

**African American Creative Arts
Dance, Literature, Music, Theater, and Visual Art
From the Great Depression to Post-Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s**

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Abstract

The African American creative arts of dance, music, literature, theater and visual art continued to evolve during the country's Great Depression due to the Stock Market crash in 1929. Creative expression was based, in part, on the economic, political and social status of African Americans at the time. World War II had an indelible impact on African Americans when they saw that race greatly affected their treatment in the military while answering the patriotic call like white Americans. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had the greatest influence on African American creative expression as they fought for racial equality and civil rights. Artistic aesthetics was based on the ideologies and experiences stemming from that period of political and social unrest.

Keywords: African American, creative arts, Great Depression, WW II, Civil Rights Movement, 1960s

Introduction

African American creative arts went through several periods of transition since arriving on the American shores with enslaved Africans. After emancipation, African characteristics and elements began to change as the lifestyle of African Americans changed. The cultural, social, economic, and political vicissitudes caused the creative flow and productivity to change as well. The artistic community drew upon their experiences as dictated by various time periods, which also created their ideologies.

During the Harlem Renaissance, African Americans experienced an explosive period of artistic creativity, where the previous article left off. Productions were prolific in dance, music, literature, theater, and the visual arts. Blacks were very active in film as well, but this article will focus only on the aforementioned genres of the creative arts. The prevailing question continued to be if art by African Americans should focus on their culture and experiences, or if it should focus on European derived artistic styles. This dilemma was based on the goal of African Americans to change the negative, stereotypical images that plagued the view of them.

2. The Great Depression, World War II, and Post War Period

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 brought on the Great Depression causing a severe economic downturn for the nation; however, not as much for African Americans because they had always been in an economic, social, and political depression. Although their creative artistic expression increased, their economic, political, and social status had barely improved. Now the nation was experiencing some of the same that they were.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected in 1932, gave African Americans hope with his "New Deal." The "New Deal" relief and recovery programs would extend to them, and he constituted a "Black Cabinet" to advise him on policies regarding African Americans. They were facing greater poverty because of the country's strife.

2.1 Art

In 1928, the year before the stock market crash that created the Great Depression, and still within the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, the Harmon Foundation, a philanthropic organization that aided African American artists, sponsored a New York exhibition. The works produced for the exhibit were mostly European influenced which disappointed the organizers because one aim of the foundation was to encourage and support African American artist to be more representative of their own culture.

Because of the long standing dilemma afflicting African American creative expression, be true to self, or adopt European traditions, many visual artists expressed what they considered more acceptable. Romare Bearden, while still a student in college, also criticized the Harmon Foundation shows because he saw that the artists involved were duplicating art forms from Europe, rather than expressing personal experiences.

Subsequent exhibitions were more successful as African American visual artists embraced the notion of creating about themselves and from their own experiences. During the 1930s, art exhibitions sponsored by the Harmon Foundation traveled throughout the United States, and they were well attended. The artists included in these exhibitions were William Artis, Richmond Barthe, Beauford Delaney, Meta Warrick Fuller, Malvin Gary Johnson, William H. Johnson, Lois Mailou Jones, and Hale Woodruff.

The next major global event to impact the United States and African Americans was World War II. On December 7, 1941, the United States entered the war after an attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan. Before the United States entered the war officially, it was helping other world nations fight Hitler and the Germans in their onslaught of Jews in Europe. After the U. S. declared war, African Americans met the patriotic call to serve their country but found that the segregation practices of America spilled over to the military as thousands tried to enlist. It took pressure from the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) on President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to pledge that African Americans would be enlisted according to the percentage of the population because the all-white draft boards were overlooking blacks. After they were increasingly able to enlist, they were relegated to service duties, not combat, but they were important to the cause because without their services, those on the front lines would not have succeeded. When African Americans were allowed into other services, they were relegated to segregated units. African Americans supported their government during WWII, but they did not ignore the racial practices in America and were vocal about them. Artists during this period had the benefit and support of the Federal Arts Project (FAP) a federal subsidiary of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), renamed to Works Project Administration after July 1, 1939. According to Powell, “artists like Allan Rohan Crite, Ernest Crichlow, and Dox Thrash, embraced a visually conservative but politically radical figurative art in which the themes of poverty, racial discrimination, and a growing social consciousness took center stage” (Powell, 2005).

