role—if indeed, any role at all. As individuals, of course, a great many artists have taken part in civil rights demonstrations, anti-war activities, and other forms of protest politics, but such political activity has rarely been allowed to penetrate the sanctum of the studio.⁹

This statement ignored much of the work being produced by black artists, and even excluded the work of many white artists such as Leon Golub. In 1969, however, artists who challenged the prevailing norms of modernist formalism did not have many outlets for exhibiting their work. Indeed, the most comprehensive collection of socially activist work by African American artists was not presented until 1985 in an exhibition entitled *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963-1973* organized by Mary Schmidt-Campbell and held at the Studio Museum in Harlem.¹⁰ The show featured works by over 50 artists including Chase-Riboud, Donaldson, Edwards, Overstreet, Ringgold, Saar, and White, as well as Benny Andrews, Malcolm Bailey, Romare Bearden, David Hammons, Jacob Lawrence, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, Raymond Saunders, Moneta Sleet, Jr., Beuford Smith, Richard Yarde, Hale Woodruff and others.

There is no doubt that museums were forced to respond to the pressures placed on them, as evidenced by the sharp increase in numbers of black artists included in museum exhibitions. But the meaning of racial equality in the art world was a subject of considerable debate and speculation. The most prevalent strategy was to organize exhibitions comprised exclusively of black art. Among just a few of the many segregated black art shows that took place from 1969 to 1973 were *Afro-American Artists, New York and Boston* organized by Edmund Barry Gaither and held at the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston in 1970; *Contemporary Black Artists*¹¹ organized by Ruder and Finn that traveled to seven national venues in 1969 and 1970; *Five Famous Black Artists* organized at the National Center of Afro-American Artists in 1970; *Fifteen Under Forty*; paintings by young New York State black artists organized at the Gallery Museum of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in New York in 1970; and *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971.¹² Used in this context, the term “black art” did not refer to a particular aesthetic; rather it was used solely to mark the racial identity of the artists. Thus the meaning of the term “black art,” which had once connoted political mobilization, became diffused.

The term “black art” was not only ambiguous in institutional contexts, the definition of “black art” was debated among artists themselves. Some artists believed that their mere exclusion from the institutionalized art world defined them as “Black Artists” regardless of the appearance or meaning of their work. Tom Lloyd, the first contemporary artist to show at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1968 and an active member of the Artworkers

Coalition, made abstract sculptures constructed of light fixtures. There was no visible “social message” in his work, yet he insisted on identifying himself as a “Black Artist.” “The white community hasn’t accepted black artists for years and years, and they’re not even ready to now, really,” he said. “And so I’m not just an artist. Therefore I’m a Black Artist. If white society is not going to accept my work, I’m a Black Artist.”¹³ Lloyd argued that his racial identity gave him and his art an especially empowering relationship to other African Americans regardless of the fact that his art had no discernible racialized or political content. Though some artists embraced the term “Black Art,” others found it constraining. Many artists did not want to be pigeon-holed by the assumption that the only authentic art by African Americans is art with an overt social message about racial struggle or art that was instrumental in social change. And while the term was empowering when employed by artists to describe themselves, it carried different meanings or could be ghettoizing when imposed by cultural institutions. Nonetheless, shows comprised exclusively of work by African Americans, mostly men, were the most prevalent response to pressures for greater inclusion.

The members of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition eschewed the objectification of Blackness as a bargaining chip in the struggle for institutional representation. They also discouraged a narrow view of art as a tool of social change. Rather, they viewed their activism as the means to bring about the social changes that would force the mainstream art world to accommodate a broad range of work by artists of all cultural backgrounds. The group persistently posed relevant questions in the evolving debates about racial equality starting with a call for inclusion and moving on to other complex issues in institutional

representation. In late 1968 and early 1969 the BECC asserted the presence of black art and artists through their negotiations with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and their ultimate protests against the exclusion of visual art from *Harlem On My Mind*.

Throughout 1969 and 1970 in their continuing activities as an organized group, particularly in their negotiations with the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, they constantly challenged the barriers to having their work seen in major museums. Equally important, when work by black artists began to enter museums, they questioned why this was typically characterized as a reflection of social progress, rather than artistic achievement. In the words of Edmund Barry Gaither, the aim of the BECC was to force curators and museum professionals “to look at the work of black Americans and to see it as art.”¹⁴

Immediately following the *Harlem On My Mind* protests, the artists of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition turned their attention to the Whitney Museum of American Art. According to Benny Andrews, artists involved in the coalition decided to focus their pressure on the Whitney because this was the museum that defined the meaning of “American art.”¹⁵ On April 24, 1969 four BECC representatives, including Andrews, began a series of negotiations with Whitney director Jack I. H. Baur that focused on five specific and concrete points. The group demanded that the museum:

1. stage a major exhibition of “Black Art Works”;
2. establish a fund to buy more works by black artists;
3. show at least five “one man” exhibitions annually of work by black artists in the small gallery off the museum’s lobby;

4. have more black artists represented in the Whitney Annual;
5. consult with experts in black art.

The Whitney fulfilled two of these five points.¹⁶ The museum agreed to show black artists in its lobby gallery--though the gallery became sardonically known as the "nigger gallery." From 1969 through 1975 when the program was suspended, the museum mounted several exhibitions of work by African Americans, including Melvin Edwards (1970), Frank Bowling (1971), Alma W. Thomas (1972), Robert Reid (1973), Mahler B. Rhyder (1973), and Minnie Evans (1975). The museum also agreed to mount a large exhibition of work by black artists entitled *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, which was held from April 6 to May 16, 1971. According to a statement issued by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, Baur agreed that the black art exhibition would be selected by a "two-man committee" consisting of one of the museum's curators and a "qualified Black art expert acceptable to both parties."¹⁷ However, in developing the exhibition, the museum merely *consulted* with experts in the field of black art, such as David Driskell, head of the art department at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and Samella Lewis of Scripps College in Los Angeles; they did not engage a black art expert as a co-curator. Instead, the project was put under the direction of in-house curator Robert Doty and this became a major bone of contention for the members of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition. Doty's previous shows had included an exhibition on the Photo-Secession Movement,¹⁸ a survey of the work of Adolph Gottlieb,¹⁹ and a group show entitled *Human Concern/Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art*.²⁰ He was not an expert in African American art. Artists reported to the BECC that studio visits with Doty were exercises in frustration in which the curator would look only at work that he had already

seen elsewhere or work that he had been advised to select for the show by a third party. It was obvious to these artists that Doty's knowledge base and his openness to new material were limited.²¹ The members of the BECC were disappointed and angered by the absence of black leadership in the development of the exhibition. Throughout the exhibition planning process from early 1970 through the opening of the show in April 1971, BECC members worked both individually and as a group to persuade Whitney Museum director John I. H. Baur to hire a black co-curator. On March 31, 1970 Henri Ghent, BECC member and director of the Brooklyn Museum's Community Gallery, wrote to Baur:

... I am extremely disenchanted that the suggestions to use a qualified black man or woman in the selection of works to be shown have been ignored. Quite frankly, I would think that everyone at the Whitney who's even vaguely involved with this project would be only too pleased to have such assistance, especially since it's such a delicate situation. I do hope you realize that you're only letting yourself in for possibly another fiasco like "Harlem On My Mind." What is being done at the Whitney is precisely what Hoving did! I needn't remind you that his utter imprudence, particularly in this instance, proved to be his undoing.²²

In planning the exhibition, Robert Doty proceeded as he would have with any other show. He asked colleagues to suggest artists, combed through catalogues and documentation of other shows, traveled around the country making studio visits, and fielded a range of unsolicited material submitted by artists who had heard about the forthcoming exhibition. For a less politicized project, this may have sufficed. For a project conceived in the wake of *Harlem On My Mind* on a sensitive subject about which the curator knew little, controversy was almost inevitable. This time, the protests would be much more intense than what the Whitney had already experienced in response to the *Painting & Sculpture of the 1930s* exhibition the year before.

Nonetheless, a letter from Baur to the museum's general counsel, David Solinger, dated September 18, 1969, indicates the museum's firm intention to proceed in its usual manner by not allowing the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition to impact its institutional procedures or interfere with its decision-making authority. In a letter soliciting Solinger's approval for the *Contemporary Black Artists in America* press release Baur wrote:

We met today with our Black friends and after long discussions and two relatively minor changes in the wording of our statement—which I do not think vitiate its contents—we have parted amicably... We have made it clear that we could not appoint a Black guest curator for the Black show, the Annuals or any of our other activities. We have said only that we would consider qualified Black candidates when a regular curatorial opening occurred, but that our final choice would be based on the ability and experience of all candidates... The only new sentence added to the release says that we will consult Black art experts in the "survey" phase of our large Black exhibition, "wherever feasible"... Since the sentence simply states what we would normally do anyway, I think there is no harm in including it.²³

Enclosed was a copy of the press release. The BECC's own press release denounced the show and proclaimed that in order for the show to authentically embody the concept of a black experience, "it is essential that it be selected by one whose wisdom, strength and depth of sensitivity regarding blacks is drawn from the well of his own experience."²⁴ The BECC called for the show to be postponed and revised. The museum refused. In response, 15 of the 75 artists selected for the exhibition withdrew their work and boycotted the project.²⁵ A counter exhibition entitled *Black Artists in Rebuttal* was held at the Acts of Art Gallery located in Greenwich Village at the same time as the Whitney show.

Contemporary Black Artists in America opened as scheduled on April 6, 1971 with protestors once again marching in front of the museum. The show included such established figures as Jacob Lawrence, who was 44 years old at the time, and Charles

White, who was 53, as well as younger artists such as 28-year-old Howardena Pindell. Some of the work contained confrontational imagery, such as Murry DePillars's *Aunt Jemima* (1968) (Fig. 4.2), Betye Saar's *Whitey's Way* (1970) (Fig. 4.9), and Barkley Hendrick's *Brown Sugar Vine* (1970) (Fig. 4.10). The folk art strain in African American art was represented by Noah Purifoy, an assemblage artist from California (Fig. 4.11), but the vast majority of the work was abstract. Some of the abstract work subtly referenced black history, such as John E. Chandler's *Garvey's Quest* (1971) (Fig. 4.12). Most of the abstract work had a more hermetic orientation, such as two untitled works by Marvin Brown (1970) (Fig. 4.13) and Frederick John Eversley (1971) (Fig. 4.14).

Doty's catalogue essay cited eclecticism as the hallmark of the exhibition, though in reality, the show glorified abstraction as a universal artistic language and proposed that abstract art represented a more advanced stage of development for black art beyond mere depiction. "The exhibition," Doty wrote, "is devoted to American artists who are Black—creative individuals, with widely disparate intentions, ideas, and goals; artists whose works are categorized as 'Black Art,' or 'African American art,' despite the fact that diversity is their universal trait." Doty acknowledged the interest of some black artists in African traditions and gave a brief nod to the concept of culture as a site of revolutionary struggle by quoting artist and graphic designer Emory Douglas, whom he referred to merely by his title, Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party. But ultimately, Doty reports that "extremist exhortations are categorically dismissed by many Black artists who refuse to believe that art should be subjected to the necessity of conveying a political message." He conceded that the important black art of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s was primarily figural,

but condescendingly characterized the work of Archibald Motley, Jr., Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden and Charles White, as using realism and representation to communicate the “conflict, stress, and tragedy” of “the Negro artist” as well as the “role of the hero” in the life of black people. Now, he says, black artists are evolving and reacting to the “ideas and techniques of the current mode, sensing and assimilating new directions of thought and vision....” He cites Richard Hunt and Barbara Chase-Riboud’s transitions from figural work to abstraction and Daniel Johnson’s move from assemblage to a “preoccupation with problems of color, form and space.” His most startling assertion was that Melvin Edwards had repudiated the historical references in his *Lynch Fragment Series* in favor of work that “demonstrates a coalescence of static and flexible states, rather than racial tragedy.” Revealingly, Edwards was one of the artists to withdraw his work from the exhibition. The artist continued to produce works in the *Lynch Fragment Series* well into the 1980s. “Ultimately,” Doty concludes, “the Black artist and his audience must respond to ‘the authority of the created thing,’ that unique quality which originates only with the creative individual, and which flourishes only under a spirit of free inquiry.”²⁶ Abstract art, for Doty, represented freedom from the constraints of social and political circumstance and freedom from the burden of history. If *Harlem On My Mind* favored the social over the aesthetic, *Contemporary Black Artists in America* went to the opposite extreme proclaiming abstract art as the ultimate expression of universal human freedom. And if *Harlem On My Mind* initially proposed this binary opposition, *Contemporary Black Artists in America* codified the social work vs. aesthetics conflict as the primary debate in the diversification of museums.

This experience with the Whitney was significant in that it clarified the next focal point for the agenda of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition. Benny Andrews and other members of the group could see that advocating Black Art shows was a limited strategy if the curatorial expertise brought to bear on those shows was itself limited. Art that challenged the institution while participating in it would later take new forms, and fall loosely into the category of “institutional critique.” In the meantime, artists of the BECC could see that the power to select work, frame a point of view, and interpret the meaning of a work of art was equally as important as the work itself. The criteria they proposed for curators addressing work by Black artists were two-fold. A qualified curator must have: “1. A lifelong identification with the entire spectrum of the ‘black experience’ and 2. a well-rounded formalized study of all available historical data on the history of black artists in America.”²⁷ That is to say, he or she must be black-identified in his or her life experience and possess a comprehensive scholarly knowledge of the field. Though the BECC did not promote the essentialist notion that such a curator must be black, the group saw these qualities best embodied in African American curator Edmund Barry Gaither, who in 1969 was the director of the Selma Lewis Art School in Dorchester, Massachusetts and a curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Concurrent with the Whitney’s *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition in April and May 1971, the Museum of Modern Art mounted simultaneous one-person shows of work by Romare Bearden and Richard Hunt.²⁸ To its credit, MoMA refused to conform to what had become the standard approach to showing work by African Americans, the Black Art Show. Instead, the museum focused on two individual artists: Romare Bearden, who

was 59 years old at the time and widely considered a senior figure, and the 35-year old artist Richard Hunt.²⁹ The introduction to the Bearden catalogue was written by Carroll Greene, Jr., former curator of the Afro-American Cultural History Department of the Smithsonian Institution and a figure who was well-respected by black artists. The Museum of Modern Art's strategy for addressing work by black artists was quite different than that of the Whitney and most other museums. MoMA incorporated black artists' work into the existing framework of the museum's curatorial interests and modes of exhibition presentation. The Romare Bearden exhibition is a case in point. The show opened with the artist's collage work *Three Folk Musicians* of 1967 (Fig. 4.15), a piece that references one of the icons in the Museum of Modern Art's collection, *Three Musicians* (1921) by Pablo Picasso. Not only does the subject matter of Bearden's painting suggest an African American "version" of Picasso's work, but Bearden's collage technique evokes the visual syntax of Synthetic Cubism which itself grew out of Picasso's own experiments in collage. Thus the exhibition of Bearden's work seems to evolve naturally from the museum's past commitment to Picasso's work and to Cubism, as well as reflecting the important influence of Cubism on Bearden's art. All of this was communicated without overblown rhetoric or sweeping generalizations about the state of black art.

By pairing Bearden with artist Richard Hunt, the Museum of Modern Art also hedged its bets and headed off potential criticism. The two artists not only came from different generations, they embodied two different styles. Hunt was an abstract sculptor, while Bearden's work was representational and depicted scenes of traditional black life in both the rural south and the urban north, especially the Harlem neighborhood where he lived.

This balancing act seemed to work. Cultural activists hailed the long overdue recognition of the socially engaged Bearden while those more concerned with “pure aesthetics” could appreciate the work of Hunt. The shows opened simultaneously, were promoted as a pair, and were reviewed together. An article in *Art in America* pointed out that the artists were “...poles apart in their esthetic philosophy...Hunt’s totally abstract welded-steel sculpture bears no reference to the ‘black experience,’ while Bearden’s ‘montage-paintings’ of Negroes going about their daily lives attempts to confront it directly.”³⁰ Despite the thoughtfulness and expertise with which these shows were organized, once again, the dichotomy between aesthetics and social work was reinforced. And like the *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition at the Whitney, the representational, socially engaged work of the elder Bearden was positioned as representing the past while the abstract sculptures of the younger Hunt implicitly suggested the future. Nonetheless, the Museum of Modern Art attempted in several exhibitions of the early 1970s to incorporate black and Latino artists into its program in an organic way. One notable example was the sprawling and multifaceted exhibition *The Artist as Adversary*, held from July 1 to September 27, 1971, that incorporated art addressing civil rights into the long legacy of activist art, a legacy that, as presented in this exhibition, included protest art made in Nazi Germany, the work of Mexican artist and activist Diego Rivera, war photography throughout the 20th Century, and a wide array of topical art and graphic design.

The Museum of Modern Art’s approach seemed to hold some promise for integrating artists of color into the way the museum had written the history of modern art. This was due, in part, to the fact that founding director Alfred Barr, Jr.’s vision of modernism was

predicated on a belief in the integrated relationship between art and life. This was not only evidenced in the museum's design exhibitions and film programs, but in its lively program of exhibition of art from around the world. After World War II, for example, the museum had organized several exhibitions of Japanese art, including a show of Japanese household objects.³¹ Beyond this, Barr's successor as director, René d'Hamoncourt, had been deeply involved with Native American art and art from Mexico, so that the museum's involvement with modern art had already spanned many cultures. But this ethos of modernism would give way to a more hermetic notion of modern art with the changing of the guard that took place in a long, difficult process of leadership transition after d'Hamoncourt's retirement in 1968. The late 1960s and early 1970s were years of profound change and upheaval at the Museum of Modern in which the museum would be overseen by four different directors in the span of four years. In 1967 founding director Alfred Barr retired.³² Rene d'Hamoncourt, who had been appointed director in 1949 retired in 1968. When d'Hamoncourt departed so did board president Eliza Parkinson, who had served as a trustee since 1939. She was succeeded by William S. Paley, the chairman of CBS. Monroe Wheeler, who had first become involved with the museum as a guest curator in 1936 and was at various times a staff member and trustee, retired in 1967, as did James Thrall Soby, chairman of the Collections Committee who had been initially hired in 1944 as Director of Paintings and Sculpture. Dorothy Miller, who had joined the staff as Alfred Barr's assistant in 1934, left in 1969. William S. Rubin, who had organized exhibitions for the museum as a guest curator, was hired as Curator of the Painting and Sculpture collection in 1968 and promoted to Chief Curator in 1969. Bates Lowry was appointed director in May 1967 and officially assumed the position on a full-time basis until July

1968. Six weeks after Lowry took over, René d'Harnoncourt was killed in a car accident. For a variety of reasons, which may have included the difficulty of the transition after d'Harnoncourt's death, the presence of a large budget deficit, the perception among some staff and trustees that Lowry had an overly scholarly orientation, and possible sabotage by rival senior staff members, the new director served for less than ten months and was fired in May 1969.³³ In early 1970 the museum announced the appointment of John Hightower as the museum's next director. Hightower officially assumed the post on May 1, 1970.

