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Interrogating Historical Trauma Through the Lens of Black and Indigenous Artists

By

Sophie Anne Brown

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Department of Visual Arts

Union College

2023

Abstract

We live in a world wherein black, brown, and ethnic minorities are forced to navigate daily race-based stressors, including but not limited to discrimination, poverty, oppression, and microaggressions. These current events that are explicitly seen in areas such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada are, in part, the lasting consequences of historical trauma passed down through generations. Genocide, displacement, forced relocation, slavery, and the intentional destruction of cultural practices are deeply rooted in the fiber of our history. These past injustices are intrinsically linked to present events, wherein they have become part of our contemporary cultural narrative. While historical trauma is collective, it is also deeply personal and individualized. It combines external events with internal processes that linger on the souls of subsequent generations. It destroys families and threatens the vibrancy of entire cultures. Throughout history, activists, community leaders, politicians, and artists have revolted against racial violence, discrimination, and the hierarchies imposed by those in privileged positions of power. Artists of color have long challenged the status quo by challenging dominant oppressive discourse and existing racist ideologies through their own visual languages. They use their work as a catalyst to educate the oppressor and heal the oppressed by interrogating historical trauma and its contemporary consequences on an individual and collective level. There is an immediacy in addressing past injustices now inscribed in the fiber of our communities. With the help and guidance from Professor Lorraine Morales Cox, this thesis takes up the work of three black contemporary artist; specifically U.S artists Carl Robert Pope and Arthur Jafa and British artist Barbara Walker and three indigenous contemporary artists, specifically U.S artists Wendy Red Star and

Nicholas Galanin, and Canadian artist Kent Monkman. The works of these six artists give us greater insight and understanding into how art can be committed to addressing and depicting historical trauma, Their work documents, memorializes, and intervenes in past injustices and current racial unrest. By creating empathy as a strategy, they explore the intersection of distrust between the oppressor and the oppressed based on historical and present antagonisms. To appreciate how art can respond to social and political upheaval, one must appreciate historical trauma's significant disruption of traditional ways of life, culture, and identity. Accordingly, a contextual understanding of historical trauma is not only instructive but imperative.

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Chapter 1: Defining Historical Trauma

Various terms have been used to describe the multigenerational nature of distress and trauma in communities, including transgenerational, intergenerational, multi-generational, cross-generational, and collective, and historical trauma. Historical trauma is the term most often used by scholars when addressing Black and Indigenous trauma. It is inherently complex and increasingly important when considering oppressed communities' health, wellness, and cultural narrative. Scholar Evans-Campbell conceptualizes historical trauma as a:

[C]ollective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation, ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation. It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events.¹

The historical events associated with the trauma tend to be deeply destructive physically and emotionally and manifest in distressing cultural patterns and consequences. Historical trauma events occur at different time periods and compound across generations to “be seen as a single traumatic trajectory.”² Although events occur over the course of many years, even decades, they continue to impact social manifestations, mental health, and the identity of oppressed communities. The lens of historical trauma “allows us to expand our focus from isolated events and their impacts to the compounding effect of numerous events over time.”³ There are three important characteristics of historical trauma. First, the events are widespread and experienced by many people in

¹ Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). “Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507312290> [February 11, 2023]

² Ibid

³ Ibid

an oppressed community. Second, the events inflict a high level of distress, grief, fear, and/or mourning in contemporary communities. Third, the events are perpetrated by a dominant group with purposeful and destructive intent.

Historical trauma sustained by black and indigenous communities is both profound and pervasive. Although the compounding events for these groups may differ, they are similar in that both have been subjected to violence, displacement, discrimination, and racial injustice at the hands of white supremacy. These white supremacist ideologies have designated both groups as inferior t, and the consequences of this continue to play out in our cultural narrative. For blacks, enslavement marks the beginning of their historical trauma and continues with Jim Crow laws, public lynching's, Ku Klux Klan terror, race based violence, segregation, police brutality, inadequate health care, housing discrimination and educational disadvantages These compounding events inform a cultural narrative which contemporary artists have sought to disrupt challenge and indite and also foster greater empathy understanding for the plight of people of color. The roots of Indigenous historical trauma are steeped in colonization, forced assimilation, war, massacres, relocation programs, and land seizures. These forms of oppression are also responsible for the stripping of Indigenous communities' rich culture and identities in order to "kill the Indian and save the man"⁴. In the 18th century, the efforts to assimilate Indigenous people into an Anglo-dominated culture began. Children were taken from their families and forced into government-funded boarding schools. Not only did children endure cultural losses, and unimaginable physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, many simply vanished. The painful traumatic scars these boarding schools left on Indigenous