Artists who had not attended art school, and whose art may not have been viewed as sophisticated, were appreciated because of a newly generated interest in the art world. The FAP afforded several painters the opportunity to move from obscurity into national prominence. The most celebrated of the group was Jacob Lawrence, and others achieving success were Horace Pippin, Archibald Motley, Selma Burke, William H. Johnson, Charles Alston, Margaret Burroughs, Eldzier Cortor, and Charles Sebree.

Samella Lewis states that, “The accomplishments of the Harmon Foundation, The Harlem Renaissance, and the WPA continued to influence the course of African American Art. The artists who benefited from these organizations were free of sponsor-established limitations and thus were able to produce works of significant value. They did not seek the approval of their peers or other rewards for their creativity, but instead expressed themselves as individual participants conscious of their role in society.” Lewis further states that, “some historians and art critics have erroneously assumed that African American artists are unfamiliar with the formalized techniques of Western aesthetics. Until recently, this assumption contributed to the long-lived absence of serious historical investigation into the African American aesthetic. Perpetuating another stereotype, some cultural powers have believed that the relatively spontaneous art, music, and dance, are better suited to African American expression than are the more deliberate forms. This supposition ignores the many skillful designs in sculpture, weaving, pottery, and architecture that are part of the African tradition and a prevailing influence in the culture of African Americans” (2003, p. 115).

Mural art as a means of social creative expression came on the scene as African American artists were impressed and influenced by Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Mexican muralists conveyed messages that were easily understood and embraced by African Americans because they advocated for, and were champions for the politically, economically, and socially disadvantaged. Miquel Covarrubias became an associate of the African American muralist, Charles Alston and his contemporaries in Harlem.

Alston and Hale Woodruff were commissioned by the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company of Los Angeles, and they produced two murals that were unveiled in 1949. Other artists are equally admired for their knowledge in the field, among them are Charles White, Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and William Walker.

2.2 Dance

By the Great Depression, African American dance had certainly changed. Dance was moving out of vaudeville and on to the concert stage; although, white audiences still preferred the stereotypical comedy acts. African American dancers began to use dance as an artistic form of expression rather than comedic. They were moving into the modern dance realm and using dance as an art form to express themselves. Hemsley Winfield was the first to organize an African American concert dance company at twenty five years of age. The group was first named, the Negro Art Theater in Harlem, and later became the Negro Theater Dance Group. "The group was sometimes known as the New Negro Art Dancers and included Edna Guy, Ollie Burgoyne, and Randolph Sawyer. The first concert given by this group was in a small theater on top of Manhattan's Chanin Building on April 29, 1931," (Emery, 1988, p. 242). The play, *Run Lil Chillun*, (1933) choreographed by Doris Humphrey included Winfield's company. "Also in 1933, Winfield directed the Ballet for the Metropolitan Opera Company's, production, *Emperor Jones*. In his role of the Witch Doctor.....Winfield became the first Negro to dance at the Metropolitan. Winfield was still performing the role of the Witch Doctor.....at the time of his sudden death from pneumonia at the age of twenty-seven..... Mr. Winfield was the pioneer in Negro concert dancing. In that field he attained for his race an eminence comparable to that of Paul Robeson in the musical field. He achieved amazing results in such a short time," (Emery, 1988, p. 243).

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, African American dancers were performing jazz, tap and soft shoe routines on stage. These dance forms were considered to be more natural for blacks because they performed them well, and audiences loved and appreciated them. Nonetheless, there were black dancers who aspired to the new dance of the concert stage. Edna Guy, who assisted Hemsley Winfield with the first performance of the Negro Art Dancers, studied modern dance with Ruth St. Denis of the Denishawn School, and she was influenced by her. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn were white pioneers of modern dance as a concert form.

Concert dance, which could be classified as then the new modern dance, became very popular throughout the United States and the world. New York City, in particular, was the training ground and capital for it. Modern dance became accepted to the point that it moved into the college and university curricula, black colleges as well. With that, a student dance group, known as the Creative Dance Group, was formed at the all black college, Hampton Institute, in Virginia, under the leadership of Charles H. Williams and Charlotte Moton Kennedy (Emery, 1988). The dance group's wide variety of programs was based on their African heritage as well as African American materials which incorporated the Negro Spirituals in dance form. The dancers in the Hampton dance group were not studying dance as a profession but were studying to become teachers in the segregated Negro schools throughout the country, who would use their knowledge and experience to create future dance groups and programs. African American concert dance companies were also formed at Spellman College, Fisk University, Tuskegee Institute, and Howard University, all segregated black colleges and universities of the South.