The seismic generational shift that occurred when the 37-year-old Hightower took over the Museum of Modern Art was comparable to the change that had taken place when the 36-year-old Thomas Hoving succeeded James Rorimer as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art three years earlier in 1967. As Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts from 1964 to 1970, Hightower had championed a democratic philosophy of art. He had seen that funding was distributed to arts organizations serving a wide range of constituencies, from poetry readings throughout the State University of New York system to experimental programs at Judson Memorial Church in downtown New York City. He channeled seed money into the creation of new organizations, such as El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem, and he had sponsored a three-day conference on neighborhood museums exploring the social function of museums in communities. And, of course, he had gone out on a limb with the NYSCA-sponsored *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. Hightower's tenure at the Museum of Modern Art would be short-lived—about eighteen months—but his efforts to bring about institutional change were dramatic.

When Hightower assumed his post as director he faced a storm of dissenting voices about MoMA's mission. The museum had been founded to show the "art of our time" and was conceived by founding director Alfred Barr, Jr. as a museum that would remain constantly contemporary. By the late 1960s, however, many of the museum's constituencies, both within and outside the institution, were suggesting that MoMA had become stuck in a rut with shows that reprised the museum's own past discoveries and the history of its own innovations, rather than blazing new paths. For example, in 1968 William S. Rubin organized *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, echoing Alfred Barr's 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*. In 1967 alone, MoMA held three separate Picasso exhibitions.³⁴ Artists, staff members, and even trustees challenged the need for yet another exhibition of work by an artist who had been championed by the museum decades earlier. The Artworkers Coalition challenged both the museum's artistic stagnation and its political complacency.³⁵ They protested the sanitization of art and dissociation of art from politics through events like the "Memorial Service for Dead Babies" murdered in Vietnam, which was held as a guerrilla action in the museum's galleries on January 3, 1970.³⁶ The Artworkers Coalition constantly pointed out that the members of the board of trustees were also members of the country's political elite. Through a hybrid practice combining art production with subversive action, the artists engaged audiences in the process of institutional critique.³⁷

A good example of this methodology, applied in an individual's art practice, was *MoMA-Poll*, a work by Hans Haacke, who was an active member of the AWC. The piece was presented in curator Kynaston McShine's *Information* show (June 20 – September 20,

1970), the first exhibition to open after John Hightower's official start date on May 1, 1970. Each visitor was given a ballot at the museum's entrance.³⁸ In the exhibition itself, visitors were confronted with a Plexiglas box that loosely resembled a Minimalist sculpture. Above the box was a sign that asked, "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochine policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" The question referred to Rockefeller's upcoming race for reelection as governor of New York. Visitors could place their written ballot in one side of the box marked yes or the other marked no.³⁹ Rockefeller was not only governor of the state, he had been a member of the Museum of Modern Art's board of trustees since 1932 and the museum was virtually a family project. His mother, Mrs. John D. (Abby) Rockefeller, Jr., had been one of its founders, the building sat on land donated by Rockefeller family, and family members had served in leadership positions continuously throughout the museum's history.⁴⁰ Ironically, Hightower owed his appointment, in part, to Nelson Rockefeller's endorsement. As Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, Hightower had helped the governor realize his vision of a public funding agency for art.⁴¹ The piece by Haacke did not ruffle as many feathers as another work that the artist would make the following year, the *Shapolsky Real Estate* piece. This work would lead to the cancellation of Haacke's one person exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum. *MoMA-Poll* was a provocation nonetheless.

On January 28, 1969 the AWC had submitted a list of 13 demands for changes in museum policy and practices, including the devotion of an area of the museum to black and Puerto Rican art under the direction of black and Puerto Rican artists and the demand that MoMA

hold a public hearing to discuss “The Museum’s Relationship to Artists and to Society.”⁴² The museum refused, but the Artworkers Coalition held a public hearing on its own on April 10, 1969 at the School of Visual Arts, attended by about 250 people and was significant enough to be reported in *The New York Times* by both the sympathetic Grace Glueck and the adversarial Hilton Kramer.⁴³ On March 30, 1969 three hundred demonstrators had gathered in the museum’s sculpture garden to protest and make speeches about the inadequate representation of black art at the museum. The protest was organized by a group called the Black Bloc of the Artworkers Coalition, though the crowd was reported by *The New York Times* as “overwhelmingly white.”⁴⁴ Bates Lowry, who was director at the time, agreed to set up a Special Committee on Artists Relations but was fired on May 15, 1969 before he could enact his promise.⁴⁵

In John Hightower, the Artworkers Coalition found an even stronger ally. On March 2, 1970, after Hightower’s appointment was announced but before he assumed his post on May 1, the incoming director met with 150 members of the Artworkers Coalition to discuss reforms at the museum.⁴⁶ On May 2, 1970 the day after Hightower officially became director, a coalition of groups demonstrated at the museum demanding the creation of a study center for black and Puerto Rican art which they called the Martin Luther King, Jr.-Pedro Albizu Canpos Study Center.⁴⁷ According to AWC member Alexander Gross, most of the Coalition showed up. The crowd of demonstrators was large and attracted a crowd of onlookers and police on motorcycles.⁴⁸ Various groups were mobilized to participate in the action, including Students and Artists United for a Martin Luther King,

Jr. – Pedro Albizu Canpos Study Center for Black and Puerto Rican Culture.⁴⁹ The

Coalition's flyer read:

The Museum [of Modern Art] is the international pace-setter of the modern movement. Its exclusion of Black and Puerto Rican artists had denied them recognition, support, and the impetus for development which every art school and movement requires...there have been no retrospectives for Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Franz Cervoni, or Epifanio Irizzary, no publications devoted to their work, no group shows for our younger artists. If our art is not to be mixed with the art of whites, well, so be it! Give us our own Study Center, where we can show our black and Puerto Rican artists and the spirit of our people!⁵⁰

A statement from the black and Puerto Rican artists of the AWC listed a program for change that called for "rearranging of institutional patterns" at the museum. They demanded the hiring of a coordinator for the Center by June 1, 1970 and an immediate commitment to thirteen activities that included the development of a black and Puerto Rican advisory board; acquisition of no less than one hundred works of art by black and Puerto Rican artists; a series of exhibitions that ran the gamut from African and South American art to posters by black and Puerto Rican artists; a retrospective for Romare Bearden; and a mural program.⁵¹ The protestors also promoted an educational program that included the production of textbooks and audio-visual materials on black and Puerto Rican art; in-service training for public school teachers by black and Puerto Rican artists; a program of busing children from predominantly black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods to the museum; and concerts of "Rhythm and Blues" and "Puerto Rican folklore" in the museum's sculpture garden.⁵²

These protests impacted the museum and prodded it to examine its unwritten policies concerning issues of inclusion and exclusion. There is no doubt that John Hightower was serious about taking steps toward greater representation of artists of color at MoMA. On

June 15, 1970 he met with the Executive Committee of the BECC to discuss the proposed Martin Luther King, Jr. Center and its possible co-directors, Carroll Greene, Jr. and Ralph Ortiz. The BECC agreed to the Center in principle but reserved the right to voice disagreements over final plans, including its leadership. BECC members did not want to undermine an effort to give black artists more opportunities, but privately they voiced misgivings about a strategy that separated artists of color from the rest of MoMA's collections and exhibitions. They wanted the legitimacy of being seen with the rest of the collection.⁵³ Tellingly, none of the BECC members participated in the demonstration on May 2, 1970 in which the AWC made its biggest public push for the Center.

Picking up where Bates Lowry had left off, the museum undertook a systematic examination of its record on diversity and inclusion. In June 1970, immediately after John Hightower assumed the post of director, the Museum of Modern Art created a trustee committee to address the criticisms raised by the Artworkers Coalition with respect to the inclusion of artists of color. At Hightower's recommendation, the Board of Trustees convened the Committee to Study Afro-American, Hispanic, and Other Ethnic Art, to investigate the AWC's charges and devise proposals for the museum. The committee was chaired by board member J. Frederic Byers III, who was also a founding trustee of the Studio Museum in Harlem and the group came to be known as the Byers Committee. Three additional trustees also participated. Blanchette Rockefeller ran the Subcommittee on Collections and Exhibitions, Beth Strauss headed the Subcommittee on International Programs, and Dr. Mamie Clark, who had been recently appointed to the board, led the Subcommittee on Community Programs.

The museum also took the unprecedented step of appointing Carroll Greene, Jr., then curator of the Afro-American Cultural History Project at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, as a consultant to the project. (Greene would later write the essay for the catalogue accompanying the Romare Bearden exhibition.)

The report that resulted from the committee's work in June 1971 suggests that its members combed through the museum's history for evidence of inclusion.⁵⁴ After reviewing lists of projects and acquisitions, the Subcommittee on Collections and Exhibitions concluded that there was "substance to the charge of ethnocentricity," but that it was not a conscious bias and that the museum "has not wholly overlooked ethnic art in developing its acquisitions and exhibitions policy." "Early in The Museum of Modern Art's history," the report stated, "the Museum pioneered in this field." The report admitted that the museum "...has not, however, been sufficiently attentive in recent years to minority artists...."⁵⁵ The committee found that although the Museum's acquisitions policy was not consciously ethnocentric, selections of the collection were based primarily upon "white experience" and recommended that a special fund be created for the acquisition of work by artists of color, as well as curatorial travel and research. The amount suggested was \$25,000 with one fourth to be donated by the trustees and the remainder to be raised from outside sources. The report stressed that any apparent ethnocentricity was completely unwitting.⁵⁶

The Subcommittee on International Programs concluded that the charge that the Museum of Modern Art's international program was too concerned with Western

cultures was “groundless.” The subcommittee cited the activities of the museum in Latin America, though it neglected to mention that these activities—mostly the circulation of exhibitions to museums in Venezuela, Argentina, and other more developed Latin American countries—focused on places where the United States, and members of the museum’s own board of trustees, had business interests.⁵⁷ The report did mention that the museum had little contact with other museums or educational institutions in Africa, a “deficiency” that may be alleviated, it said, by the touring show *Twenty-five Contemporary American Painters and Sculptors as Printmakers*, which was then in circulation, as well as a forthcoming exhibition of African textiles and jewelry.⁵⁸

Finally, the Subcommittee on Community Programs painted a complex picture of the museum’s relationships to the racially and ethnically diverse constituencies of New York City. The findings were informed by interviews with dozens of people including artist and BECC leader Benny Andrews; Courtney Callender, Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Department of Parks; and Vinnette Carroll, the Artistic Director of the Urban Arts Corps and formerly the head of the Ghetto Arts Program at the New York State Council for the Arts. The subcommittee lauded the museum for its projects and events for minority constituents, such as its sponsorship of the children’s program called the Harlem Art Carnival, which was modeled on the programs developed by MoMA’s former director of education Victor D’Amico. But the museum was criticized for the fact that most of its projects were “white-sponsored and white-directed” and its publications on artists of color were

almost all authored by whites. While many of the museum's past and present efforts may have appealed to diverse ethnic groups, the panel's advisors observed that they remained largely unknown because they were inadequately promoted in the relevant communities.⁵⁹ The advisers strongly suggested that future Museum of Modern Art "ethnic projects" be directed or at least influenced by the people they are designed to serve, and that the museum's contacts with minority communities be greatly improved. This section of the report concluded with the assessment that the museum's past activities "...were valuable chiefly as an indication that the spirit was willing; the flesh still requires strengthening."⁶⁰ To accomplish this, the subcommittee recommended that the Museum of Modern Art programs be designed to engage minorities educationally; that committees be set up to enable members of minority communities to participate in the museum; and that exhibitions be undertaken to explore the cultural identities of these groups.

On the whole, the report stressed the museum's eagerness to address the problems and suggestions presented by the AWC and to reflect the reactions and concerns of those people whose advice the committee had sought. But the committee's ultimate conclusion suggests a disturbing degree of complacency. The report said:

It is significant that fulfilling this role requires no substantive change in the Museum's present policy. Most of the revisions suggested by the subcommittees, and herewith recommended by the Committee, simply seek to modify existing programs. Many of these modifications have already been adopted by the appropriate standing committees of the Museum....⁶¹
(Emphasis in the original)

In the ensuing years and decades, the Museum of Modern Art would become increasingly detached from the concerns of African American artists and other artists of color. During the 1970s and '80s the museum would be harshly criticized for its continuing Eurocentric—some even said neo-colonialist orientation—most notably in regard to the 1984 exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art*, which ironically, had its seeds in an idea recommended by the Artworkers Coalition. A 1970 memo from Chief Curator William S. Rubin to Director of Architecture and Design Arthur Drexler documents the source of the idea:

...[I]t would be interesting to have—as the Art Workers Coalition originally suggested—an exhibition on the relationship of African and other ethnic and indigenous arts to the tradition of modern painting and sculpture. This would make a fascinating exhibition—even though that contribution is, I believe, less marked than some people believe—and could also provide the basis for a most useful publication.⁶²

The influence of African Art on modern European art was also a topic frequently addressed by *Muhammad Speaks*, the newspaper of the National of Islam. An advertisement for the *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* exhibition, held fourteen years after Rubin wrote this memo, is strikingly similar to the use of illustrations in the many articles published in *Muhammad Speaks* in the late 1960s and '70s (Figs. 4.17 and 4.18). But for all William Rubin's interest in "primitivism," he was not particularly interested in cultural equity. At one of the Byers Committee meetings, he said he did not want to be part of any endeavor that was "all black"; he saw this as a form of "reverse racism."⁶³ He believed in "high quality" and "due process" and implied that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center would compromise the museum's standards. Hightower, on the other hand, had no investment in the concept of "museum standards."⁶⁴ He felt the role of the museum was to be a living

part of people's lives, not a storehouse of precious objects or a tastemaker for the bourgeoisie.

According to Russell Lynes, who has written a history of the Museum of Modern, the events that led to Hightower's firing were pragmatic, not ideological, despite this clash of values.⁶⁵ When Hightower was hired, he was told that one of his main responsibilities was to cut the museum's projected annual deficit of \$1,800,000. He addressed this problem primarily through staff reductions. In fact, the staff of the museum decreased by about 20%, from 539 to 440, during his short eighteen-month tenure.⁶⁶ The reductions came from a combination of attrition and firings. In December 1970 Hightower was faced with a possible strike after eleven employees were dismissed. The strike was averted, but in August 1971, additional staff cuts were announced and the employees walked out. By this time, the staff had formed a union, the Professional and Administration Staff Association (PASTA) of the Museum of Modern Art. The strike lasted sixteen days and Hightower was fired four months later. On January 5, 1972 he was forced to resign by board chairman David Rockefeller and board president William S. Paley. Hightower's tenure, which had begun on May 1, 1970, lasted about twenty months.

There is no doubt that John Hightower made a sincere effort to address the interests of black and Puerto Rican artists. When the board hired him they did not realize the full extent of his commitment to institutional change, which according to one trustee, put him on a "suicide course."⁶⁷ Hightower was sympathetic, perhaps too sympathetic in the eyes of the museum's trustees, to many of the artists' demands. He not only engaged, and got

the museum's trustees to engage, in serious dialogue with the AWC and the BECC about the role and future of the museum, but also advocated the dispersal of the collections to community museums in poor neighborhood and supported the establishment of the staff union, which he was sure would "benefit the entire museum profession."⁶⁸ He had little reverence for the notion of museums as "elegant warehouses for beautiful things."⁶⁹ His museum philosophy was, in fact, closer to that of Alfred Barr, Jr., who also believed that a modern museum must be engaged with the social issues and concerns of its time. Looking back, Hightower's philosophy echoes some of the reasons expressed by Allon Schoener for mounting *Harlem On My Mind*, a desire to refresh and democratize the museum with little regard for elitist definitions of art. But in contrast to *Harlem On My Mind*'s disdain for artists—or perhaps to redress this lapse—Hightower was highly concerned with the Museum of Modern Art's relationships with artists and actively sought to incorporate their concerns into the museum's policy making process. In the end, however, he was unable to bring about the changes they sought at MoMA.

The aftermath of *Harlem On My Mind* at the Metropolitan Museum was a different story, one that offers the most prescient vision of how museums would come to address issues of cultural diversity in the subsequent decades. The Metropolitan focused its efforts on educational activities. This interest in education had philosophical resonance with the aims of the Black Arts Movement: to use art as a means of empowerment, to employ a socially-based aesthetic, and to see art as an agent of change. The idea of art as socially useful, rather than apart from or above everyday existence, was expressed in Western aesthetics in the writings of John

Dewey.⁷⁰ In *Experience and Nature* Dewey aimed to connect aspects of human experience and social life that had been divided by specialized, institutional discourses, anticipating the development of this idea in postmodernism and the challenge to Greenbergian formalism and the autonomy of art. Perhaps Dewey's most important theme is the privileging of art experience over the object itself. For Dewey the essence and value of art lay in the dynamic activities of creation and perception. He distinguished between the "art product" and "the actual work of art [which] is what the product does with and in experience."⁷¹ However, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's new emphasis on museum education was only a partial solution to the challenge democratizing the museum and may have even hindered the effort by shifting the focus away from a rethinking of the canon of art and away from artwork by artists of color. The methodologies of education employed by museums did not ensure empowerment for neglected constituencies. On the contrary, the emphasis on education deflected resources and attention away from the more daunting and politically charged task of reconceptualizing the history of Western art so that it encompassed or in some way documented and came to grips with art by disenfranchised groups.

The harsh reception of *Harlem On My Mind* made director Thomas Hoving apprehensive about any exhibitions related to African art or art of the African Diaspora. Uttering the words "Harlem on my mind" was like spewing an obscenity and the repercussions of the controversy had a chilling effect within the museum. So pervasive was this concern that when Curator Theodore Rousseau suggested he pursue

the acquisition of Nelson Rockefeller's primitive art collection, which would eventually come to the museum and lead to the creation of the Michael Rockefeller wing, Hoving hesitated, as he reports in his memoir, because he was worried that the trustees would look upon "primitive art" as "another 'Harlem.'" ⁷² The members of the BECC did indeed discuss the possibility of starting an action against the Metropolitan when it heard on May 14, 1969 that the museum was to receive Nelson Rockefeller's collection of "Primitive Art." Specifically, they considered proposing that the collection be placed in a "more symbolic place," such as Harlem or the African American neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. ⁷³ But this course was never pursued.

Fearful of doing anything that might provoke another firestorm, the Metropolitan Museum began to fulfill its social obligations through what came to be called "outreach" programs and educational services. In December 1969 Harry S. Parker III was promoted to the position of Vice-Director for Education, a post equal in rank to the museum's other vice-directorships including curatorial affairs, administration, and finance, and in 1970 established a Community Programs Department. ⁷⁴ According to Parker, Thomas Hoving recognized that education was an area in which the museum could deliver on some of its more "idealistic ventures." The Metropolitan Museum was not alone. In 1970 the American Association of Museums received requests from over 50 museums across the country for advice on how to reach minority groups. ⁷⁵ Parker and his staff would have a hand in a wide range of museum activities that played a role in visitors' aesthetic responses, including exhibition design, installation,

and interpretative wall texts, as well as the more conventional activities of lectures and student tours. But their prime innovation was the Community Programs Department designed to reach audiences that were not part of the regular museum-going constituencies.