⁴ National Conference of Charities and Correction (U.S.). Session. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, at the ... Annual Session held in ...* Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis.

communities recently resurfaced when thousands of unmarked graves in the United States and Canada were discovered near these boarding schools (figure).⁵

The consequences of the historical trauma suffered by Black and indigenous communities have manifested in ongoing discrimination, prejudice, and systemic racism. The compounding events experienced by these groups has been shown to have left an imprint on the epigenome that is passed down to future generations. Depression, anxiety, heart disease, and substance abuse plague these communities as they continue to face daily race-based stressors. While the contemporary members of these oppressed groups did not experience the initial collective traumatic events of slavery or colonization, public narratives link past traumatic events to the present so that the trauma becomes part of the contemporary cultural narrative.⁶ In other words, the contemporary members of the affected group experience trauma-related symptoms despite not being present for the past traumatizing events. There is mounting evidence that subsequent generations unconsciously inhabit historical trauma from these past historical events, “they are carriers, living, reproducing and passing it on. Persecution and victimization in one generation typically get enacted like a haunting in the next.”⁷ Those past histories and events are responsible for this continued haunting, and white oppression is sitting on the chest of these subsequent generations.

⁵ “Canada: 751 Unmarked Graves Found at Residential School,” BBC News (BBC, June 24, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57592243>.

⁶ Mohatt NV, Thompson AB, Thai ND, Tebes JK. Historical trauma as public narrative: a conceptual review of how history impacts present-day health. *Soc Sci Med*. 2014 Apr;106:128-36. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.043. Epub 2014 Jan 31. PMID: 24561774; PMCID: PMC400182

⁷ JEFFREY. “Danger and Deformation: A Social Theory of Trauma Part II: Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Recovering Humanity, and Repairing Generations.” *American Imago* 72, no. 2 (2015): 133–55. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26305113>

Early studies on the impact of historical trauma emerged in the 1980s and focused on the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors. In their international handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma, psychotherapist Nanette Auerhahn and the late Dori Laub, an Israeli-American psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and Holocaust survivor, memorialize their extensive research as follows:

[K]nowledge of psychic trauma weaves through the memories of several generations, marking those who know of it as secret bearers...Furthermore, we have found that massive trauma has an amorphous presence not defined by place or time and lacking a beginning, middle, or end and that it shapes the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children.⁸

This research demonstrates that historical trauma is compounding. Events occurring at different time periods across generations are a traumatic trajectory. There is no clear beginning, middle or end to trauma. It is woven into the minds and bodies of generations and actively shapes their reality which they will then pass on to future generations. Historical trauma manifests not only on psychological, emotional, and social levels; it manifests on a cellular level. Directed studies with the children of Holocaust survivors have produced scientific evidence connecting historical trauma to a change in the human body at the cellular level. "This research has suggested that stressful environmental conditions may leave an imprint on the epigenome that is passed down to future generations."⁹

⁸ Auerhahn, N., & Laub, D. (1998). *Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust*. International handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma. Danieli, Y. (Ed.). New York: Plenum.

⁹ Kyaien O. Conner Ph.D. "Why Historical Trauma Is Critical to Understanding Black Mental Health." Psychology Today. Sussex Publishers, October 1, 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202010/why-historical-trauma-is-critical-understanding-black-mental#:~:text=In%20the%20Black%20community%2C%20individuals%20not%20only%20carry,make%20current%20events%20so%20traumatizing%20for%20Black%20people.>

In a 2015 study, Dr. Rachel Yehuda, a neuroscientist at the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center in the Bronx, New York, concluded that epigenetic changes caused by exposure to trauma suffered during the Holocaust were passed on to the adult children of the Holocaust survivors who were born after the event. “Epigenetic processes altered the expression of a gene without producing changes in the DNA sequence and can be transmitted to the next generation.”¹⁰ The study focused on the stress gene FKBP5, which is linked to depression, anxiety, and mood disorders. Dr. Yehuda found that this FKBP5 gene was affected in both the Holocaust survivors and their adult children, many of whom suffered from depression and anxiety. While the study was small and inconclusive, evidence suggests historical trauma affects future generations' epigenome. What happened to previous generations can fundamentally impact the molecular level. It can perpetuate mental health issues, and contribute to how one feels, behaves, and perpetuate vulnerabilities. Because the gene expression was changed without altering the DNA sequence, it was clear that the adult children of Holocaust survivors were not born with an altered FKBP5 gene; rather, they inherited traits that promoted vulnerability. This research is informative and can be translated to the connection between historical trauma and the physical and emotional manifestations in Black and Indigenous communities.