The Creative Dance Group of Hampton Institute made its first appearance in New York City in 1937. Another black concert dance group, The American Negro Ballet, founded by Eugene Von Grona, debuted at the same time. The ballet group did not receive favorable reviews, as could be expected, because ballet was a European dance form. It was inconceivable that African Americans could perform ballet, at least in the view of whites. While the performers and performances may not have been viewed as equal to a white ballet company, their efforts were appreciated by many, and it was considered a start in demonstrating that blacks could perform a genre other than rhythmic styles.

By World War II, concert dance had become the preferred style of performance among many African American dancers and choreographers. They were making a conscious effort to show that African Americans could create and perform in the dance genre known as modern dance. It had become the prominent expressive dance style for white dancers in America as they moved away from traditional ballet and was for black dancers as well.

In the 1940s, two African American pioneers who rose to success in concert dance were Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus. Katherine Dunham was born in Chicago and first made a name for herself there, in 1933, as the star performer in Ruth Page's *La Guiblesses*. In recognition of Page's help, when Dunham became director of the Negro Unit of the Chicago branch of the Federal Theater Project, she made Ruth Page's famous *Frankie and Johnny* one of its first productions. Like most dancers of her day, Dunham went on to New York where she formed her own company in 1938.

In 1945, Katherine Dunham opened her own school “offering an extensive curriculum in the humanities that combined dance, drama, language, philosophy and anthropology components; the school anticipated by decades the interdisciplinary, historically-grounded discipline of cultural studies that emerged in institutions such as the Birmingham School in the 1970s” (Johnson, 2005, p.11).

Dunham received a fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation to study dance in the West Indies. She traveled to Martinique, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Haiti where she spent the majority of time combining anthropology and dance in her studies. Her studies of the dance and cultures of blacks, in Haiti particularly, was the influence for the choreographic material of many productions for her company.

Pearl Primus was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad and came to New York with her family at the age of two. She studied biology at Hunter College in New York City and later joined the New Dance Group, with whom she made her dance debut in 1943. The following year she gave a solo recital, which led to several Broadway engagements. Primus formed her own company in 1944. Primus’ first major choreographic work, *African Ceremonial* (1944), attested to her early interest in her black heritage. She traveled to Africa in 1948, the first of many such research trips (which eventually led to her Ph.D. from NYU in African and Caribbean studies). Her dances reflected these travels, notably *The Wedding* (1961) for Alvin Ailey's company. Though most of her other dances are based on primitive West Indian forms, she choreographed several pieces about American life, including *Strange Fruit* (1945), a reference to the practice of lynching; *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1944), based on a poem by Langston Hughes; and *Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore* (1979), about the racially motivated bombing of churches in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1960s (Emery, 1988). American dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and teacher whose performance work drew on the African American experience and on her research in Africa and the Caribbean, along with Katherine Dunham paved the way for many to follow.

2.3 Literature

In the years following the Stock Market Crash, African American writers were caught between two literary extremes. One, writing for the white reader who expected to see the same stereotypes: contented slaves, brash, rough Negroes, and primitive characters; and two, African American readers expecting to see their stereotypical characters put to rest and more positive images brought forward. Moreover, African American writers wanted their work judged by the same literary standard and criticism as white Americans. Blacks did not want their literature to be considered as less accomplished, which was the belief.

Many African American writers began to represent life more realistically, rather than idealistically. Their aim was to promote social reform. ArnaBontemp was one of the first to be successful with his fictional account, *A Summer Tragedy*. Joining him was Richard Wright with *The Man Who Was Almost a Man*, a story also based in realism. However, Wright’s *Native Son* was not only a realistic account of Bigger Thomas’ anger, pain and suffering, it was also considered as “naturalism.”