The Community Programs Department employed the Metropolitan Museum of Art's first Black staff members (with the exception of custodial staff). They included Cathy Aldridge, formerly a writer for the *Amsterdam News* who had covered the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition and controversy; Theodore Gunn, who had served as acting director of the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1968 and '69 during the hiatus between the tenures of directors Charles Innis and Ed Spriggs; and a young art historian named Lowery Stokes Sims. The job of Community Programs Department members was to mediate the demands of different communities of New York City with the resources and capabilities of the Metropolitan Museum. The department was both a gateway and a buffer between the museum and the constituencies making demands upon it. Among the Community Programs Department's offerings was Eye-Opener, modeled after the Harlem Cultural Council's Jazzmobile and Dancemobile. The project was essentially a bus containing a portable exhibition that would drive around the city and stop in different neighborhoods to do on-the-spot art workshops. The results of these workshops, and other classes offered by the museum, were exhibited in a gallery located at the museum's 81st Street entrance in what was then the Junior Museum. This was hardly prime real estate within the museum; the entrance was used exclusively by school groups. According to Lowery Stokes Sims, Benny Andrews

called this the “kitchen gallery” because it was situated in the space designated for visiting students to eat their bag lunches.⁷⁶ Slide lectures on topics in the history of art were offered at senior citizen centers by retired teachers who were, according to Sims, not considered “classy enough” for the museum’s regular volunteer program.⁷⁷ But the most lasting service offered by the Metropolitan was the participation of Community Programs Department staff members in the creation of many of New York City’s borough museums, particularly the Bronx Museum of the Arts founded in 1971 and the Queens Museum of Art founded in 1972.

The creation of the Metropolitan Museum’s Community Programs Department in 1970 is widely understood as a legacy of the *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. Equally important, however was its instrumental role in deflecting threatening challenges to the museum’s expansion plan. In the fall of 1967, the Metropolitan Museum had been awarded custodianship of the Temple of Dendur by a presidential commission appointed by Lyndon Johnson.⁷⁸ To accommodate the Temple the museum proposed encasing the building in a large glass structure that would have an open air feel without subjecting its ancient stones to the harsh effects of the Northeastern climate. The incorporation of the Temple was part of a much larger master plan to increase and reorganize the museum’s galleries developed by Thomas Hoving with architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo.⁷⁹ The enlarged building would accommodate not only the Temple of Dendur, but the recently acquired collection of Robert Lehman and the Rockefeller collection of “Primitive Art” and extend the museum 38,000 square feet farther into Central Park.

This plan enraged park preservation activists and critics of the museum, who used the issue of decentralization to advocate that the Temple of Dendur be placed somewhere else. A letter to the editor of *The New York Times* had gotten the opposition rolling as soon as plans for the Temple had been announced in November 1967. The letter was written by a lawyer and conservationist named Robert M. Makla:

Cultural decentralization is the only policy to pursue today. Entire communities are still untouched by the cultural explosion which has enriched central Manhattan, while the museum's stupendous ten acres buildings [*sic*], stretching from 80th to 84th Street, saturate Fifth Avenue with art.⁸⁰

An editorial by *The New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable published the same day endorsed Makla's position. According to Arthur Rosenblatt, who oversaw the expansion in his position as Vice-Director for Architecture, "It became clear that the Met was going to have to play politics and reach out to the boroughs."⁸¹ In order to justify and argue for a great, centralized museum, Hoving had to be able to say that the Metropolitan Museum of Art was serving the whole community. To fulfill this goal the museum intensified its focus on community relations. In addition to Community Programs, Rosenblatt set out on a systematic campaign to present the museum's designs and concepts to community boards throughout the city.

The conflict intensified during the two-year period following the initial announcement of expansion plans in late 1967. In February 1970 the museum created a board committee on "Decentralization and Community Needs" to explore the issue.⁸² On April 13, 1970 when the museum unveiled its detailed plans for the \$50 million

renovation, the call for decentralization reached a shrill peak.⁸³ In order to proceed the museum needed the approval of Parks Commissioner August Heckscher and the New York Arts Commission. Heckscher had the authority to approve the plans unilaterally, but in order to address the public outcry and appease several City Councilman who advocated decentralization of the museum's collections—including Carter Burden, president of the Studio Museum in Harlem—Heckscher called for a public hearing.⁸⁴ During the hearing, which took place on June 4, 1970, Robert Makla resurfaced again as the plan's most outspoken opponent and a leader in the newly formed New York Museum Action Group. Makla called the project a product of Thomas Hoving's vanity and suggested that the newly acquired Lehman collection be sent to "Brooklyn, or Queens, or some other culturally deprived city."⁸⁵ Other proposals called for the museum to build a branch near Hostos Community College, a branch of the City University of New York located in the South Bronx,⁸⁶ the Fulton Fish Market,⁸⁷ the U.S. Customs House at Bowling Green on the lower tip of Manhattan,⁸⁸ or take a floor or two of the World Trade Center, which was currently under construction.⁸⁹ The Metropolitan countered by arguing that it could do both—build the new wings and decentralize. "Decentralization means different things to different people," said Hoving. "I don't want to lop off sections of the Metropolitan and put them down in the Bronx or Queens. I'd rather extend all the help we can give—loans, curators, advice—to cultural centers run by the people themselves, not by us."⁹⁰ An additional hearing was held in August 1970 by the Landmarks Commission. Benny Andrews attended on behalf of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in order to advocate for the placement of Rockefeller's "primitive" collection in an African American

neighborhood, but there were dozens of speakers and the hearing dragged on for hours. A battle-fatigued Andrews did not wait through the other speakers to say his piece.

Community Department staff members knew that they were hired to enhance the museum's image as an institution serving a broad and diverse audience. They knew that their role was primarily one of public relations because their rotating exhibitions were virtually invisible, save for the press releases the museum would churn out every three weeks for the shows in the 81st Street exhibition space. To better fulfill what they saw as their mission, many members of the Community Programs Department staff expanded and redefined their roles. They began to serve as a resource for artists of color and colleagues who were starting a new wave of arts organizations. According to Lowery Stokes Sims, "[W]e had the official Community Programs and then we had the renegade community programs where we felt that as employees of the Met we were there to help everybody on our own time and to scrounge materials wherever we could...."⁹¹

Despite these renegade efforts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's education programs provided a small fig leaf behind which the museum tried to hide its continuing exclusion of artists of color from its curatorial program. The BECC would continue to press this point. In December 1969 the group sent a letter to Hoving protesting the omission of black artists from the museum's exhibition of American art as part of its Centennial celebration. The letter asked, "How could the Metropolitan Museum of Art

put on an exhibition of 400 years of art without making any mention whatsoever of the contributions by Black people in this country?"⁹² Hoving responded a couple of months later and agreed to meet with the group. The meeting took place on April 17, 1970. Hoving began by conceding the errors of *Harlem On My Mind* and acknowledged that an exhibition entitled *New York 1940–1970* organized by Henry Geldzahler and which had recently closed erroneously omitted black artists. He reported that the museum was planning an exhibition of work by black artists headed by Romare Bearden, who had previously been put in charge of the ill-fated Black Art show planned to accompany *Harlem On My Mind*; James Sneed, who had succeeded Bearden as organizer of this failed project; and Carroll Greene, Jr., who had written the introduction to the Romare Bearden exhibition catalogue at MoMA and was in discussion with John Hightower about a permanent position as co-director, with Ralph Ortiz, of the proposed Martin Luther King, Jr. wing devoted to Black and Puerto Rican art. Andrews and the other members of the BECC Executive Committee, including Russ Thompson, Cliff Joseph, and Chuck Bowers, were unimpressed by Hoving's plans. Not only did they see this proposal as a repeat of the museum's past failure, they objected to the participation of Sneed, who had presided over the final stages of the museum's last attempt to mount a black art show. In addition, they did not like the idea of the museum relying on artists as curators when there were qualified art historians and scholars available. They suggested setting up an advisory committee to which Hoving agreed, and at a subsequent BECC meeting, they developed a list of advisors that included Edmund Barry Gaither, Ed Spriggs, director of the Studio

Museum in Harlem, and Floyd Coleman. But, once again, the show never materialized.

Andrews' personal experience with the Metropolitan Museum further illustrates the museum's intransigence with respect to black art and the difficulty of bringing museums to recognize the work of black artists as art. Every year since Henry Geldzahler had been appointed curator of contemporary art in 1967, he had been making annual studio visits with Andrews, though he had never expressed interest in exhibiting his work. In January 1972 Andrews proposed an artist-in-residency project in which he would set up a studio in one of the Metropolitan Museum's galleries and interact with visitors who would be free to enter, talk with Andrews and observe him at work. The final product would be a conventional gallery exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. Andrews's concept was to show the world of the artist from process to presentation, an idea he suspected was too innovative for the museum, but which Geldzahler seemed to find of interest. When Geldzahler made a follow up visit in May 1972 he brought along Susan Coppello, a member of the Metropolitan's education department staff who had previously served as the museum's sole Community Relations staff member during the tumultuous final year of planning for *Harlem On My Mind*. According to Andrews, Geldzahler was eager to make the project happen and felt that Coppello (who was now married and using the last name Bader) could be instrumental in bringing in money under the auspices of education. Several months later, however, Bader came back to Andrews with bad news. Money was tight and this project did not top the list of the museum's educational priorities.

Andrews was not surprised that the project was rejected. In his journal entry describing the studio visit with Geldzahler and Bader he had written, “I just cannot believe that the Metropolitan Museum will let me do something strong and original under their roof.”⁹³ What surprised him was that the project he had proposed to the Metropolitan’s Contemporary Art curator had been reclassified as an educational project. This slippage encapsulated the larger trend that would characterize not only the Metropolitan Museum, but the museum field as a whole, a shift from thinking about integrating the museum’s collections and exhibitions to focusing on education and the diversification of audiences. The social work vs. aesthetics debate had gone another round and social work had won.

Frustrated by the limitations of the museum’s community outreach and sensing that the primary battle was to have artists of color legitimated *as artists*, Sims gradually made the transition into curatorial work. She saw that the battleground was the curatorial realm since it is the curator who has the power to define what is and is not considered art, what is and isn’t seen as having quality. Sims skillfully maneuvered her way into an assistant curator position with Henry Geldzahler in the Contemporary Art Department in 1975 after two and half years doing outreach programs in the Community Programs Department. She became the first and only black curator in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s one hundred and thirty year history. “...I finally figured out that being a curator was it because you do shows and you affect a collection. A collection is forever, more or less.”⁹⁴ But Sims got flak from all sides. Her white counterparts in other museums claimed she got the job simply because she

was black and lacked basic qualifications. Her black colleagues couldn't understand "why [she] wasn't mounting all the shows."⁹⁵ But her opportunities within the museum were limited. Her ideas for shows—everything from small installations from the permanent collection, to a Black Art show, to a show of European paintings from the 1940s to the 1970s—were all shot down. Finally, after sixteen years as a curator in the Department of Contemporary Art (later called 20th-Century Art) Sims realized the first and only major exhibition in which she was the lead curator, a retrospective of the work of Stuart Davis which opened in 1991.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Sims's stature as a curator grew as she began to execute projects for other organizations outside the Metropolitan Museum. Her clout as a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art commanded attention and the quality of her work earned her the respect of colleagues. In 1991, shortly after the Davis show, she received the College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather award for art criticism and, in 1998, a Curator's Grant from the Peter Norton Family Foundation that enabled her to purchase works for the collection by contemporary African American artists Glenn Ligon, Richard Mayhew, Alison Saar, Lorna Simpson, and Kara Walker.⁹⁷ After incrementally building up a record of victories, Sims left the Metropolitan Museum of Art to direct the Studio Museum in Harlem.

The experiences at these three museums, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, illustrate the difficulties encountered by both artists and institutions in trying to bring about greater cultural equity. Paradoxically, those institutions that made the greatest efforts were

often the ones that came in for the greatest criticism. No single effort would bring about the magnitude of change needed to make museums truly equitable and all were affected by compromises and ignorance. Answers were not always clear and the vigilance of arts activists meant that criticism, and often protest, was inevitable. This created a vicious cycle in which new initiatives provoked virulent attack, which in turn, may have had a chilling effect on museums' willingness to change. Certainly the activism of the early 1970s forced museums to reexamine their unwritten policies of exclusiveness and exclusion and to diversify their exhibitions and education programs. But the issue that is still the most pressing in museum practice is the question of representation—who speaks for whom. Although there are now many more exhibitions of work by artists of color and women, there are still relatively few people of color in curatorial positions and even fewer in upper management positions and on boards of trustees. In retrospect, the agendas put forth in the 1970s are as timely as ever, but the solutions equally elusive.

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1. It is nearly impossible to determine definitively the racial composition of the photographers included in *Harlem On My Mind*. Many of the photographs were unattributed and in cases where credit lines were given, they were often organizations, not the individual photographers themselves.
 2. Faith Ringgold interview in *I'll Make Me a World*, "Not a Rhyme Time" produced by Blackside, Inc. in association with Thirteen/WNET New York (1999).
 3. Edmund Barry Gaither, *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston* (Boston: The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, The Museum of Fine Arts, and The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, 1970). Exhibition catalogue introduction.
 4. Ron Milner interview in *I'll Make Me a World*.
 5. August Wilson interview in *I'll Make Me a World*.
 6. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*. Eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 128.
 7. Ibid.
 8. For a discussion of *Womanhouse* see Faith Wilding, *By Our Own Hands: The Woman Artist's Movement, Southern California, 1970-1976* (Santa Monica, CA. : Double X, 1977); Arlene Raven, "Blood Sister: Female Art and Criticism" in the catalogue *Division of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, ed. Lydia Yee (New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995) published in conjunction with an exhibition held at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, February 17-June 11, 1995; and Juli Carson, "On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics" in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 121-124.
 9. Hilton Kramer, "Artists and the Problem of 'Relevance,'" *The New York Times*, May 4, 1969, exhibition review of the *Art and Technology* show at the 1969 Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
 10. *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade* was held at the Studio Museum in Harlem January 27-June 30, 1985. It should be noted that the show included several white artists whose work addressed civil rights issues, including Nancy Spero and May Stevens. After its premier at the Studio Museum, the show traveled to the Galleries of the Claremont Colleges, Claremont, CA; the New York State Museum; and the Arkansas Arts Center. See Mary Schmidt-Campbell, ed. *Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade, 1963-1973*. (New York: Studio

Museum in Harlem, 1984). Art historian Kellie Jones is currently working on a project about the Black Arts Movement.

11. This show was an expanded version of *New Voices: 15 New York Artists* organized by Ruder & Finn in 1968, which also traveled to five national venues as *30 Contemporary Black Artists* in 1968 and 1969.

12. See Chapter one, note 3.

13. *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* XXVII, no. 5 (January 1969): 251.

14. Edmund Barry Gaither interview in *I'll Make Me a World*.

15. Benny Andrews interview in *I'll Make Me a World*.

16. According to an article in *The New York Times*, the museum also agreed to a third point, setting up a fund for the purchase of Black Art. It is not clear, however, if this was followed through.

17. Black Emergency Cultural Coalition statement in the Benny Andrews archive, Studio Museum in Harlem.

18. Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Photography as a Fine Art* (Rochester: The George Eastman House, 1960).

19. Robert Doty and Diane Waldman, *Adolph Gottlieb* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1968).

20. Robert Doty, *Human Concern/Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969).

21. BECC flyer in the Benny Andrews archive, Studio Museum in Harlem.

22. Henri Ghent, letter to John I. H. Baur, March 31, 1970 in the Whitney Museum of American Art Archive.

23. John I. H. Baur, letter to David Solinger, Esq., September 18, 1969 in the Whitney Museum of American Art Archive.

24. BECC press release, April 5, 1971 in the Benny Andrews archive, Studio Museum in Harlem.

25. The list of artists who withdrew from the show has never been published. The *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition archive at the Whitney Museum of American Art contains correspondence and notes suggesting that the group may have included Melvin Edwards, Joe Overstreet, Robert Blackburn, Beverly Carter, Daniel LaRue Johnson, George Smith and DeWain Valentine. Works by these artists were

listed on exhibition checklists and shipping orders, but did not appear in the exhibition catalogue.

26. Robert Doty, *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), 7. Exhibition catalogue introduction.

27. See Benny Andrews, "The B.E.C.C.: Black Emergency Cultural Coalition," *Arts Magazine* 44 (Summer 1970): 18-20.

28. *Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual* and *The Sculpture of Richard Hunt* were held at the Museum of Modern Art, March 25-June 7, 1971.

29. Richard Hunt was born in Chicago in 1935 and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is best known for his sculptures in welded metal, including several large out door commissions for public sites and college campuses throughout the country. A small catalogue was produced in conjunction with the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *The Sculpture of Richard Hunt* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971).

30. Exhibition review, *Art in America* (May-June 1971) 59: 130-1.

31. *Japanese Household Objects* was held at the Museum of Modern Art from April 17 through June 18, 1951.

32. Barr had founded the museum in 1929 and run the institution until 1943 when he was shifted into the role of Curator of the Museum's Collections, position he held until 1967. In 1949 René d'Harnoncourt was appointed his successor as director of the museum.

33. Following Lowry's departure the museum was run by a committee comprised of trustee Walter Bareiss, Director of the Exhibition Program Wilder Green, and Director of Administration Richard Koch. See Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 417.

34. These exhibitions were *Picasso: "Guernica" Studies and Postscripts*; *Prints by Picasso: A Selection from Sixty Years*; and *The Sculpture of Picasso*.

35. As mentioned in chapter one the first action of the AWC was artist Takis' removal of his "Tele-sculpture" (1966) from the exhibition *The Machine at the End of the Mechanical Age* on January 3, 1969. The aim was to protest the inclusion of the work in the exhibition despite the artist's personal objections and the more general lack of control over the use of artists' work once it is sold. By 1970, protests at MoMA had become so commonplace that according to AWC member Alex Gross, if a visitor to the museum didn't happen upon one, he or she felt cheated.

36. Standing in front of Picasso's "Guernica," Father Stephen Garmey, an Episcopalian minister and chaplain at Columbia University at the time, read a series of

texts alternating between prayers and gruesome news reports of activities in Vietnam. During the service artist Joyce Kozloff sat on the floor in front of the painting with her eight month old baby, Nikolas.

37. For a good chronicle of the AWC's activities, see Lucy Lippard's essay, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York since 1969" in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 79-113.

38. The color of the ballots differed according to the visitor's status as a full-paying visitor, member, courtesy pass holder, or a Monday visitor, the one day during the week when the museum did not charge admission. Museum staff did not hand the ballots out consistently so that some visitors improvised by casting ballots on scraps of paper. For full description of the project see *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1986), 86-87.

39 12.4% of the museum's visitors participated in the poll and of these, 68.7% answered yes and 31.3% answered no.

40. Perhaps the most absurd artists action, because it was so outlandish, was GAAG's call for all the members of the Rockefeller family to resign from MoMA's board of trustees.

41. Lynes, 420.

42. See Grace Glueck, "Artists Threaten Sit-in at the Modern" *The New York Times*, March 7, 1969, 26.

43. See Grace Glueck, "'J' Accuse, Baby!' She Cried," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1969 and Hilton Kramer, "Artists and the Problem of 'Relevance,'" *The New York Times*, May 4, 1969, D23.