According to the American Psychological Association, oppressed communities suffering from historical trauma are more vulnerable to anxiety, PTSD, depression, and other mental health conditions. This high-stress vulnerability makes contemporary race-

¹⁰ “Study Finds Epigenetic Changes in Children of Holocaust Survivors,” October 20, 2016. <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/1016-3.cfm>.

based experiences particularly hard to process. Therein creating consequential effects such as suicide, homicide, violence, and other anti-social behaviors.¹¹ Several empirical studies demonstrate oppressed groups who experience historical trauma are more vulnerable to “diminished psychological health, depressed social and economic status, and racial discourse.”¹² In addition to psychological and antisocial behaviors, other consequences include physical manifestations such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.¹³ Moreover, many suffer from the denigration of their self-worth, ability, and intelligence. Generally speaking, oppressed groups do not have power in the institutions that impact their lives nor opportunities for self-determination. This reality contributes to feelings of inferiority, oppression, and resentment.¹⁴

Black and Indigenous communities have a distrust of public authority and institutions. This distrust is not imagined; it is the direct result of systemic failures to include them or, worse, discriminatory practices and procedures used against them. This denigration of self-worth, ability, and intelligence is amplified by microaggressions that occur daily and actively intrude on “current-day perception and shape the interaction between oneself and others.”¹⁵ Microaggressions are subtle but have cumulative,

¹¹ “African Americans.” Psychiatry.org - African Americans. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/stress-and-trauma/african-americans>.

¹² Kellermann NP. Transmission of Holocaust trauma: An integrative view. *Psychiatry*. 2001b;64(3):256–267.

¹³ Lewis ME, Volpert-Esmond HI, Deen JF, Modde E, Warne D. Stress and Cardiometabolic Disease Risk for Indigenous Populations throughout the Lifespan. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Feb 13;18(4):1821. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18041821. PMID: 33668461; PMCID: PMC7918141.

¹⁴ Bobo, Lawrence D., and Victor Thompson. “Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System.” *Social Research* 73, no. 2 (2006): 445–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971832>

¹⁵ PRAGER, JEFFREY. “Danger and Deformation: A Social Theory of Trauma Part II: Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Recovering Humanity, and Repairing Generations.” *American Imago* 72, no. 2 (2015): 133–55. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26305113>

negative impacts on Black and Indigenous communities. “[They] are often subtle, unintentional or intentional behaviors, actions, and expressions that communicate hostile, negative or derogatory messages to target individuals in marginalized groups.”¹⁶ They manifest in seemingly small behaviors: clutching one’s bag or locking a car door when approached by a black man; a store owner closely monitoring a black customer; presumed alcohol abuse of Indigenous people; racist questions like “Don’t you go to school for free?”, “Do you live in a teepee?”, or “You don’t pay taxes.” While not direct acts of violence, being the recipient of frequent microaggressions “may cause chronic stress and/or adverse health behaviors, either which can lead to mental and physical health consequences.”¹⁷ When not healed, historical trauma is projected as racist beliefs and the enactment of traumatic actions toward others.¹⁸ It can perpetuate structural inequalities, perceived historical loss, and discrimination. It can dominate cultural racial narratives and cause sustained marginalization. Just like victims of abuse often become perpetrators, violence exacted typically yields violence enacted. In Part II of his article *Danger and Deformation, A Social Theory of Trauma* Dr. Jeffery Prager contends:

...a nation built upon anti-human premises and which flourishes for a time inflicts traumatic injury on the entire nation, on perpetrators and victims alike. Suspicion and mistrust of the other, the anxiety of harm being done to oneself, guilt, shame, and fear of the eruption of uncontrollable rage by oneself or by other constitutes the psychological constellation of experiences that unify all members of the nation, victims, and perpetrators alike.¹⁹

¹⁶ Thurston, Isabella. “Microaggressions against Indigenous Peoples and Its Impacts.” The Indigenous Foundation. The Indigenous Foundation, July 18, 2021. <https://www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/microaggressions-against-indigenous-peoples-and-its-impacts>.

¹⁷ “African Americans.” Psychiatry.org - African Americans. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/stress-and-trauma/african-americans>.