African American poetry underwent the same struggles as fiction. The material (verse) addressed social and political conflicts. Free verse was the form of choice which is “technically demanding and makes use of repetition, natural speech rhythms, parallelism, and image patterns” (Tidwell, 1992, p. 385). By the time of World War II, African Americans began to question the role blacks had in defining American Literature. They wanted to know which American anthologies had included black authors in them, and which ones had excluded them, and why? African American writers who had been ignored or omitted from the canon of American literature would finally achieve recognition in a landmark anthology, *The Negro Caravan*, edited by Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee. The publication included a variety of African American literature that became ingredients to help make up the American literary tradition. That tradition could no longer be devoted to white writers only. The aim of the black literary world was to have the white literary world embrace African American writers such as Dunbar, Chestnutt, Hughes, Hurston, Wright and others. The literature of African Americans should be a part of American literature, and not separate or apart from.

2.4 Music

At the time of the Great Depression thatbegan before the end of the Great Harlem Renaissance, jazz, big bands in particular, was the musical tradition for African Americans. Count Basie and Duke Ellington’s bands set the standard for a style known as “swing,” which included a unique sound of improvisation, harmonies, timbres, and exceptional arrangements. These elements are always present in African American music stemming from the African-derived characteristics that make African American music so flavorful.

African Americans were continually creating and following the very successful period of the big bands, bebop evolved. The style was performed by a much smaller ensemble group. During the 1940s, bebop emerged from “jam sessions” that were held at clubs in Harlem. Among the musicians who “jammed” in these clubs were noted jazz musicians Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Lester Young, Max Roach and Kenny Clark. Bebop was transformed into a style known as “cool jazz” and popularized by John Coltrane and trumpeter Miles Davis, among others. Cool jazz was more for listening because the improvisations within this style of music varied to the point that the rhythm was not consistent enough for dancing. Jazz then transformed to a more danceable style called “bop” or “hard bop” and was “funkier,” incorporating the rhythms of blues and gospel. Some of the musicians who popularized that style were Horace Silver, Dexter Gordon, Max Roach, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, Sonny Rollins, Donald Byrd, Jimmy Smith, and others.

Although jazz is America’s classical music, African American musicians performed and created European classical styles of music as well. They were not limited in their creative activity to just musical styles evolving through their own musical traditions of folk, spiritual, blues, gospel, rag, and jazz. The African American community consisted of other trained musicians who gravitated toward the European tradition, and who were capable of composing and performing European classical music. However, black composers were encouraged to deliberately use black folk idioms to keep with a black nationalistic vein exhorted by writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Composers answering the call, and contributing substantially to the cause and tradition were Florence Price, R. Nathaniel Dett, William Grant, and Clarence Cameron White. Furthermore, African American female sopranos were delivering concert performances to black audiences before the turn of the twentieth century. African Americans, both female and male continued to perform gaining wider popularity. Some of the singers standing out for their vocal abilities include contralto Marion Anderson, soprano Dorothy Maynor, tenor Roland Hayes, and baritone Paul Robeson. Marion Anderson was the most popular and recognized concert performer of the time; although, all the aforementioned black singers broke racial barriers for African Americans. Anderson was the first to perform at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City; even though, a white group tried to prevent her appearance. Many other African American classical musicians have followed her onto the concert stage and among them are singers Leontyne Price and Robert McFarrin, pianist Andre Watts, and conductor Michael Morgan.

Other styles of music that emerged during the 1940s were rhythm and blues, soul, and funk. Rhythm and blues (R&B) began around World War II in urban areas by Southern blacks who migrated to the North. It was used primarily for dancing and was performed by groups of four or five featuring a lead singer with a back-up group. Rhythm and blues was the trend in musical style from the late 1940s to the 1960s. Many R&B groups developed and became popular through radio, recordings, and touring shows. R&B was the foundation for much of America’s pop music. Additionally, girl groups had imposed upon this musical style with much success. Another style of music that developed through the vocal groups and became a popular musical trend was “doo wop.” The style consisted of vocal group harmonies, mostly without instrumentation. Doo wop also usually incorporated a single, solo lead with a backup group.

In the 1950s, Ray Charles created a new style of black music, “soul,” when he merged black gospel music with R&B. The style was broadly accepted making Ray Charles a very popular figure in African American music, as well as others such as Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson.