44. Robert Windeler, "Modern Museum Protest Target," *The New York Times*, March 31, 1969, 33.

45. The AWC appears to have made some headway. On December 10, 1969 while the museum was between directors, Benny Andrews received a phone call from Arthur Drexler, head of the Architecture Department and a senior staff member at the museum inviting him and other leaders of the BECC to a meeting with museum representatives William S. Rubin, head of the Painting and Sculpture Collections, William Agee, an associate curator, and himself. They wanted to discuss the creation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for the Study of African American and Puerto Rican Culture proposed by the AWC. Apparently these three were meeting with representatives Tom Lloyd and Faith Ringgold of the AWC on December 16 at 2:00 p.m. and they wanted invited the BECC to come on the same day at 6:00 p.m.

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45. The meeting with the BECC was to brief them on the earlier discuss with the AWC. No action resulted from this meeting but it is significant to note that MoMA initiated the meeting with the BECC, signaling the seriousness of their process.
46. See Grace Glueck, "Hightower Meets Museum's Critics," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1970.
- 47 This demonstration appears to be the only instance in which the name of the center included Pedro Albizu Campos, which the artists misspelled "Canpos." Pedro Albizu Campos was a leader in the Puerto Rican Independence Movement.
48. See Alexander Gross, "The Great Communist Take-Over Plot" in *Inside the Sixties: What Really Happened On An International Scale* at <http://language.home.sprynet.com/otherdex/60s-comm.htm>.
49. Interestingly, Benny Andrews makes no mention of this demonstration in his journal and extant documents reveal no participation by BECC members.
50. See *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group*, #10, Exhibit *1. No page number. Bearden's show was held the following year in Spring 1971.
51. The document was signed by Tom Lloyd, Faith Ringgold, Bob Carter, Todd Williams, Jack Hunte, Adrian Garcia, Ralph Ortiz, James Sewpyo, Martin Rubio, Amondo Soto and Joan Barnes.
52. During the protest the Guerrilla Art Action Group provided their usual brand of theatrics. In the middle of the protest a sleek black limousine pulled up in front of the museum and out came Jon Hendricks playing "the director," Jean Toche as "the trustee" and Cynthia Lindquist, "the secretary." "The director," dressed in black tie, emerged from the limo and looked at the protest with a horrified expression on his face. He urged "the trustee" to come out and observe the protestors. Immediately, "the trustee" gave an order to "the director" who gave the order to "the secretary" who gave the order to "the guards," played by other artists already on the scene, to build a barricade to protect the museum from the protestors. After this barricade was built (out of chicken wire) "the guards" brought out the rest of the props, toy rifles, cap guns, smoke bombs, and tomato juice to be used as fake blood. "The trustee" and "the director" started yelling at the demonstrators while the artists rallied behind a large Puerto Rican flag unfurled by Adrian Garcia. Then the protestors, led by Ralph Ortiz, dragged "the trustee" into the center of the demonstration and proceeded to rip off his fancy clothes. A smoke bomb went off and Toche and Hendricks climbed back into their limo and raced off just as police cars drove up. The aim of the action was: "to do an irrational, visceral, classist visualization of the racist mental attitudes of the controlling forces of the Museum of Modern Art, and to point out through the action the myths, fears, and their protective fantasies, that have historically exploited and excluded the art and life-styles of Puerto Rican and black people. For more information on the action see *GAAG: The Guerrilla Art Action Group*, #10, Exhibit *4 n.p.

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53. Benny Andrew, interview by author, tape recording, Litchfield, CT, July 14, 1999.
54. The Report to the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art from The Committee to Study Afro-American, Hispanic and Other Ethnic Art, June 1971. A full copy of the report, also known as the Byers Report, is available in the Museum of Modern Art Archive.
55. Byers Report, 1.
55. Ibid, 5-6.
57. Art historian and curator Mari Carmen Ramirez discussed this aspect of the Museum of Modern Art's history in a paper delivered at the Working Seminar "Contemporary Visual Art/Critical and Historical Interpretations" held at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, February 1993.
58. Byers Report, 7.
59. Ibid, 8.
60. Ibid.
- 61 Ibid, 10.
62. William S. Rubin, memo to Arthur Drexler, February 24, 1970 in John Hightower papers in the Museum of Modern Art Archive.
63. Andrews Journal entry #979, October 27, 1970.
64. Ibid.
65. Lynes, 421.
66. Ibid, 422.
67. Edward Warburg made this statement as quoted in Lynes, 421
68. Letter of resignation quoted in Lynes, 430.
69. Lynes, 427.
70. See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959) and *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958).
71. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 9.
72. Thomas P.F. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Touchstone, 1994),183.

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73. A letter was drafted, but it is uncertain whether it was ever sent. Benny Andrews journal entries, May 14, 1969 and May 16, 1969.
74. The Community Programs Department was abolished by Philippe de Montebello upon his appointment as director of the museum in 1978.
75. Barbara Y. Newsome and Adele Z. Silver, eds. *The Art Museum as Educator: A Collection of Studies As Guides to Practice and Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
76. Lowery Stokes Sims, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, February 27, 2001.
77. Ibid.
78. Several years earlier the United States had been given the building by the United Arab Republic in exchange for \$16 million in American support to rebuild the ancient temple of Abu Simbel. President Johnson issued a request for proposals from museums across the country to determine which institution would receive the building under its stewardship. The Metropolitan Museum of Art found itself competing with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, who proposed putting it on the Charles River to simulate its original location on the Nile. The Philadelphia Museum was going to put it on the Skeekill. A museum in Cairo, Illinois wanted to put it on the Mississippi. There was even a proposal from the Brooklyn Museum to site it on the sands of Coney Island. The Metropolitan had an advantage over its competitors in that it could demonstrate its experience caring for another architectural artifact, The Cloisters.
79. The plan increased the space of the museum from seven to seventeen acres, redesigned the thousand-foot façade, and renovated all two hundred of the museum's galleries.
80. Letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, November 23, 1967, 32.
81. Rosenblatt, interview.
82. Grace Glueck, "Metropolitan to Study Its Role in City's Communities," *The New York Times*, February 24, 1970.
83. For the best detailed account of the initial renovation plans see Ada Louis Huxtable, "Metropolitan Museum Plans Centennial Expansion," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1970, 1 and 53.
84. The Landmarks Preservation Commission and the City Council also called public hearings to debate the museum's plans, although legally they had no role in the approvals process.
85. *Newsweek*, August 17, 1970, 93.

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86. Paul O'Dwyer, letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, March 11, 1970.
87. Robert Weinberg, critic-at-large for architecture and planning, WNYC, quoted in Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 219.
88. James P. O'Shea, letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, June 12, 1970, 38: 4
89. Grace Glueck, "Metropolitan Asked to Share Its Art," *The New York Times*, July 23, 1970.
90. As quoted in *Newsweek*, August 17, 1970, 93.
91. Sims, interview.
92. Andrews Journal entry #845, April 17, 1970.
93. Andrews Journal entry #1384, May 10, 1972
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. *Stuart Davis. American Painter* was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from November 23, 1991 to February 16, 1992. Interestingly, Davis had been an agitator at the Metropolitan Museum in the late 1930s and early '40s advocating that the museum pay more attention to abstract art by contemporary American artists. See Lowery Stokes Sims, *Stuart Davis. American Painter* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991).
- 97 The Norton Foundation Curator's Grants provide \$50,000 in unrestricted acquisition funds. Lowery Sims used her grant to purchase the following works for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection: Glenn Ligon, *Untitled: Four Etchings* (1992); Glenn Ligon, *Runaways* (1993); Richard Mayhew, *Spring Series #7* (1997); Alison Saar, *Nappy Head #1* (1997); Lorna Simpson, *9 Props* (1995); Lorna Simpson, *Parts* (1998); Kara Walker, *African/American* (1998).

Chapter 5 Multiculturalism in the 1980s and '90s

Harlem On My Mind took place at a critical moment in American society when museums were being pressured to serve more racially diverse constituencies and address multiple, often conflicting agendas with few precedents and only experimental models. Race relations in the United States were being redefined in ways that had not been seen since the end of slavery and the era of Reconstruction. The subject of *Harlem On My Mind*—the history of Harlem and, more generally, the story of African Americans in 20th-Century America—was timely and intriguing and there was every reason to think that a lively presentation of the history of Harlem would draw audiences and intrigue tastemakers. Private and public funders were eager to contribute to experimental projects that addressed the country's "race problem." White liberals had discovered "ethnicity" in fashion, music, and politics¹ and African Americans were demanding greater visibility in the public realm. Why, then, was *Harlem On My Mind* such a failure and how does this failure shed light on the subsequent development of multiculturalism in museums?

Beyond the particular mistakes that were detailed in chapters two and three, the exhibition embodied large structural dilemmas and historical disjunctions. Thinking of the exhibition as a *discursive formation* can help clarify the nature of these problems. Stuart Hall defines the word "discourse" as a way of constructing knowledge: a "cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices" that provides a

way of talking about a particular topic. Discursive formations define what is considered “useful, relevant, and ‘true’” about a given subject at a given time.² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has proposed that the central problematic of all museums is the relationship between its knowledge formation (similar to Hall’s notion of discursive formation), its collections, and its existence as an institution. At their founding moment, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says, these three aspects of the museum are in synch, but as the museum evolves, they begin to diverge. The museum’s collections become out of synch with current knowledge.³

Applying Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s notion of synchopation to the practice of exhibitions, we can say that *Harlem On My Mind* was out of synch with the knowledge formations of its time and place. Beyond the issues of curatorial strategy and exhibition design, the fundamental issue of Allon Schoener’s cultural identity made any exhibition he would produce about African Americans in the late 1960s subject to skepticism. This was a time when authentic expression (including curatorial practice as a form of expression) required that the speaker be visibly identified with his or her subject. Black self-determination required black self-representation and the imperative of self-determination trumped all other concerns. This was not necessarily a reflection of essentialism, that is to say, a belief in timeless essences of identity that naturally equip one with the knowledge and ability to speak authoritatively about one’s “people” or one’s “heritage.” Rather at that particular point in history, the alignment of race with cultural identity was a sign of authenticity that was used instrumentally to advance particular political agendas. Allon Schoener and Thomas P.

F. Hoving knew that they could not mount an exhibition about Harlem without the inclusion of people from Harlem itself. They created advisory boards to address this need. But their use of these “authentic subjects” was not perceived as sincere and this overture was viewed, at best, as an empty gesture, at worst, an insult.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, not all of the actors in the *Harlem On My Mind* drama believed in the existence of an essential, authentic identity, but many used essentialism strategically. The light-skinned Benny Andrews deferred to the dark-skinned Henri Ghent as media spokesperson for the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition because the coalition believed that Ghent’s skin tone gave him the “right” public profile of a militant activist that would appeal to media outlets. Similarly, Allon Schoener lifted the quotation marks from Candice Van Ellison’s use of Nathan Glazer’s passage from *Beyond the Melting Pot* because he thought that a direct statement from a “ghetto resident” would provide a more compelling first-person account of Harlem life. The truth—that this student had written a well-researched, academic paper drawing on white sources as well as black—was much less provocative than the stereotypical image of a young black woman giving an unmediated, eyewitness account of her personal experiences. Whether they believed in essentialism or not, many of the players in the *Harlem On My Mind* controversy acted as if they did in order to accomplish their specific goals.

As I have conducted interviews for this text, I have repeatedly been told that if Allon Schoener had been African American, there would not have been a controversy

among African American artists and community leaders. I would venture to say that if Allon Schoener had been African American, he would not have been given the opportunity to mount a show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as the later experience of Lowery Stokes Sims seems to confirm. Speculation about what would have been had Schoener been black is a moot point. In the words of Patricia Mainardi, "When the powers that be first take notice, they always want one of their own."⁴

In the 1960s and early 1970s black artists argued that black curators should be the ones organizing shows of their work, a stance that put them at odds with institutions that had no black curatorial staff members and little intention of allowing "outsiders" to dictate museum policy. Thirty years later, young artists are more forgiving of a system that still largely excludes people of color from positions of artistic decision-making power. When asked if she ever hears an outcry among African American artists against white curators organizing shows of their work, Lowery Stokes Sims laughs and says, "No, I think artists are more interested in just having a show...I haven't heard any black artists say, 'I'm not going to be in this show because the curator isn't black!'"⁵ With so few black curators and other people of color in curatorial positions to refuse a white curator would be tantamount to refusing an art career. Moreover, notions of race have been deconstructed by cultural intellectuals such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Stuart Hall and these theorists' ideas have penetrated the art world, creating new meeting grounds where difference is thought of as a shared condition, and all are subject to racialized identities, whatever those

identities may be. The term "race" is used with quotation marks by the generation that came of age in more integrated schools, read Toni Morrison along with William Faulkner, and watched Jesse Jackson run for president of the United States.

But in the evolution of the multicultural museum, race-in-quotation-marks goes only so far. Constraints still exist that are based on the marking out of racialized territories.

White curators have the luxury of moving between worlds and working with whatever art they wish, whereas people of color in curatorial positions and particularly African Americans, are still consigned to representing "their people."

Sims says,

...[I]f a white art historian can do a black art show, I ought to be able to do a white show.... [U]ntil there's that kind of reciprocity, than we cannot talk about a kind of multicultural world ... [I]f a Black person can't do a European show... than it's a sham, it's just continued neo-colonialism... And at this point I can't think of one black art historian who has taken a topic that is not somehow related to the African Diaspora... [w]ho may have done Byzantine art, Renaissance art, or anything like that. It doesn't exist.⁶

This pressure to work within strict racialized boundaries comes not only from the "white art establishment," but also from African Americans in the institutionalized art world. This was made evident in the reaction to the exhibition *Black Male:*

Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art organized by curator Thelma Golden at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1994. The exhibition questioned the image of black masculinity in mass media and the popular imagination through works of art by a culturally diverse range of artists, including Robert Arneson, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mel Chin, Robert Colescott, Leon Golub, Lyle Ashton Harris, Byron Kim, Glenn Ligon, Adrian Piper, Alison Saar, Andres Serrano,

and others. Like *Harlem On My Mind*, *Black Male* provoked a controversy. The controversy centered on the fact that some audience members interpreted the artistic appropriation of “negative images” as straightforwardly derogatory representations. Also, *Black Male* happened to take place in 1994, the year of the 25th anniversary of *Harlem On My Mind*. Several articles were published looking back at the show and some critics compared the two. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture organized a symposium commemorating the *Harlem On My Mind* anniversary and one audience member asked why there was no outcry on the part of blacks against the perceived racism of the *Black Male* exhibition, as there had been with *Harlem On My Mind*. The distinguished group of symposium participants— a group that included Allon Schoener—all came down against *Black Male*. They agreed with the premise of the audience member’s question, that the exhibition deserved to be picketed, but were unable to provide an “adequate” explanation as to why the show was spared.⁷

Edmund Barry Gaither took the opportunity to suggest that perhaps curator Thelma Golden had been co-opted by the Whitney Museum and had lost touch her with “community.”⁸ He bemoaned the fact that in developing the itinerary for *Black Male*’s national tour, the Whitney offered the exhibition to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, but not the “community-based” Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists, also located in Boston, attributing this decision to a lack of concern for “the black community,” rather than a function of the typical tendency of museums to collaborate with institutions of similar size, budget, and stature.⁹ In the 1960s and ‘70s mainstream museums were being pressured to utilize the expertise of black curators. In the 1980s and ‘90s the few black curators who worked in mainstream

museums were still being pressured to address the issues of “community” that had been articulated thirty years before.¹⁰

Such historical disjunctions jumped into high relief in the late 1960s and ‘70s and *Harlem On My Mind* embodied several. In addition to the issue of Allon Schoener’s qualifications to speak of, if not for, the people of Harlem, there was the question of curatorial methodology. *Harlem On My Mind* was forward looking and old fashioned at the same time. The show embodied a shift away from the idea of an omniscient, objective curator and crystallized the notion of exhibition practice as a subjective means of writing history, a definition of curatorial practice that would become increasingly important in the 1980s and ‘90s. The show’s overarching curatorial concept and installation design subsumed the individual objects that comprised it, provoking viewers’ awareness of “issues of representation” in museum practice, vividly demonstrating the role of the curator as creator of an interpretative apparatus through which audiences encounter a specific knowledge formation and perceive materials and subject matter as imbued with particular meanings. Schoener himself intended to take up the challenge of questioning institutional authority. He felt, and tried to act, like a rebel, creating an exhibition that would “demonstrate new ideas about how museums could become information environments,” rather than showplaces for objects on pedestals.¹¹ But the models that Schoener chose for *Harlem On My Mind* were of an earlier era—the propaganda exhibitions of the 1930s and ‘40s and the trade fair and exposition-style photo displays of the 1950s and ‘60s—and their character was antithetical to Schoener’s own aims. As noted earlier, Schoener

was a self-proclaimed follower of the exhibition style of Charles and Ray Eames, who themselves would come under fire for employing the exposition model of display in their 1973 exhibition *The World of Franklin and Jefferson* developed to celebrate the bicentennial of the American Revolution and which, coincidentally, took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹² This exposition model reflected the optimistic modernist belief that delivery of information to mass audiences was an inherently democratic act. This kind of curatorial practice was out of synch with the emerging consciousness about representation in the late 1960s. The strategy was predicated on the assumption that visual information is itself innocent and objective and this created a contradiction between the curatorial intention and the end result. At the time Schoener mounted *Harlem On My Mind*, questions of interpretative context were being raised throughout the museum field. Challenges even arose as to whether certain objects should be shown in museums at all. For example, in anthropology museums the new consciousness of the Civil Rights Movement called into question the acquisition and presentation of Native American property. In 1970 a controversy arose between the New York State Museum in Albany and the Onondago Indians and their supporters over the rightful ownership of Iroquois wampum belts. Debates about the ethics of cultural ownership, the recoding of an object's function and meaning when it passes into the museum, and the issue of repatriation have been major concerns since the 1970 UNESCO convention on the prohibition of illicit transfer of cultural property.¹³

The issue of exhibition as interpretive context became a central concern of “avant-garde” contemporary artists in the early 1970s. Artists such as Gordon Matta-Clarke, Alan Saret and Marjorie Strider, who were all involved in founding 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street (established in 1970 and renamed White Columns in 1979) rejected the traditional museum exhibition model in favor of alternative spaces where space itself was used as an art material.¹⁴ As Martin Beck has discussed, the “raw” state of the converted industrial space came to stand for freedom:

The physical features of an unfinished, unpolished, or ‘as-is’ architecture with traces of industrial history are hence associated with the possibility of doing things that one cannot do elsewhere... “Raw”—with its connotations of natural, crude, unrefined, unprocessed, rough, unfinished—became a metaphor for freedom from restrictive definitions of art making. It alluded to a frontier state where boundaries are negotiated and challenged, where space is explored and extended.¹⁵

However, the issue of exhibition as interpretative context took a very different turn with the work of African American artists. The progressive aims of cultural equity were instead married to traditional exhibition formats. The first shows of work by African Americans mounted in the late 1960s in community galleries and on college campuses, especially black colleges and inner city schools, used the same presentational style dominant in mainstream art museums, the “white cube.” The white cube countered the historical tendency to categorize the cultural production of African Americans as folk art or ethnographic. In general terms, marginalized artists were not looking to subvert the status quo, they were looking for their piece of the pie. As Lowery Stokes Sims puts it, “[W]hat black artists wanted was to be seen in the same context as white artists. And since the aesthetic was the clean white cube with the black ceiling and the cement floor, that’s what they wanted....”¹⁶ In 1976

Brian O'Doherty published a series of essays in *Artforum* with the overarching title "Inside the White Cube."¹⁷ These essays identify the main functions of the white cube gallery space as dislocating the object from space and time—that is, from history—and creating a context in which artworks operate simultaneously as both aesthetic and commercial objects. For black artists, the white cube wasn't necessarily viewed in this ideologically charged way, it was simply normative. Its design conventions were intended to give the work of black artists a sense of legitimacy and parity with that of white artists even if they were "only" being shown in marginal venues like college galleries and community arts organizations. This was equally true of feminist artists, such as the founding members of A.I.R. Gallery, who worked for months renovating a Soho warehouse space in order to bring it as close as possible to polished museums standards.¹⁸ Indeed in 1974 when art historian and gallerist Linda Goode-Bryant established her influential gallery Just Above Midtown with the specific intent of showing work by artists of color, she chose to rent a pristine, albeit small, exhibition space on 57th Street, the heart of the established commercial art district.¹⁹ The "business-as-usual" exhibition style was sometimes used strategically, and sometimes merely as a "default setting" for exhibition design. But in either case the white cube had different connotations depending on whose work it contained.