2.5 Theater

African Americans were portrayed in a better light by the time of the Great Depression. However, it was difficult to overcome the racist stereotypes that had been implanted, and white audiences still wanted blacks to entertain them with singing, dancing and comedy. While white audiences enjoyed the singing and dancing of African Americans, it had to be in the proper setting: burlesque, vaudeville, and musical comedy shows. They did not want to see African American’s growing liberal attitude; they were still entranced with the stereotypes of the exotic, primitive, the comic stooge, and the tragic mulatto. The musical comedies were a much more successful form of entertainment than dramatic productions at that time.

During World War II, many productions were cancelled after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Still, the stage productions of a few playwrights managed to be produced. Richard Wright’s stage version of his revolutionary *Native Son*, and Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen’s collaboration, *St. Louis Woman*, were produced on Broadway.

Abram Hill, founder and resident playwright for the American Negro Theatre (ANT), had several of his plays produced by the Harlem theater group. “*Anna Lucasta*, adapted by Hill and ‘doctored’ by white director Harry Wagstaff Gribble from the play by Phillip Yordan, was first produced by ANT, then transferred to Broadway where it ran for 957 performances, becoming the longest running play with an African American cast up to that time, bringing many of its stars into the professional theater, film and television” (Peterson Jr., 1997, p. 231).

After World War II, African Americans became more aggressive in abolishing the old stereotypes. They wanted to be seen as part of the mainstream of American culture. While there were a few good offers projected towards the mainstream, Lorraine Hansberry made the greatest contribution to that effort with her *A Raisin in the Sun*, which appeared on Broadway in 1959. It was the first play written by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway, and was the first to be directed by a black man, Lloyd Richards. It was a successful, critically acclaimed portrayal of a black family’s trials and tribulations as well as the obstacles they faced when attempting to become part of the society that degraded them. The production follows the historic Supreme Court ruling in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared “separate but equal” unconstitutional. “Hansberry’s, *A Raisin in the Sun*, argues in timely and timeless fashion that the American dream of equity and access has salience for all people” (Elem Jr., 2014).

3. Civil Rights Movement

The African American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was a paramount social and political movement to end legalized racial segregation and discrimination. The major activities and actions of the movement took place between 1954 and 1968. The movement was the catalyst of successful legal changes affecting African Americans. The Civil Rights Movement involved actions incorporating people from the masses, community, social and political organizations, as well as religious and educational organizations.

The methods were nonviolent, direct actions like boycotts, community education, voter registration, civil disobedience, sit-ins, and civil resistance. There were many people involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and some were white and Jewish. The major African American leaders of the nonviolent philosophy include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., (the most prominent who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, and today has a national holiday and a monument erected in Washington, D. C. honoring him), Andrew Young, Reverends Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Julian Bond, Bayard Rustin, John Lewis, and James Farmer to name a few.

Two others who must be mentioned are President John F. Kennedy and Medgar Wiley Evers. Evers joined the NAACP in 1953 as a chapter organizer and in 1954 was appointed State NAACP Field Secretary for Mississippi in the cause of registering African Americans to vote.

During the early sixties, our nation had two leaders who embraced one common theme and shared a common end. On June 12, 1963, U.S President John F. Kennedy – who would be assassinated only a few months later – expressed this sentiment in an address to the nation: ‘white resistance to civil rights for Blacks is a moral crisis.’ President Kennedy pledged then his support for federal action on integration and the achievement of full civil and voting rights for African Americans. That same night, as he got out of his car in front of his home after returning from an NAACP meeting, Medgar Wiley Evers was ambushed and killed by the blast of a shotgun [to his back] (Medgar Evers College Catalogue, p. 8).

Other leaders and groups joined in who were not of the nonviolent persuasion, and they were Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam, and Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, and Eldridge Clever of the Black Panther Party (who were responding to police brutality). Various organizations joined the many protests and marches that took place during this period of high remonstrance, for example: NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who had been fighting for the improvement and civil rights of African Americans for many decades, SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), PUSH (People United to Save Humanity), SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), NUL (National Urban League), BPP (Black Panther Party), AJC (American Jewish Committee), and (American Jewish Congress), BHI (Black Hebrew Israelites), and the ADL (Anti-Defamation League).