As artists of color received more opportunities to show their work in museum, the exhibition context itself became a subject of art. Artists who wanted to play a productive role in reshaping the museum as an institution would develop new artistic strategies that infiltrated Eurocentric institutions and enabled their work to play the

double role of “participant/saboteur.” Influencing such work were artists like Hans Haacke, who used his artwork to expose the power relationships between the museum and larger political and corporate structures in pieces such as *MoMA-Poll* (1971) and *MetroMobiltan* (1985), a work that took on the issue of corporate art sponsorship as a form of international public relations and economic diplomacy (Fig. 5.1). The piece addresses Mobil corporation’s grants to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for shows of art from places like Nigeria, where Mobil holds major assets, and its simultaneous refusal to stop doing business with the apartheid government of South Africa despite a shareholder resolution to do so. Among African American artists, Fred Wilson has made the largest contribution to critiquing the racial politics of museum display. In the 1970s, Wilson ran an arts program at the James Weldon Johnson Community Center in East Harlem. His students were among those who exhibited their work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 81st Street exhibition space. Later he taught as a museum educator at the Metropolitan, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of American Folk Art. In the 1980s Wilson became head of the Longwood Arts Center, an exhibition space located in the Bronx that was housed in a former public schools. There he developed a landmark project that would become paradigmatic for most of his later work. *Rooms With a View: The Struggle Between Cultural Content and the Context for Art* (1987-88) (Figs. 5.2, 5.3, 5.4) presented works by thirty contemporary artists in rooms designed in three different modes.²⁰ One looked like a contemporary gallery with the artwork antiseptically installed on white walls. The second was designed to resemble a small ethnographic museum and contained work by artists who were using Third World cultural idioms that made the

work blend seamlessly into the “anthropological” space. (This room had wall labels that mimicked the anonymous presentation of objects in ethnographic collections: “Found, Williamsburg section, Brooklyn, late 20th century.”) The third room looked like a Victorian salon. Wilson’s method of using exhibition design as a critical artistic medium in a hybrid practice that straddles art making and curatorial work reached a highpoint in *Mining the Museum* (1992) (Figs. 5.5 and 5.6), a reinstallation of the collection of the Maryland Historical Society that reinscribes African Americans into the state’s history, an account from which they had been erased. In the continuing redefinition of problems and issues to be addressed in the project of democratizing museums, curatorial methodology became both a medium and a subject for artists.

Looking back at *Harlem On My Mind*, the use of photography was another critical issue with an important legacy. Today it is commonly recognized that photographs are constructed representations, not raw data or direct transcriptions of reality. In *Harlem On My Mind* photographs were used as documents. The pictures were drained of all artistic status; they were blown up, made smaller, cropped, repeated. They were not viewed as objects in their own right, but rather as vehicles for the presentation of information with the implicit erasure of any subjective or ideological point of view. This strategy was viewed by critics as appropriate for a sociological display in which the photographed subject is an object of study, but it was not considered appropriate for an art exhibition in which subjectivity is located in the act of creation. Now, of course, this innocent view of photography has been widely debunked. In the 1980s and ‘90s the use of photography as a representational, rather than purely

presentational medium, would become a key issue in the work of many artists, particularly black artists. These artists would reverse the process of objectification by bringing in their own subjectivity through the process of interpretation. One significant example is Pat Ward Williams' *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* (1986) which reproduces a photograph of the scorched body of black man who had been padlocked to a tree, burned, and left to die (Fig. 5.7). The source image was originally published in a 1937 issue of *Life* magazine. Williams frames the picture within a text that reads:

...Can you be BLACK and look at this? Could Hitler show photos of the Holocaust to keep the Jews in line? WHO took this picture? Couldn't he just as easily let the man go? Did he take his camera home and then come back with a blowtorch? BURN off an ear...How can this photograph exist? WHO took this picture? Life answers Page 141—no credit. Oh god, somebody do something.

Interestingly, this image was originally included in *The Family of Man* exhibition held at MoMA in 1955 (Fig. 5.8), but was removed during the first two weeks of the show. The museum stated that it took the picture down because too many people clustered in front of it and interrupted the smooth flow of visitors through the exhibition.²¹ Another important example of the recontextualization of the photograph is Carrie Mae Weems's major work entitled *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995), a series of thirty-two photo and text panels based on historical photographs of African Americans starting with the invention of photography in the mid-19th century and continuing through the present (Fig. 5.9). Each panel critiques the use of photography in the construction of African American identity beginning with the recording of African Americans as objects of anthropological study and continuing through Robert Mapplethorpe's objectification of a black man's genitalia

in *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980). Glenn Ligon's large photo-installation entitled *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1993) (Fig. 5.10) also takes on the issue of photographic representation. This work appropriates and recontextualizes Robert Mapplethorpe's series of photographs of black men, mostly nude, and combines them with commentaries by myriad viewers including well-known cultural critics, such as bell hooks, and anonymous lay viewers. Ligon's strategy of combining photos and texts recodes the meanings of these photographic images. By teasing out ambiguities and contradictions—for instance, some of his commentators were offended by the objectification of the black male body while others enjoyed and found the photographs erotic—the work goes beyond the act of reinterpretation to take on the subject of *making meaning* itself.

Taking a “reconstructionist” rather than deconstructionist approach, curator and art historian Deborah Willis edited a modest but compelling book entitled *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*²² that looks at how identity and representation are constructed in photographs of African Americans through a series of commissioned texts. Willis invited eighteen artists, writers, poets, critics, and historians, all of whom are black, to select an image and discuss its impact and larger questions of “how photography and African American identity have shaped each other.”²³ The eighteen essays have no methodological consistency. Some are personal, some analytical. Yet the project as a whole grows out of a semiological approach to photography, the theory that photographs can be read as texts. The path from the 1960s to the 1990s is neither straight nor continuous. But in the work

described above, we see African American artists intervening in the process of photographic representation and problematizing the dichotomies of art and ethnography, aesthetics and social work, and self-representation and representation by others. Identity is presented as a fluid concept that is always under construction.

For a short time in the late 1980s and early '90s the professional museum community in the United States took a great interest in work by artists of color. During this period, a body of literature and a large number of exhibitions were produced that tried to expand the Eurocentric canon and critique its underpinnings. "Multiculturalism," as it came to be called, focused the art community on ways in which museums are political arenas in which definitions of identity and culture are asserted and contested. Museum professionals debated issues regarding collecting policy, programming, governance, audience cultivation, and the ideological implications of display strategies. In 1990 the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), the prestigious membership organization for art museum directors, devoted its 1990 conference to the theme "Different Voices" and published the proceedings a year later.²⁴ The Smithsonian Institution and the American Association of Museums held a series of symposia that lead to the publication of two thick anthologies presenting case studies of exhibitions and projects that counter Eurocentric museum traditions and explore ways in which museums participate in the legitimization of the existing social order.²⁵ The same year, the New Museum of Contemporary Art published an anthology that has become an indispensable handbook on cultural difference for critics and curators, *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. The

book was based on a series of panel discussions on “The Ideology of the Margin” held in May and June of 1988. The art establishment was opening its doors and the wave of concern touched every kind of arts organization, from the smallest alternative space to the largest bureaucratic museum. Even the National Portrait Gallery, a bastion of tradition, presented a comprehensive survey of the work of James VanDerZee in 2000 organized by Deborah Willis. VanDerZee had been “discovered” by the white art community when his work was presented in *Harlem On My Mind*.

The layers of representation dealt with critically in the 1980s and ‘90s were multiple and the strategies diverse. Several major culturally specific shows showcased work by artists of color in identity-based surveys, including *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors*, a traveling exhibition that originated at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in 1984 and was organized by John Beardsley and Jane Livingston; *Latin American Spirit, Art and Artists in the United States 1920-1970*, organized by Luis Cancel at the Bronx Museum of Art in 1988; and *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art* organized by Margo Machida at the Asia Society in 1994. These shows presented surveys of particular “racial” or “ethnic” groups that elided cultural differences within them. Other shows fostered cross-cultural connections and comparisons, such as the much disparaged 1993 Biennial of the Whitney Museum of American Art, pejoratively dubbed, “the Multicultural Biennial,” and the big, collaborative exhibition called *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, which was co-organized by and held simultaneously at three New York City museums, The New Museum of

Contemporary Art, the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem in the spring and summer of 1990. There were exhibitions that thematized identity and addressed race or “Otherness” as a subject, such as *New Histories* held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1996 and *Other Narratives* at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston in 1999. A deconstructionist approach to representations of “minority” groups would characterize many exhibition and projects of the 1980s and ‘90s, such as the exhibition *Facing History: The Image of the Black in American Art 1710-1940* organized by the late art historian Guy McElroy and held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1990 and *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier*, an exhibition that critiqued the representation of the Westward expansion in 18th- and 19th-century American art held at National Museum of American Art in 1991.²⁶

Throughout the late 1980s and ‘90s artists, curators, art historians and critics were both cautiously optimistic and profoundly skeptical about the possibility of having a real dialogue about racism in the art world in a space of cross-cultural collaboration.²⁷ Some progressive cultural practitioners saw these initiatives as being less concerned with promoting the interests of underrepresented or misrepresented groups than with promoting the public images of their sponsors and perpetuating “cultural apartheid” under a thin multicultural veneer. As Coco Fusco wrote in 1988:

A segregated division of labor [exists] in which white arts institutions provide structures of control, in which white intellectuals theorize about racism...or in which the white intelligentsia solicits token third world intellectuals to theorize about the question—that is, the problem—of the Other for the white intelligentsia.²⁸

British theorist Rasheed Araeen offered the view that “the obsession with cultural difference is now being institutionally legitimized through the construction of the ‘post-colonial other’ who is allowed to express itself only so long as it speaks of its own otherness.”²⁹

In 1991 the Dia Center for the Arts in concert with the Studio Museum in Harlem invited writer Michele Wallace to organize a monumental gathering of cultural intellectuals—black, white and other—to discuss the topic of black popular culture. The conference took place over a period of three days, and presented over thirty speakers to a large audience.³⁰ It was a watershed event that brought together some of the best thinkers in the United States and Great Britain on the topic of race and culture, including Stuart Hall, Cornel West, bell hooks, Valerie Smith, Marlon T. Riggs, Lisa Kennedy, Judith Wilson, Houston A. Baker, Jr., Hazel V. Carby, Greg Tate, Isaac Julien, Coco Fusco, Manthia Diawara, Manning Marable, Paul Gilroy and Angela Davis. It was driven by an understanding that public discussions of race and culture must be circumspect and self-reflexive in the way they negotiate the use of institutional spaces. Gina Dent’s introduction to the resulting book shows a high level of self-consciousness about the spectacle of public representations of blackness. She writes:

[R]ather than policing the borders of black culture, these critics attend to the high and the low, the progressive and the conservative, the general and the particular. In doing so, airing our dirty laundry so to speak, they challenge the resurrection of communal privacy that relies on extending the paradigm of the bourgeois family to that of “race.” And they go against the version of Afrocentrism that, in inscribing privacy at the level of the community,

attempts to hide the gender relations that benefit “our men” calling it the protection of “our women.”³¹

Dent’s comments suggest a wariness of the consequences of voicing the differences and conflicts within black cultural discourse to an audience that included people who were both a part of and outside the black cultural community. Dent also shows an awareness that the invitation to enter the mainstream institutional art world can be rescinded at any time. Thelma Golden hammered this point home in a roundtable discussion two years later in conjunction with the exhibition *The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism*: “The fact is that there have been waves. Everybody puts their big black shows on the books, they get their corporate funding, it goes all around the country, it’s a big extravaganza, and then it’s over.”³²

Golden knew what she was talking about. In 1993, the Whitney Museum of American Art had organized the Biennial exhibition that was later widely viewed as bringing an end to the multicultural moment. In his preface to the 1993 Whitney Biennial exhibition catalogue director David Ross wrote: “As a museum of American art, the idea of community is literally inscribed into our name. There is no single set of questions with more relevance at this moment, no set of concerns with more resonance of this moment than those raised by artists concerned with identity and community.”³³ The show included 84 artists, about half of whom are people of color. The proportion, however, “felt” much greater because it was so large in comparison to other museum exhibitions and because so many of the artists, including the white artists, were marked by another form of “difference,” they were women, or they were

gay or lesbian artists who dealt with issues of sexuality in their work. The response to the 1993 Biennial was vitriolic. The usually thoughtful critic Arthur Danto went on a tirade in his review in the generally progressive magazine, *The Nation*:

...[T]he order of work in the aggregate here is mawkish, frivolous, whining, foolish, feckless, awful and thin. Its messages rarely rise to, let alone above, a level set by the bumper sticker, the T-shirt, the issue button...[M]any of the exhibits are strident in advancing their messages, and in form are noisy, disheveled, disordered, menacing and arrogant.³⁴

As with *Harlem On My Mind*, liberals and conservatives shared their disdain for the show. Roger Kimball, writing in the conservative *National Review*, said:

None, not one, is a work of art except in the technical sense that it has appeared exhibited as such in a gallery or museum. There is nothing of beauty, craftsmanship or formal excellence here: no delicacy, no joy, no pleasure, no recognition that artistic accomplishment requires more than political rage.³⁵

Eleanor Heartney, who is usually sympathetic to politically engaged art, used a pretzel twist of logic. She employed the rationale typically used by cultural conservatives to dismiss works by artists of color by claiming that the Biennial's social content undermine its purportedly progressive agenda: "Much of the work here is numbingly didactic, easily summed up in a sentence or two. In a curious way this tendency to privilege social message over esthetic considerations parallels the attitudes of the religious right in its demand that art be morally uplifting."³⁶

According to Heartney, the art was too much "social work" not enough "aesthetics." Her assessment is strikingly similar to Hilton Kramer's view that *Harlem On My Mind* was "...not so much an exhibition as an amateur exercise in social evangelism."³⁷

As of this writing, multiculturalism has been jettisoned by conservatives and progressives alike. It has been replaced by “globalism” in the art world, which all too often means cultural tourism for wealthy collectors who can afford to fly from one international biennial to the next. The global extravaganza of summer 2002 was *Documenta 11* organized by the Nigerian-born writer and curator Okwui Enwezor, who is now based in the United States. The degree to which multiculturalism has fallen out of favor and the return to a museum discourse frighteningly retrograde is captured in Holland Cotter’s review of the Studio Museum’s recent group show of young African American artists’ work, *Freestyle*. The exhibition presented the work of twenty-eight young African American artists and was a debut not only for most of the artists in the show but also for the new leaders of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Lowery Stokes Sims, who had been appointed director the year before, and Thelma Golden, hired concurrently as Deputy Director for exhibitions and programs. *Freestyle* identified a new aesthetic among the artists it presented. In contrast to the Afrocentric “black aesthetic” of the 1970s and the “new black aesthetic” of the 1980s,³⁸ Golden posited that the artists of the current period can be best described as “post-black.” As Eungie Joo has pointed out, Golden used the term “post-black” with a streak of irony:

[T]he term was intended as a critique of the arrogance of young artists of color who were perhaps a little too comfortable with their graduate school training and the attention paid to their narcissistic youth or even neo-primitive exoticization. It is humorous, reflecting a kind of knowing; a cynical self-reflexivity that should be accompanied by a rolling of the eyes, a raising of the brows, and an audible smirk....[Golden] is not suggesting the end of blackness. Rather, she is modifying the nostalgic burden of the “nationalist/aesthetic dogma” of the 1970s Black Arts Movement. The term

“post-black” acknowledges the ineffectiveness of language to express the complex circumstances and ongoing challenges of cultural production.³⁹

Golden’s use of the term “post-black” needs to be read as a racial formation linked in content and linguistic form to post-Modernism, that is, a loss of belief in monolithic pronouncements and definitions, be they of history, identity, or culture. Just as the term “post-feminism” refers not to an era in which all gender inequities have been erased or a return to patriarchal status quo, but an era in which feminism has established itself in the public consciousness and the struggle for equality continues. The word “post-black” can be read as the latest contribution to the long list of terms used to describe people of African descent in the United States. Might not the term also suggest a current desire to move beyond the disempowerment associated with narrow definitions of “appropriate” racial behavior, a step outside the constraints of an old guard that demands a “community-based” curatorial practice and that cultural practitioners who are people of color represent “their people”?

Critics seemed to miss the irony and complexity in Golden’s use of the term and instead breathed a sigh of relief that the country’s leading black curator had finally let them off the hook. Peter Schjeldahl in his review of *Freestyle* in the *New Yorker* jubilantly cheered the end of multiculturalism:

The reign of hectoring installations and photo-and-text “critique” was nightmarish for art lovers. We got punished for our dewy avidity by stern stuff like that, for all its pugnacity, hardly laid a glove on the enemies of truth and justice...Political correctness and theory-think have receded from the artworld to their normal streambeds in the universities, where academics seem to be recovering their traditional indifference to contemporary art, one way or another.⁴⁰

In his *New York Times* review, “Beyond Multiculturalism, Freedom?” Cotter applauded what he perceives as the evolution of a new “post-ethnic” approach to art. Cotter first presents a litany of problems produced by multiculturalism: the ghettoization that resulted from identity-based exhibitions; the perception that careers were built on “ethno-racial identity” rather than artistic accomplishment; the construction of “marketable” identities based on collapsing cultural and ethnic groups, such as artists of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent, all under the category “Asian American”; and the creation of the new genre, “victim art.” Cotter goes on to say that now that the multicultural moment has passed, we have a new opportunity for freedom. “Where will this freedom come from?” he asks. “[W]hatever form it takes,” Cotter says, “[it] will ultimately come not from curators or critics, or from the classroom or the marketplace, but from the studio, that free zone where everything starts, where all options are, or should be, wide open and optimism the rule.”⁴¹ If only it were that easy.

These issues will not be resolved merely in the artist’s studio because they are issues that affect not only the production of art, but also the nexus of relationships governing its distribution, display, interpretation and reception. *Harlem On My Mind* was a galvanizing event because it embodied so many of the daunting cultural conflicts that still face the institutional art world. The nature, magnitude and complexity of the issues embodied in *Harlem On My Mind* turned the show into a compelling case study of the clashes that occur when museums are out of synch with the needs of their

time. The reason *Harlem On My Mind* continues to be a subject of fascination and dismay is because it reminds us that the issues of identity and representation, culture and social change, and the role of arts institutions in society are still being contested. Perhaps *Harlem On My Mind* was not an anomaly in the history of museums, but a symbol of their contemporary condition.

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1. This atmosphere is parodied in Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic & Mau Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1970).
 2. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited and with an introduction by Stuart Hall (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications in association with the Open University, 1998), 6.
 3. These remarks were made at the inaugural conference of the Association for Museum History, New York University, NY, February, 19, 2003. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is a University Professor and Professor of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University.
 4. Patricia Mainardi, conversation with the author, New York, NY, January 31, 2003.
 5. Lowery Stokes Sims, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, February 27, 2001.
 6. Sims, interview.
 7. The symposium was held on October 28, 1995 and was entitled "Race and Racism in the Museum World: Harlem On My Mind Revisited." The morning panel discussion, "Harlem On My Mind and After," featured Allon Schoener, Edmund Barry Gaither, and Fath Davis Ruffins, an historian at the National Museum of American History. The afternoon discussion featured John Kuo Wei Tchen, Director of the Asian-American Center at Queens College; Susanna Torruella Leval, Director of El Museo del Barrio; W. Richard West, Director, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution; Tom Freudenheim, Assistant Secretary for Museums Programs at the Smithsonian Institution; Cheryl McClenney Brooker, Vice President for External Affairs at Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Flora E. S. Kaplan, Professor and Director of the Museums Studies Program at New York University. A videotape is available for viewing at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division.
 8. This remark by Edmund Barry Gaither was made during the discussion period.
 9. The budget of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2001 was approximately \$30 million. That of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was approximately \$100 million. By contrast, the budget of the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists was roughly half a million.
 10. This generational divide was also seen in the controversy surrounding the work of artists Kara Walker when she received a fellowship award from the MacArthur Foundation, a so called "genius" award. Artist Betye Saar was disturbed by the recognition conferred on Walker for work that Saar viewed as "revolting and negative

and a form of betrayal to the slaves, particularly women and children,” and that was “basically for the amusement and the investments of the white art establishment....” (This quotation is from an interview with Saar featured in “I’ll Make Me a World,” Part 6, produced by Blackside Films and PBS, 1999.) Saar mounted a letter-writing campaign designed to pressure the MacArthur Foundation to rescind the grant. Saar’s effort did not result in the removal of the grant, but did garner tremendous attention in the art world and threw the specter of controversy over Walker’s work.

11. Allon Schoener, Introduction to *Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*, edited and with a new introduction by Allon Schoener (New York: The New Press, 1995), n.p. Also see Allon Schoener, “Art Without Pedestals,” *Zodiac* 7 (1960): 22-29.
12. See John Neuhart, Marilyn Neuhart, and Ray Eames, *Eames Design: The Work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 416-425. The exhibition traveled throughout Europe and the United States and began its American tour at the Met in March 1976.
13. George W. Stocking, Jr., *Objects and Other: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 11.
14. Places like 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street not only provided new modes of presenting such art, but provided venues for current art that museums refused to show.
15. Martin Beck, “Alternative: Space” in *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 254-255. By the late 1970s, as mainstream Madison Avenue galleries moved to Soho and Tribeca, the immediate association of the raw space with artistic freedom would break down and the raw space would no longer be perceived as oppositional. But in the early ‘70s, this mode of presentation was a viable, exciting new option.
16. Sims, interview.
17. Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999). Expanded edition. First published 1976.
18. These artists included Dotty Attie, Susan Williams, Barbara Zucker, among others. For a discussion of A.I.R.’s genesis and photographs of the renovation of its space see Beck, 262-268.
19. Linda Goode-Bryant, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, February 7, 2003. In 1979 Just Above Midtown moved to Tribeca and in 1983 to Soho, where it remained until Goode-Bryant closed the gallery in 1984. JAM’s activities continued until 1988.

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20. The exhibition *ART/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, organized by Susan Vogel at the Center for African Art in New York in 1988, used a similar structure.
21. Mary Ann Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1998), 253.
22. *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, ed. Deborah Willis (New York: The New Press, 1994).
- 23 Ibid, xi.
24. See *Different Voices: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Framework for Change in the American Art Museum*, ed. Marcia Tucker (New York: Association of Art Museum Directors, 1992).
25. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) and *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Muller Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).
26. See *Facing History: The Image of the Black in American Art 1710-1940*, ed. Guy McElroy (San Francisco: Bedford Arts Publishers, 1990) and William Truettner, ed., *The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the American Frontier, 1820 - 1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
27. The initial backlash came from conservatives in bestselling books like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and *Cultural Literacy* (1988) by E.D. Hirsch. Bloom condemned the creation of ethnic studies departments in universities and dismissed challenges to the andro- and Eurocentric canon as "cultural relativism" that threatened the existence of a shared national culture which is, in his view, the basis for the American social contract. "Outsiders," as Bloom calls them, should stop resisting the notion that they must give up their "cultural individuality." Instead, they must "make themselves into that universal abstract being who participates in natural rights or else be doomed to existence on the fringe" (Bloom, 30-31). Hirsch, although slightly less polemical, used a similar argument, that an epistemological canon and conservatism are essential for the preservation of American society: "We make social and economic progress *only* by teaching myths and facts that are predominantly traditional" (Emphasis in the original). The book provides a list of things that every "literate" American should know. The list has been updated in subsequent editions, but remains Euro-American in orientation and, because of its format, provides no analysis of any of its entries.

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28. Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," *Afterimage* 16, no. 5 (December 1988): 6.
29. Rasheed Araeen, "New Internationalism, or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans" in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: KALA Press in association with the Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994): 10.
30. The three-day symposium was held December 8-10, 1991 and is documented in the book edited by Gina Dent, *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992).
31. Ibid, 7.
32. "Roundtable Discussion" in *Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism*, ed. Charles Gaines and Catherine Lord (Irvine, CA: The Regents of the University of California and The Fine Arts Gallery of the University of California, Irvine, 1993), 74.
33. *1993 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1993), 9.
34. Arthur Danto, "The 1993 Whitney Biennial," *The Nation* 256, no 15 (April 19, 1993): 533.
35. Roger Kimball, "Of Chocolate, Lard, and Politics," *National Review* 45, no. 8 (April 26, 1993): 54.
36. Eleanor Heartney, "Identity Politics at the Whitney," *Art in America* 81, no. 5 (May 1993): 42.
37. Hilton Kramer, "Politicalizing the Metropolitan Museum," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1969, D31.
38. See Greg Tate, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).
39. Eungie Joo, "Crisis to Collapse: The Racialized Subject in Contemporary American Art" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California at Berkeley, 2001), 42.
40. Peter Schjeldahl, "Breaking Away: A Flowering of Young African American Artists," *New Yorker* (June 11, 2001): 90.
41. Cotter, Holland. "Beyond Multiculturalism, Freedom?" *The New York Times*, July 29, 2001.

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Archives

Benny Andrews Archive at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY

John Henrik Clarke Archive, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
New York, NY

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

Jean Blackwell Hutson Archive, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
New York, NY

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Allon Schoener Archive, Grafton, VT

The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Interviews

Benny Andrews, artists and co-founder, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, July
14, 1999, Litchfield, CT

Linda Goode-Bryant, filmmaker and founding director of Just Above Midtown Gallery,
February 7, 2003, New York, NY

Thomas P. F. Hoving, former Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 29, 2001.

Werner Kramarsky, lawyer and former Special Assistant to Mayor John V. Lindsay and
chair of the Board of Estimate, November 15, 2000, New York, NY

Harry S. Parker III, museum director and former Vice-Director for Education, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, July 19, 1999, San Francisco, CA

Arthur Rosenblatt, architect and former Vice-Director for Architecture, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 27, 2000, New York, NY

Allon Schoener, curator, *Harlem On My Mind*, December 17-19, 1998, Grafton, VT

Mary Schmidt-Campbell, art historian and former Director, The Studio Museum in
Harlem, February 26, 2000, New York, NY

Lowery Stokes Sims, art historian and current Director, The Studio Museum in Harlem,
February 27, 2001, New York, NY



Fig. 2.1 *Harlem On My Mind* protestors in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Chisholm in Washington...Page 10

Manhattan **Tribune**
 Serving the World Since 1847

VOLUME ONE NUMBER 411 JANUARY 25, 1969

Score Met Exhibit

Artists Say: 'No Soul'

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's new exhibit, "Harlem on My Mind," is being criticized by artists who say it has no soul. The exhibit, which opened last week, features a collection of paintings and sculptures by African American artists. The critics argue that the exhibit is too white and does not represent the true spirit of Harlem. They say the artists are too concerned with technical skill and not enough with the social and political issues of the time. The exhibit is being held in the main hall of the museum, which is a landmark building in New York City. The critics are calling for a more inclusive and socially conscious exhibit that truly represents the diverse and vibrant culture of Harlem.



Fig. 2.2 Front page of *Manhattan Tribune*, January 25, 1969 with photographs of *Harlem On My Mind* protestors in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 2.3 *Harlem On My Mind* protestors in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

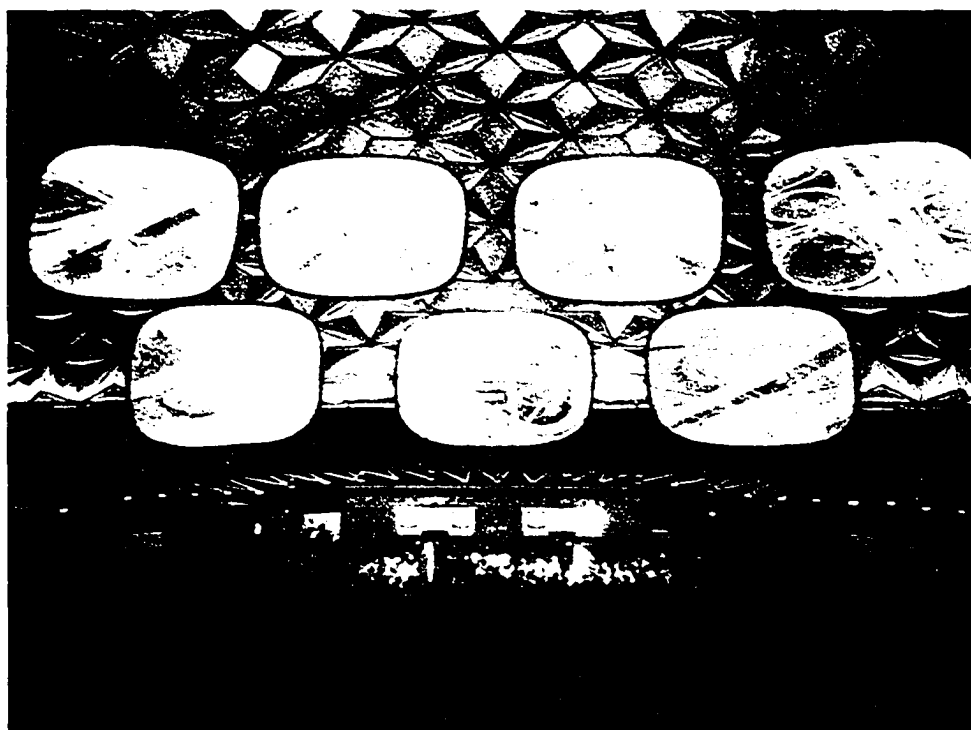


Fig. 3.1 Charles and Ray Eames, *Glimpses of the USA*, Moscow Pavilion, 1959.



Fig. 3.2 Entrance to *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition.



Fig. 3.3 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1900-1919, From White to Black Harlem"



Fig. 3.4 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1900-1919, From White to Black Harlem"

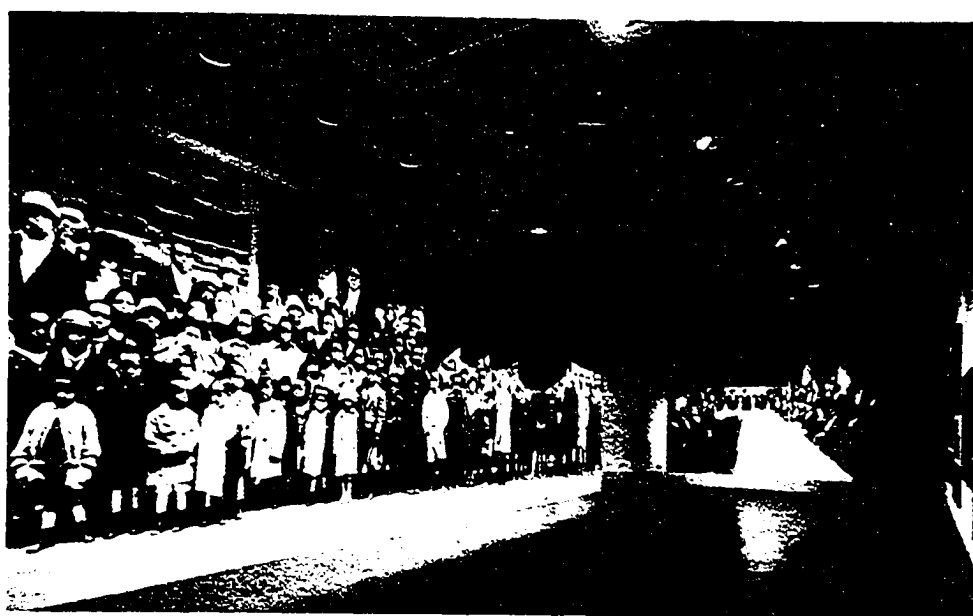


Fig. 3.5 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1920-1929, An Urban Black Culture"



Fig. 3.6 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1920-1929, An Urban Black Culture"



Fig. 3.7 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1930-1939, Depression and Hard Times"



Fig. 3.8 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition. "1940-1949, War, Hope, and Opportunity"

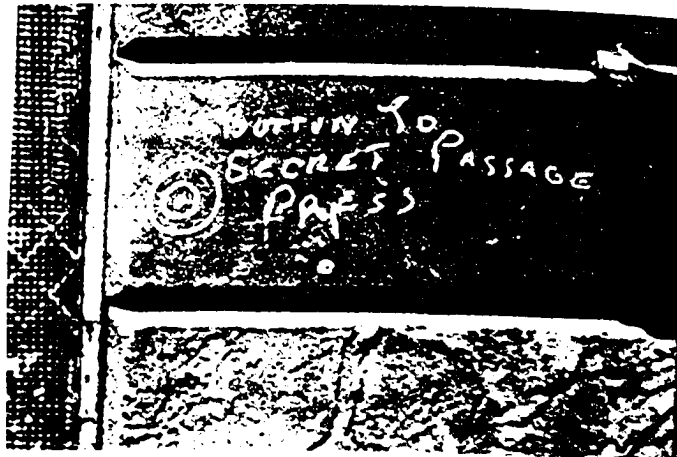


Fig. 3.9 Helen Levitt, *Graffiti*, c. 1945



Fig. 3.10 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "1960-1969, Militancy and Identity"



Fig. 3.11 *Harlem On My Mind* exhibition, "Hall of Heroes"



Top Row

Figs. 3.12-14 "Mother Brown" photographs by Don Hogan Charles, 1968

Bottom Row

Figs. 3.15-17 "Mother Brown" photographs by Bruce Davidson, 1962



Fig. 3.18 Roy DeCarava, *Woman and children at intersection*, 1952



Fig. 3.19 Roy DeCarava, *Couple talking, subway platform*, 1952



Fig. 3.20 Roy DeCarava, *Man sitting on stoop with baby*, 1952



Fig. 3.21 Opening night of Macbeth, Lafayette Theater, 1936
Anonymous photographer, Schomburg Collection

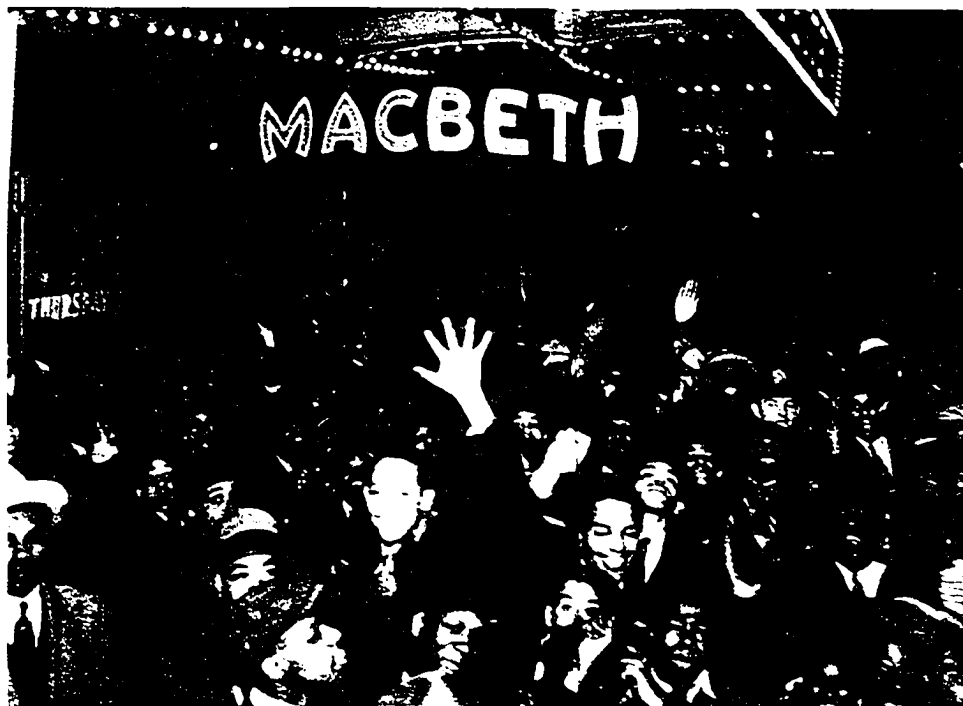


Fig. 3.22 Opening night of Macbeth, Lafayette Theater, 1936
Anonymous photographer, Federal Theater Archive



Fig. 3.23 Edward Burra. *Harlem*. 1934



Fig. 3.24 *Garbage cans on sidewalk*, c.1930, Schomburg Collection



Fig. 3.25 Photo-reproductions from *Harlem On My Mind* installed at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2001



Fig. 3.26 Photo-reproductions from *Harlem On My Mind* installed at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2001