Rosa was the person who initiated the Montgomery bus boycott that demonstrated the frustrations of African Americans with the country’s racial inequities. She refused to give her seat on a bus to a white man after a long day’s work. It sparked the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama (1955-56) and spurred what became an intense period of demonstrations.

It was followed by the Greensboro, N. C. Sit-ins from 1958-60, and the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965 in Alabama. Those were all nonviolent activities by African Americans and other racial groups who joined in the protests. Some other protest activities became violent by white objectors who launched vicious attacks on the groups. Because many events were not peaceful, it took courage from those who took lead roles in them, and the participants alike. Desegregating Little Rock H.S. in 1957 and the Freedom Rides of 1967 were such events. There were people who joined the protests because they disagreed with the plight of African Americans and wanted to help rectify societal ills, and lost their lives doing so.

The foremost white supremacist groups who did everything they could do to prevent African Americans from attaining equality were the Ku Klux Klan, Southern Democrats, the American Independent Party, and the Citizens' Councils. Even so, some very important political accomplishments were attained: the Civil Rights Act (1964), Voting Rights Act (1965), and Fair Housing Act (1968).

African Americans made major accomplishments through the highly concentrated efforts of many socially and politically conscious people. But, there were many who were not happy with any of the outcomes and wanted to relegate African Americans to the standards of yesteryear. To demonstrate that sentiment and fear, the leader that threatened white southern bigots the most, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968. Even with this tragedy:

Resistance to white supremacy and affirmation of black identity endures, even in a time when many white Americans find unity in opposing the movement's legacy. Not only does the movement continue to press for African American advancement, it has inspired similar movements among women, Native Americans, gay and lesbian citizens, and other victims of discrimination. Reactions against the achievements of the civil rights movement may define American political possibility well into the twenty-first century. But the large unheralded black and white citizens whose hands painstakingly stitched the quilt of legal equality have forever enlarged the meaning of democracy (Tyson, 1997, p. 151).

3.1 Art

This was a period of political and cultural awareness in the visual arts. While struggling for equal economic, political, and social opportunity, "African American artists embraced the concept of self-determination through self-expression, which involved the demand that they formulate their own aesthetic principles. As this demand became a dominant theme of the 1960s, artists, writers, musicians, and dancers joined together, as they had during the Harlem Renaissance, to formulate new ideological directions" (Lewis, p. 143). A new sense of dignity and pride had developed because of the aggressive social activity of the past three decades.

During this social and political turbulence, Romare Bearden called a group of artists together in New York City to discuss ways that they could show their sympathies and support the civil rights movement. These artists included Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, Hale A. Woodruff, Reginald Gammon, Richard Mayhew, Ernest Crichlow, Felraith Hines, Alvin Hollingsworth, and the only woman, Emma Amos. The group decided to call themselves *Spiral*. The group continued to meet at Bearden's studio to explore their creative philosophies, their value and worth as visual artists. "The sharpest spur to action was the March on Washington in 1963. As they later claimed, they 'could not fail to be touch by the outrage of segregation, or fail to relate to the self-reliance, hope, and courage of those persons who were marching in the interest of man's dignity'A decision was taken to hold an art exhibition in downtown Manhattan.....At first it was entitled 'Mississippi 1964' in homage to the three slain civil rights workers, but the group eventually decided on a less political, more racially generic title: *Black and White*" (Patton, 1998, p.185).

3.2 Dance

Concert dance had become the creative dance style for African Americans as a theater dance experience. The social dance styles were always evolving because popular social dance was a part of the African American social life at all times. Dance and music are the traits that stem from Africa within the social activities of African Americans, and the club or party life is rarely without some type of dance or music. Though, from an artistic, creative standpoint, African Americans were successfully demonstrating that they could compete in ballet and modern dance. Two people who became renowned around the world were Arthur Mitchell and Alvin Ailey. Ailey began his love of dance when he saw a performance by Katherine Dunham's dance company. He did not begin to dance until he went to UCLA and joined the Lester Horton Dance Theatre. He came on to New York and trained with Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Hanya Holm, Anna Sokolow, Donald McKayle and others.

In 1958, during the high period of social and political unrest, Alvin Ailey formed the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. The company has been received throughout the United States and around the world more than any other African American dance company and is the most famous black (not all dancers are black) dance company today. His choreography has become some of the most memorable in the world, especially his signature piece *Revelations*.