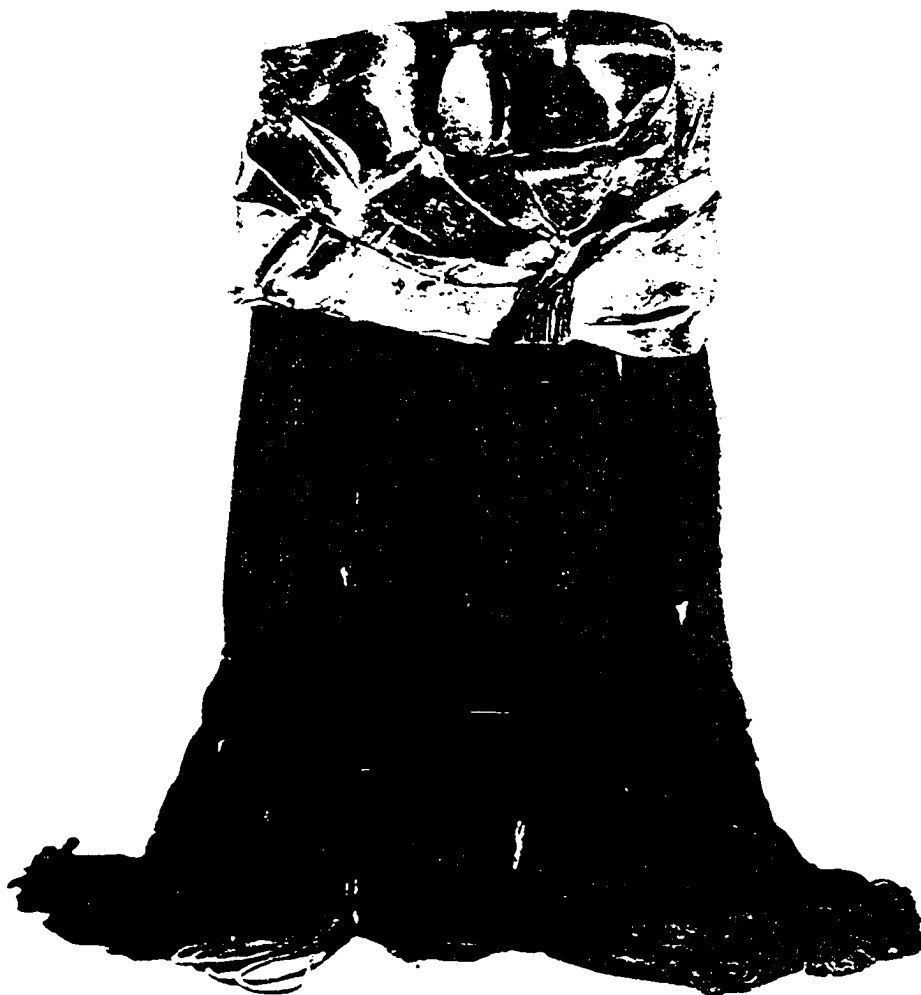


Fig. 4.1 Barbara Chase-Riboud. *Monument to Malcolm X (#II)*, 1969



Fig. 4.2 Murry DePillars. *Aunt Jemima*. 1968



Fig. 4.3 Jeff Donaldson, *Aunt Jemima (and the Pillsbury Dough Boy)* '64, 1963-64