Arthur Mitchell became the first black principal ballet dancer with the New York City Ballet, one of the most famous ballet companies in the world. Mitchell danced with a white female partner all over the world in a role created especially for him by George Balanchine but was limited in the United States where he faced many prejudices. He could not recreate the role in the South on television because commercially sponsored stations feared their advertisers would not like it. In response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mitchell founded his school, the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

3.3 Literature

The civil rights struggle brought on different idealistic goals by some organizations, in that, they started a push toward nationalism for peoples of African descent. And, “in response to the emergent nationalistic movement of the mid-to late 1960s arose its cultural or aesthetic counterpart, the Black Arts Movement” (Smith, 1997, p. 458). Also, an expression became the mantra among African Americans, and that was “black power.” The Black Arts Movement called for cultural productions in all the creative genres: art, dance, music, literature and theater. Coming from the Black Arts Movement were several journals and presses such as *Negro Digest*, *the Journal of Black Poetry*, and *Black Expression*. The presses that the Movement gave rise to were the Free Black Press, Broadside Press, Jihad Press, Third World Press, and Free Dialogue Press.

Although the Black Arts Movement sought to connect cultural and artistic production to the aesthetics and the needs of the black community, it also “led to a kind of literary and ideological gatekeeping that judged African American writing on its conformity to a narrowly defined political and aesthetic agenda. By this light, only certain styles, topics and positions were considered authentically black,” according to Smith, (p. 458). The leading literary figures were writers of a wide-range of genres such as Gwendolyn Brooks, LeRoi Jones (Amari Baraka), Sonia Sanchez, Mari Evans, Ed Bullins, Ishmeal Reed, Addison Gayle, Jr., Nikki Giovanni, Etheridge Knight, and Carolyn Rodgers.

3.4 Music

In 1959 Barry Gordy founded Motown Records, the first record label to primarily feature African American artists. Barry Gordy created a sound that would take the world by storm and had not only a remarkable impact for African American musical artists, but would impact white America and the world as well. The label produced its own unique style of soul and pop music. Further, it groomed its artists to represent the label in a distinctive, recognizable manner that would generate millions of dollars over the years. Many groups and individual artists were produced by Motown Records, and some are The Miracles, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, Martha and the Vandellas, The Supremes, Aretha Franklin, The Jackson 5, and many others.

African American music had a tremendous influence on groups in the United Kingdom such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. By the end of the 1960s, soul, R&B, and pop were still popular among African Americans, but the music was evolving to “funk” as James Brown and others had come on the scene.

3.5 Theater

“The 1960s stand out culturally as the most explosive decade in modern American Life. No other period swept across the country with such a devastating tide of social, political and racial ferment. A shocked world witnessed the process of change in the entire social fabric of one of its most powerful nations” (Forman, 1980, p. 72).

Many theater groups were developing in African American communities, but unfortunately, even with government funding, they could not survive. Two such groups in New York were Ed Bullins’ and Robert Macbeth’s New Lafayette Theatre, and Amiri Baraka’s Black Arts Repertory.

The problems of interracial relations and civil rights were still the dominant themes in African American theater, and the subjects were treated in a nonthreatening manner, following the examples of the movement. Several plays that modeled their subjects around the problems of the time were Ossie Davis’ *Purlie Victorious*; Langston Hughes’ *Black Nativity*, *Jerico-Jim Crow*, *Tambourines to Glory*, and *Prodical Son*; and the satire of the “sit-in” movement *Fly Blackbird*, presented by C. Bernard Jackson and James V. Hatch, a white playwright.

Other plays that were successful include Adrienne Kennedy's *Funny House of a Negro*; Douglas Turner Ward's *A Day of Absence*, and *Happy Ending*; Lonnie Elder III's *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*; and Lorraine Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.

As we see, the African American creative arts of dance, literature, music, theater, and visual art, underwent several variations as time periods changed. Those changes: the Great Depression; World War II; and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s caused African American ideology and expression to take different approaches. African Americans had formulated racial aesthetics based on ethnic concerns and anxieties since the nineteenth century. However, in the 1960s, a new term "black aesthetics" originated with a distinguishing formula for the methodology to achieve the goals of the African American creative arts expressionists.

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