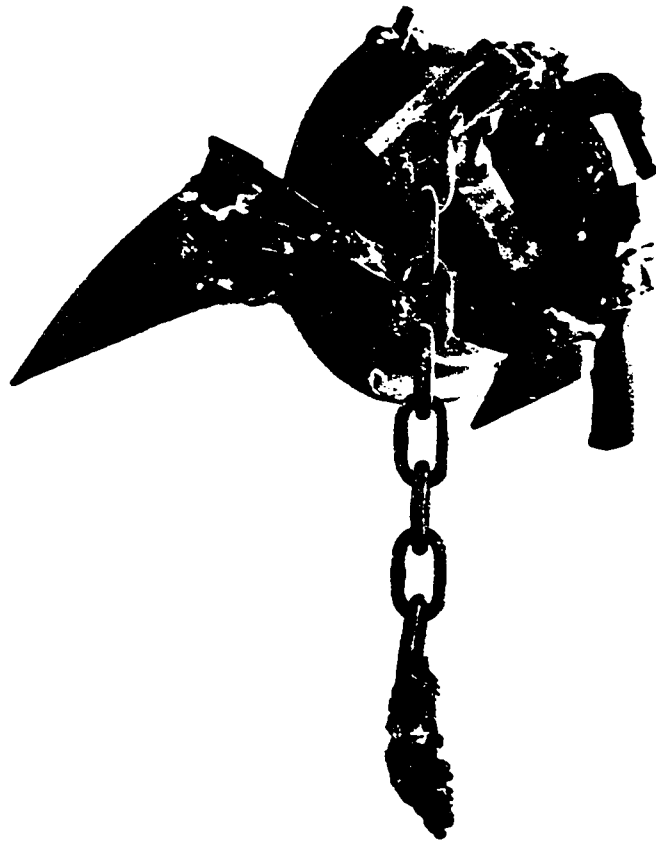


Fig. 4.4 Melvin Edwards, *Lynch Fragment Series*, 1963



Fig. 4.5 Joe Overstreet, *New Jemima*, 1964

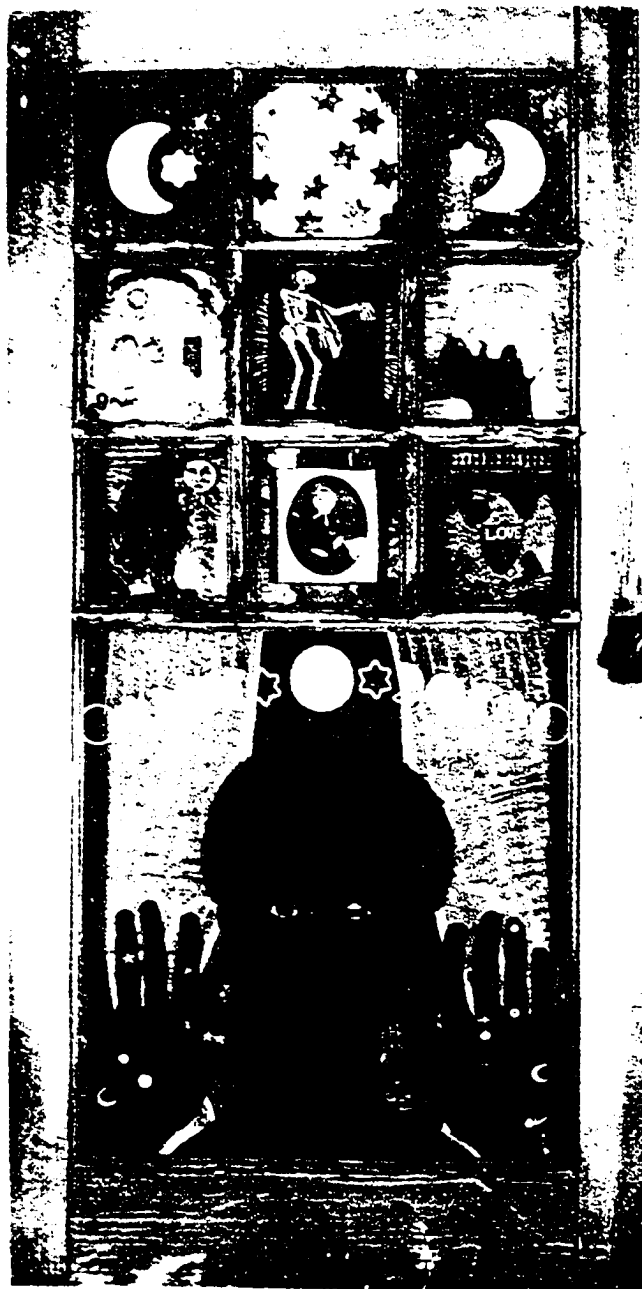


Fig. 4.6 Betye Saar, *Black Girl's Window*, 1969

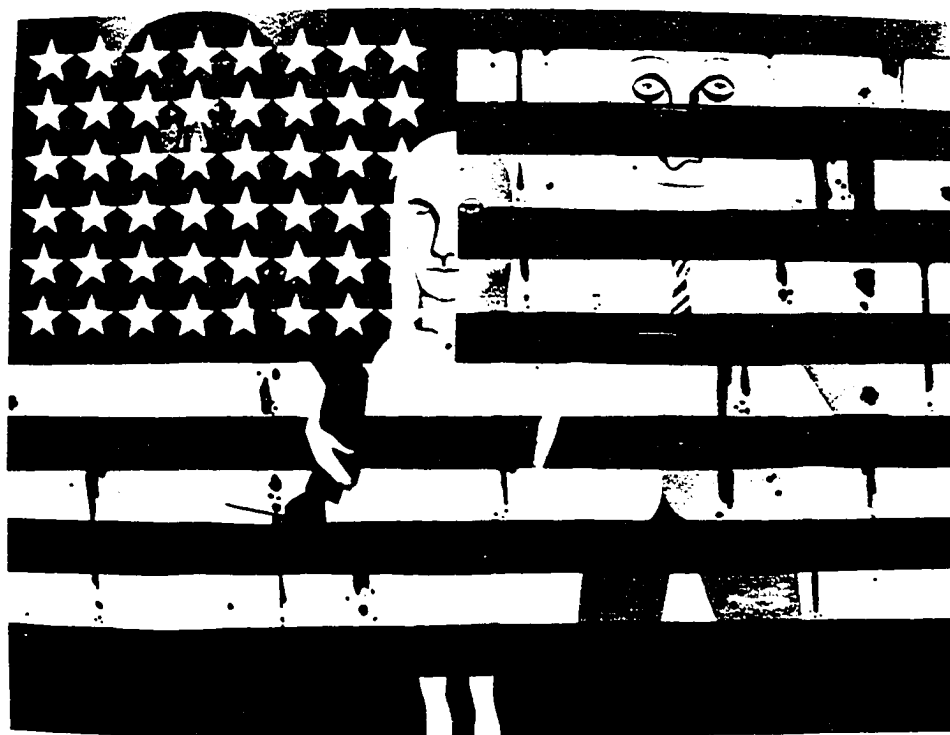


Fig. 4.7 Faith Ringgold, *The Flag is Bleeding*, 1967



Fig. 4.8 Charles White, *Wanted Poster Series #6*, 1969

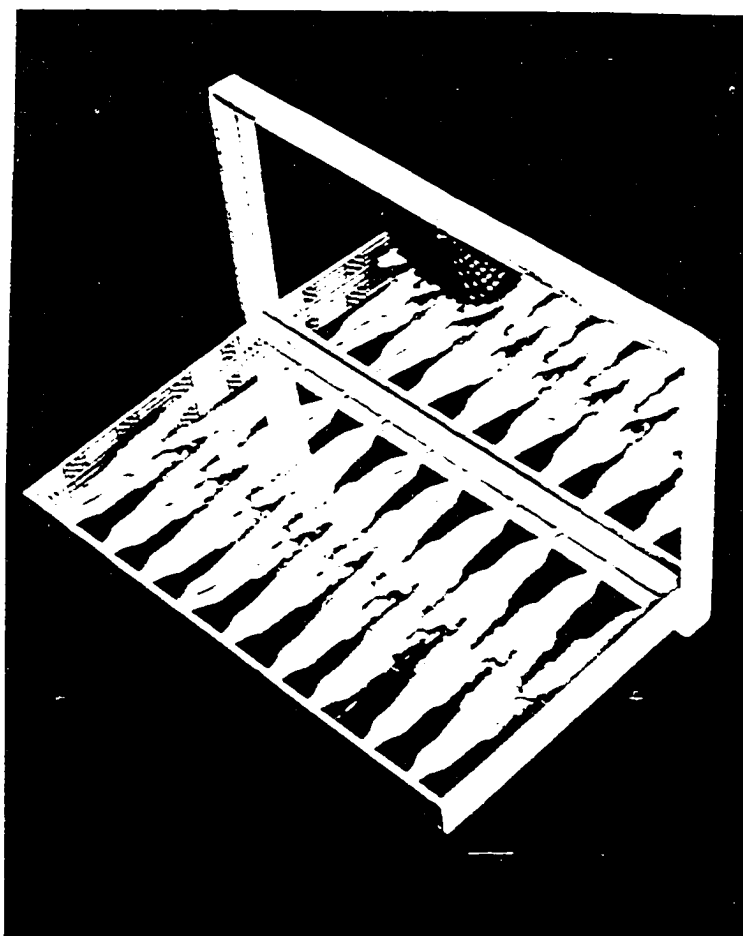


Fig. 4.9 Betye Saar, *Whitey's Way*, 1970



Fig. 4.10 Barkley Hendricks. *Brown Sugar Vine*. 1970



Fig. 4.11 Noah Purifoy, untitled, 1970

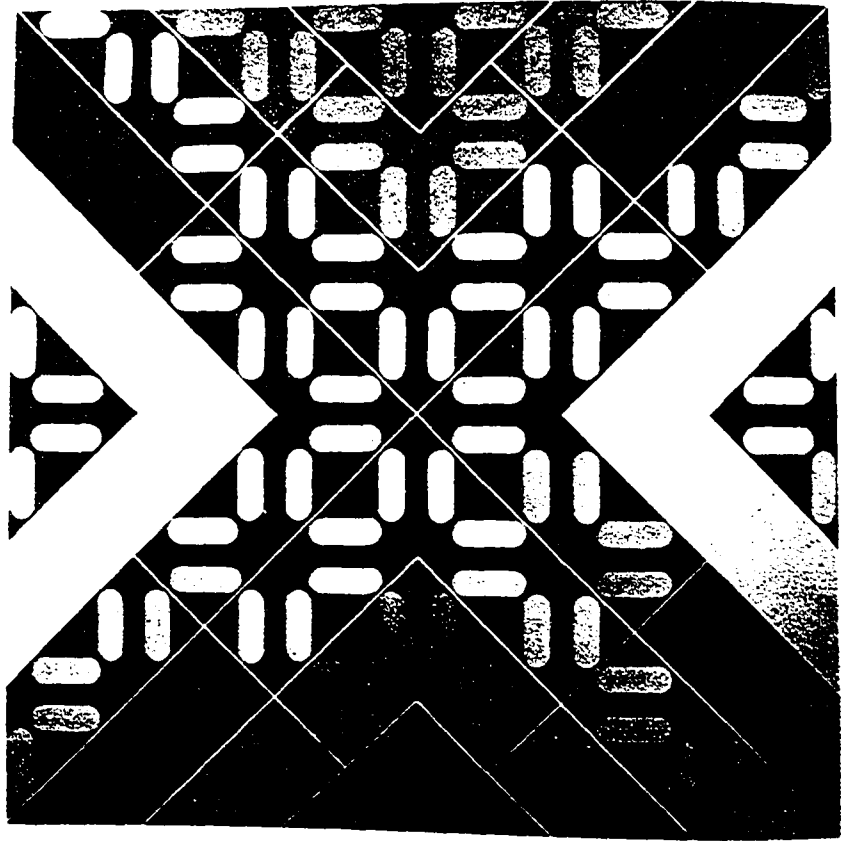


Fig. 4.12 John E. Chandler, *Garvey's Quest*, 1971

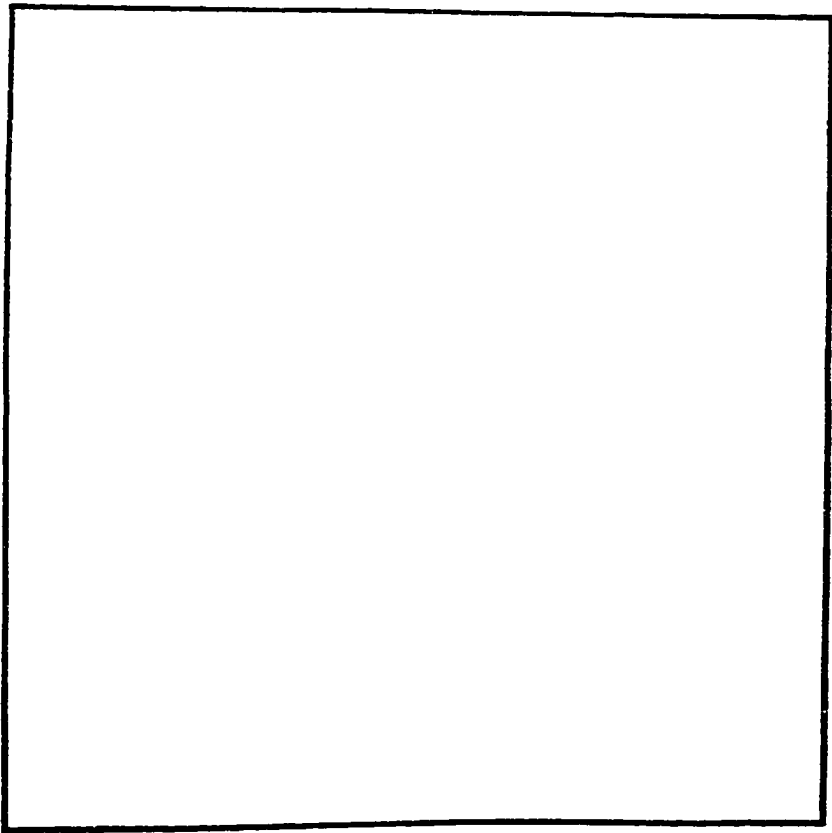


Fig. 4.13 Marvin Brown. untitled. 1970

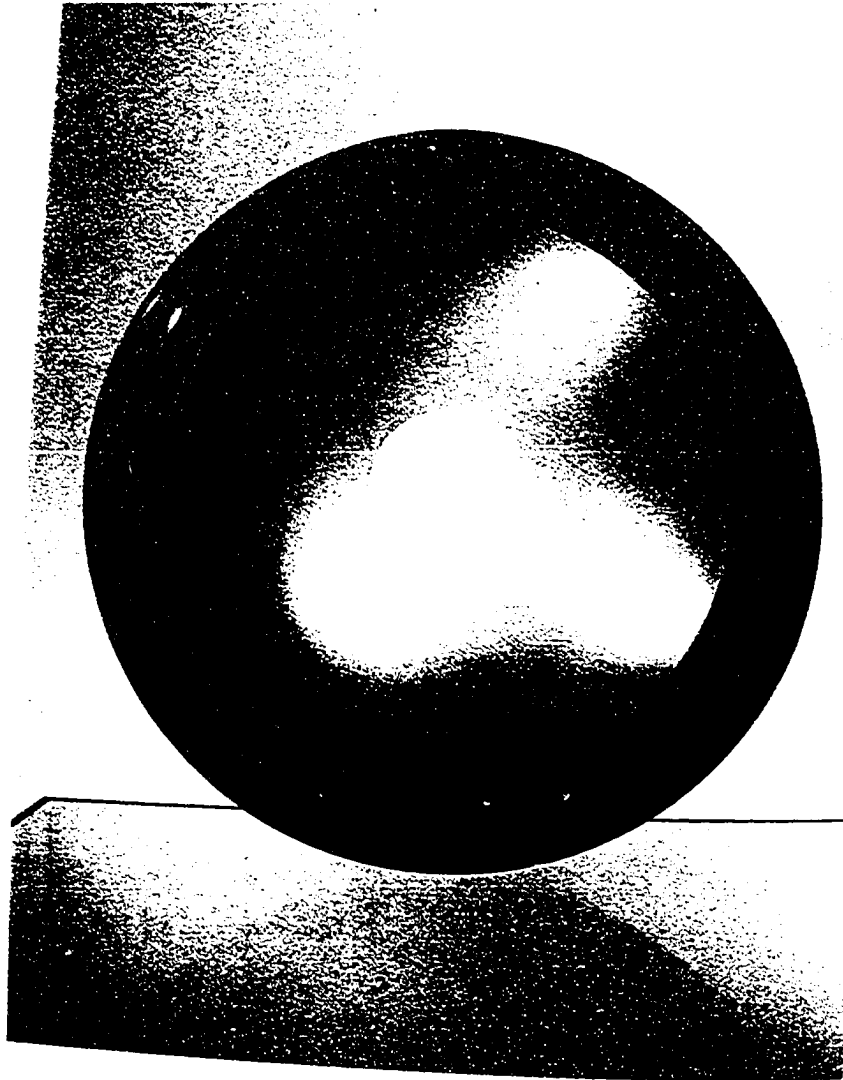


Fig. 4.14 Frederick John Eversley, untitled, 1971



Fig. 4.15 Romare Bearden. *Three Folk Musicians*. 1967

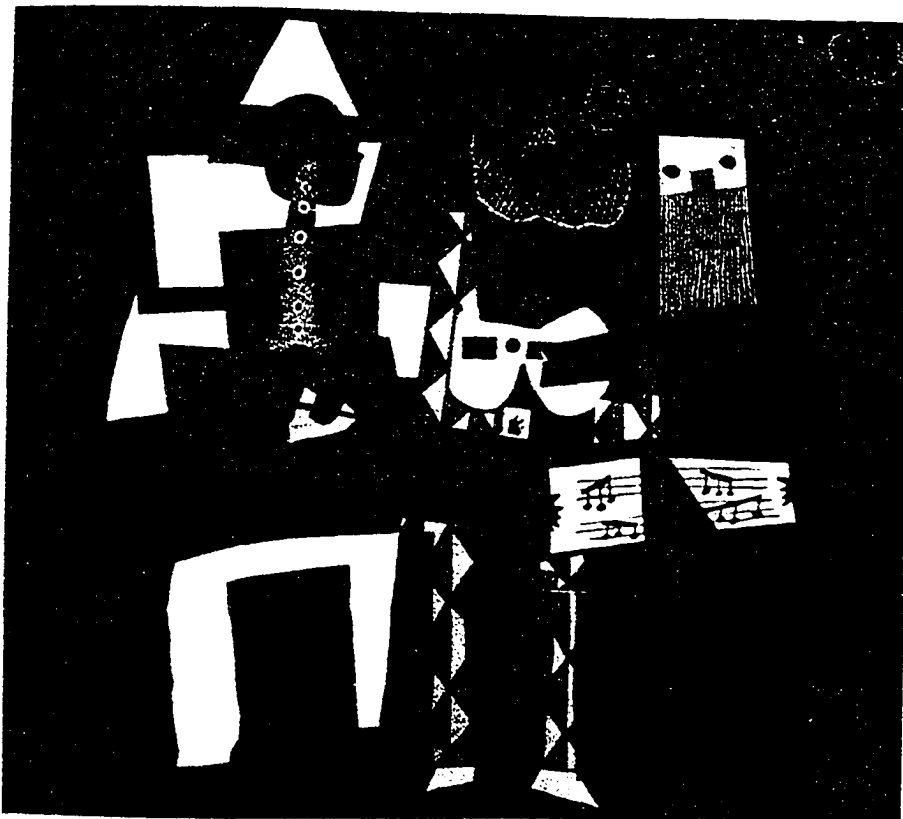



Fig. 4.16 Pablo Picasso. *Three Musicians*, 1921

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1984

FALL ART

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Fig. 4.17 Advertisement for *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art* held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, September 27, 1984- January 15, 1985



Fig. 5.1. Hans Haacke, *MetroMobiltan*, 1985



Fig. 5.2. Fred Wilson, *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Cultural Content and the Context for Art*, 1987-88, Longwood Art Gallery. Bronx Council on the Arts (installation detail)

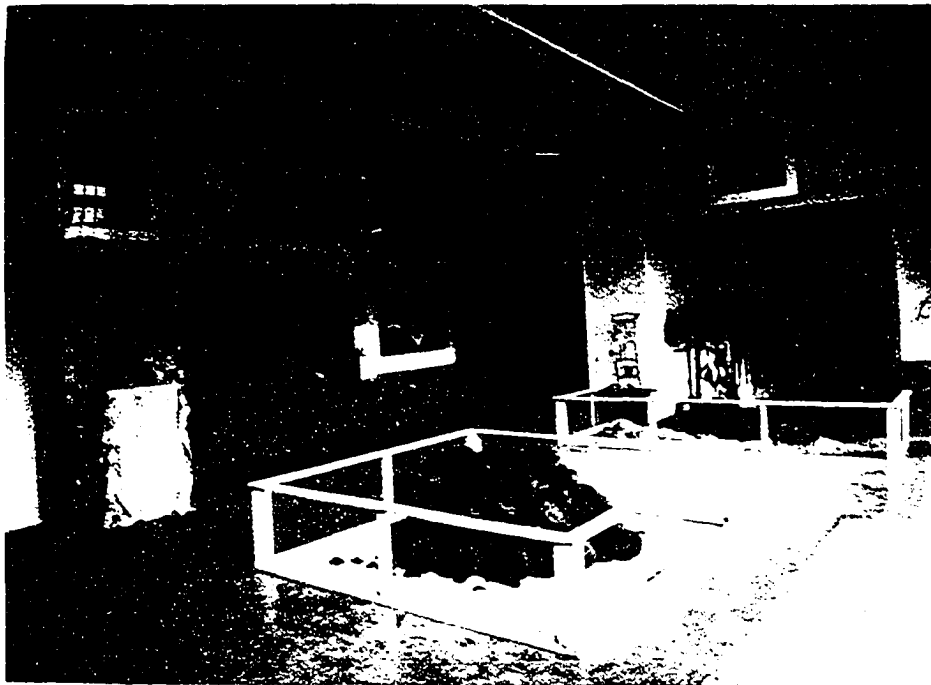


Fig. 5.3. Fred Wilson, *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Cultural Content and the Context for Art*, 1987-88, Longwood Art Gallery, Bronx Council on the Arts (installation detail)



Fig. 5.4. Fred Wilson. *Rooms with a View: The Struggle Between Cultural Content and the Context for Art*. 1987-88. Longwood Art Gallery, Bronx Council on the Arts (installation detail)

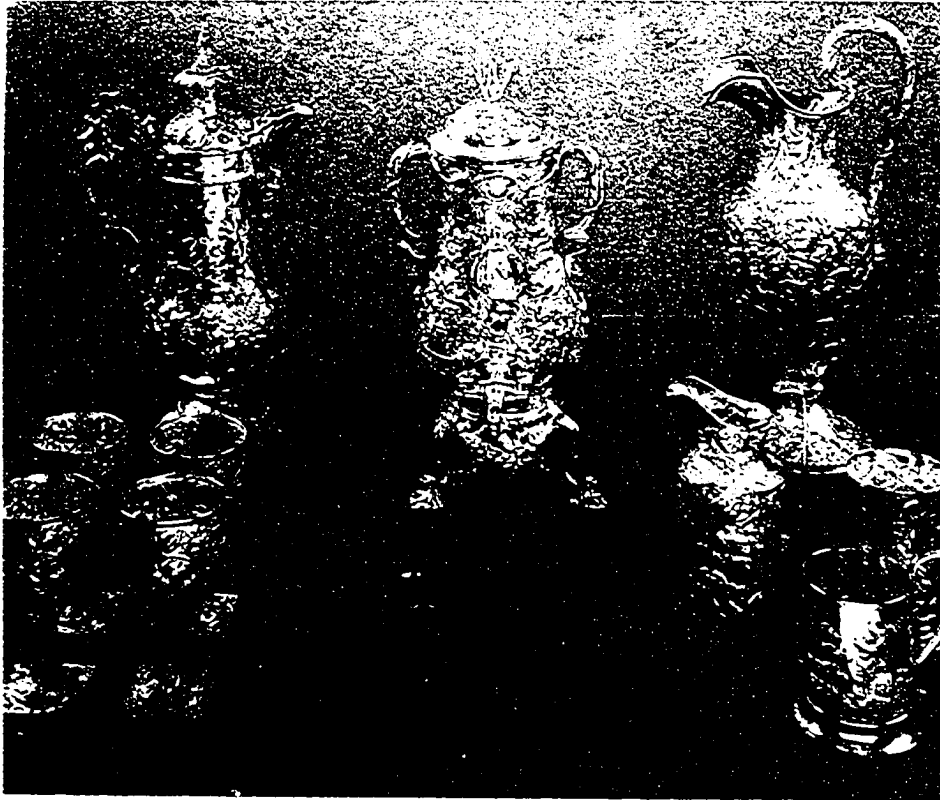


Fig. 5.5. Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum*, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.
April 4, 1992 -February 28, 1993 (installation detail)



Fig. 5.6. Fred Wilson. *Mining the Museum*. Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. April 4, 1992-February 28, 1993 (installation detail)

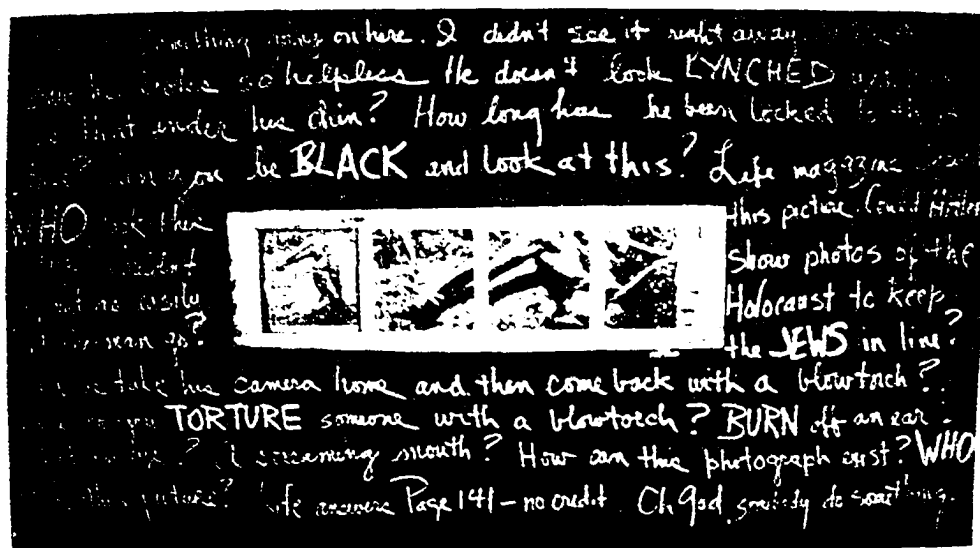


Fig. 5.7. Pat Ward Williams, *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock*, 1986

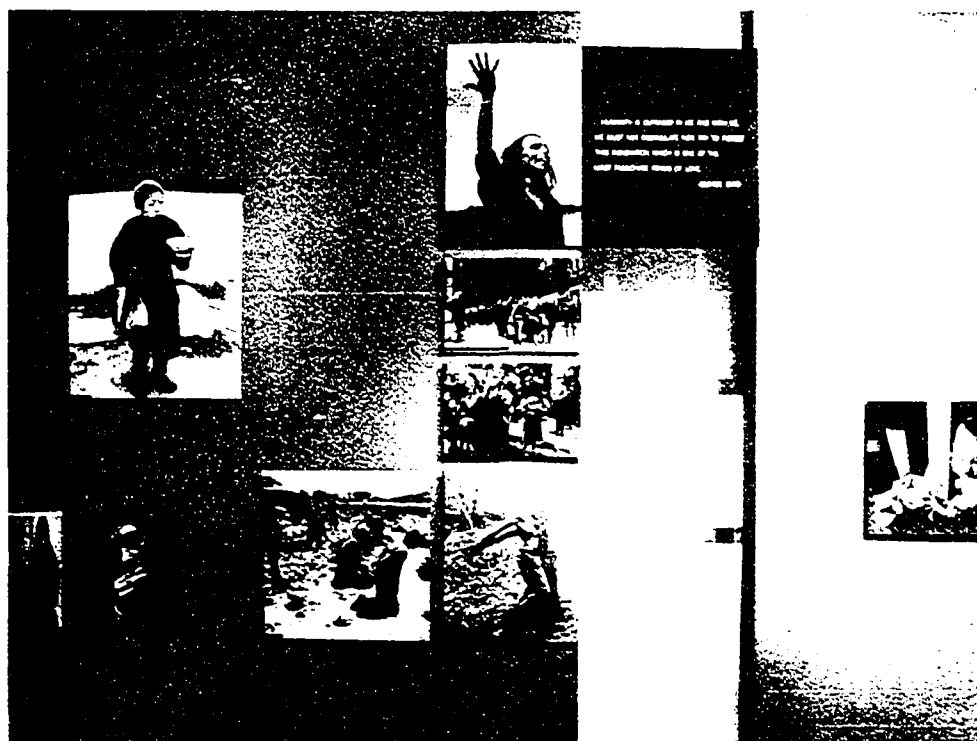


Fig. 5.8. *The Family of Man*, The Museum of Modern Art. New York. January 24-May 8, 1955. Note the *Life* magazine photograph in the lower center.

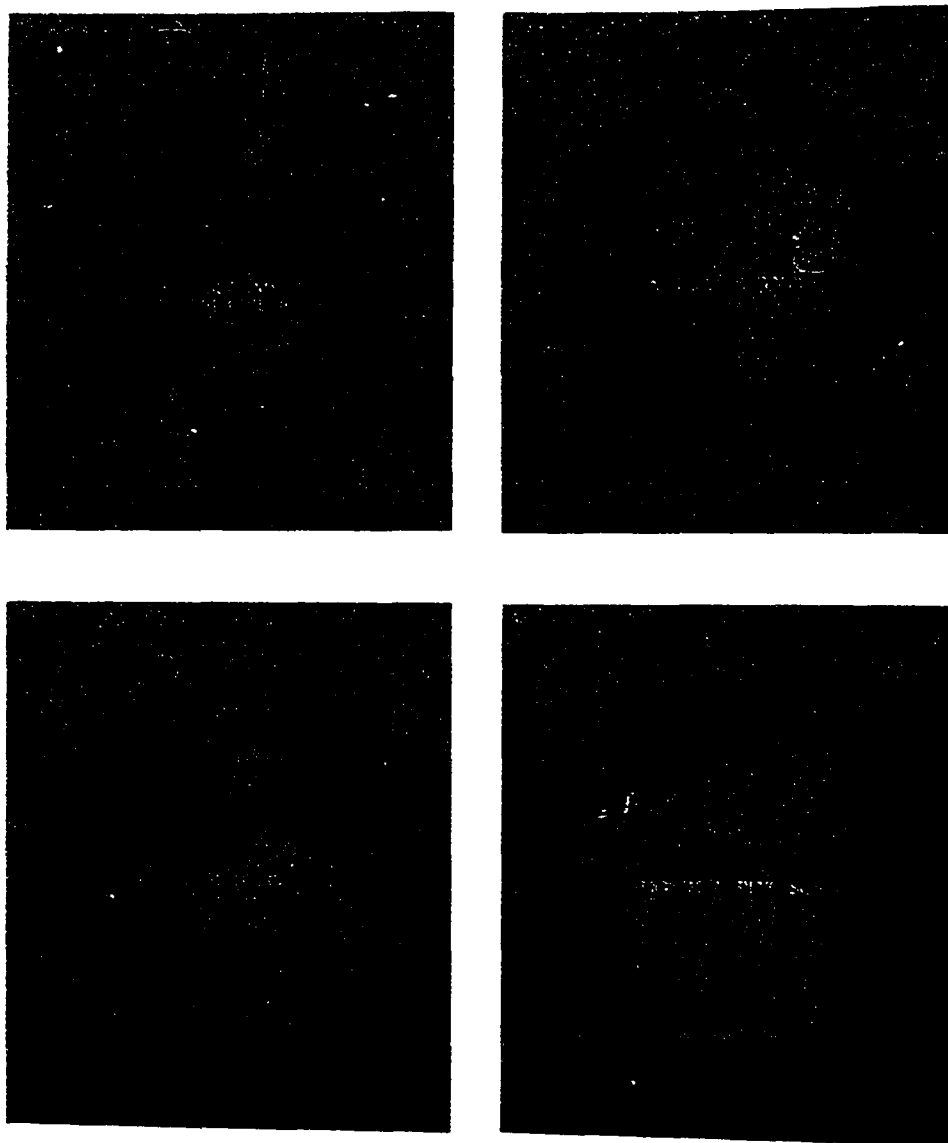


Fig. 5.9. Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. 1995-96
(detail)

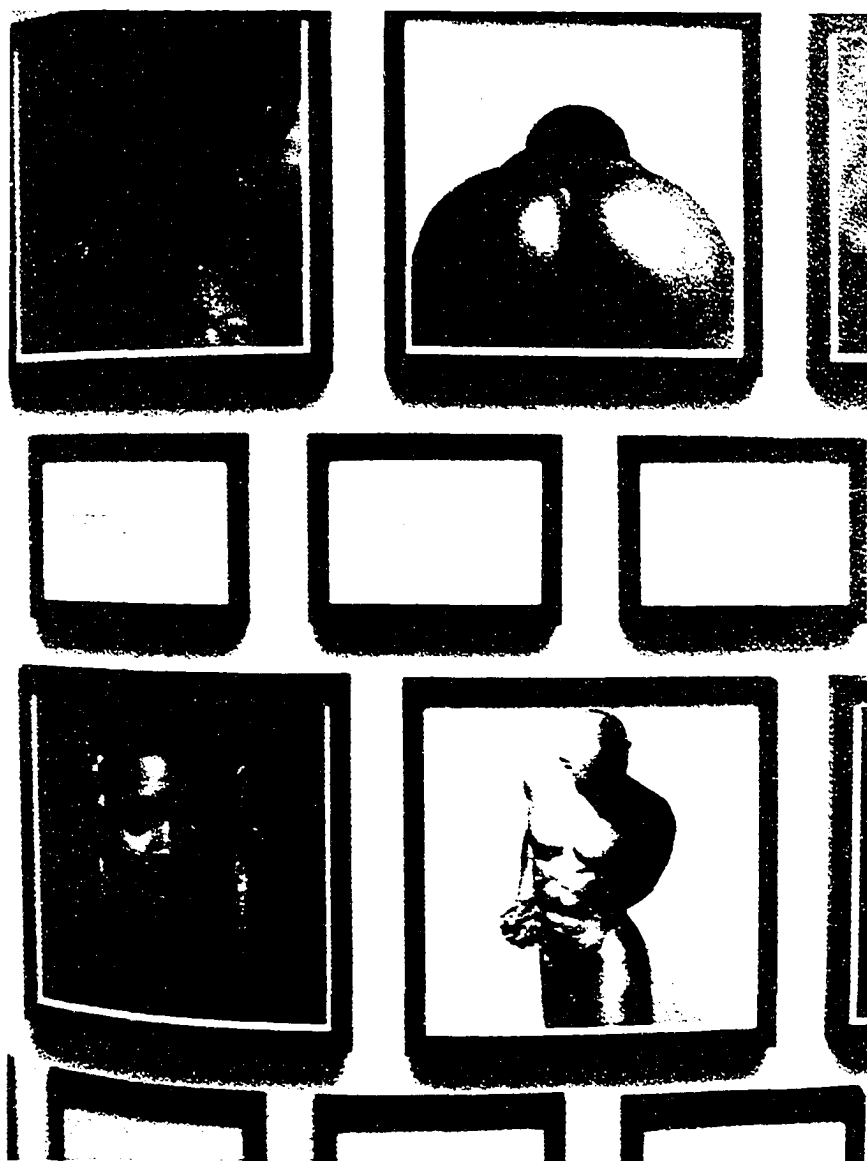


Fig. 5.10 Glenn Ligon. *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book*. 1991-93 (detail)