¹⁸ PRAGER, JEFFREY. “Danger and Deformation: A Social Theory of Trauma Part II: Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Recovering Humanity, and Repairing Generations.” 133–55.

¹⁹ Ibid

Historical trauma can play out as internalized racism, a “conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above people of color.”²⁰ For minorities, internalized racism prompts the dangerous devaluation of their own race based on years of programmed, systemic racism. For example, Black police officers' brutality beating and/or killing black people can be seen in recent cases involving such individuals as Freddie Gray, George Floyd, and Sean Bell, all of whom were all killed at the hands of Black officers. However, the racial optics of the recent brutal beating and killing of Tyre Nichols emphasizes how internalized racism is a very real consequence of historical trauma and confirms we live in a country where recognizing Black humanity continues to be a fight.²¹ Our nation was born from violence, discrimination, and brutality in the most broken and suffering way. The consequences are rage that boils inside the white and the black. The oppressor and the oppressed become interchangeable, and healing feels out of reach. Especially when black police officers, who are sworn to protect and serve communities already suffering from violence, marginalization, and discrimination, engage in unimaginable brutality. It is a vicious, multi-layered cycle that is not just about what happened in the past but about what is still happening today.

While there is a growing body of people, including activists, political leaders, sociologists, scholars, and artists, trying to obtain a collective understanding of the impact of wrongs committed in the past, “we know that communities of distrust, alienation, and hatred persevere even when legal and institutional measures are implemented to

²⁰ Pyke, Karen D. (December 2010). "What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries". *Sociological Perspectives*. 53 (4): 551–572.

²¹ Jonathan Franklin and Emma Bowman, “What We Know about the Killing of Tyre Nichols,” NPR (NPR, January 28, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/01/28/1151504967/tyre-nichols-memphis-police-body-cam-video>.

dismantle those collectives.”²² It is imperative to make every effort to break these cycles of historical trauma by providing safe spaces for dialogue, conversation, understanding, and education.

²² PRAGER, JEFFREY. “Danger and Deformation: A Social Theory of Trauma Part II: Disrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Recovering Humanity, and Repairing Generations.” 133–55.

Chapter 2: Art Interrogating Historical Trauma

The Eurocentric art world has long been controlled by the white gaze. It has determined whose stories are told, what gets to be seen, and what is deemed worthy enough to be considered art. Artists of color have historically been cast in supporting roles to the “primarily white stars of the Western canon.”²³ However, the contemporary consequences of historical trauma felt for decades have motivated black and brown artists to challenge this narrative. German philosopher Theodor Adorno famously argued that “art is an uncommitted crime,” suggesting that it can promote the tools with which we can change society.²⁴ He called for art to be transformed from “the harmonic and knowable to the jarring and irresolvable.”²⁵ Today artists actively engage in social, political, and global movements exploring how the past intersects with the present. However, that has not always been the case. At one time, leaders of the art world concluded art should not be political in nature.²⁶ Many art purists were adamant that art, museums in particular, were “most psychologically useful to society by being irrelevant to the outside world.”²⁷ Art should provide respite and beauty, and only by removing [it] from

²³ “Nine Black Artists and Cultural Leaders on Seeing and Being Seen.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, June 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/t-magazine/black-artists-white-gaze.html>.

²⁴ “Art Is an Uncommitted Crime.” issuu. from Fall 19, Issue 2: *War Is Peace by Avant Garde*, December 4, 2019. https://issuu.com/aucegypt43/docs/pdfresizer.com-pdf-crop__1_/s/10118365#:~:text=%E2%80%9C9CArt%20is%20an%20uncommitted%20crime,and%20other%20forms%20of%20entertainment.

²⁵ Marstine, Janet. “Challenging the Gendered Categories of Art and Art Therapy: The Paintings of Jane Orleman.” *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 3 (2002): 631–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178792>.

²⁶ McClellan, Andrew. *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

²⁷ Ibid

daily life could its "life-enhancing difference" be felt.²⁸ Even contemporary curators and private collectors find some political art too provocative or triggering.²⁹ Artists, however, cannot be silenced and continue to interrogate the outside world in deep and provocative ways.

The turbulent times of the 1960s promoted a call to activism. Historical trauma now manifested in the Civil Right Movement, de-segregation, and de-institutionalization, prompted artists, galleries, and museums to change course. They started to embrace multicultural and outreach initiatives and engage in the outside world. Museums, artists, and galleries started giving more credence to the diversity of ideas, cultures, and values and looked for innovative ways to address this progression. They started to address the lack of diversity and white-dominated histories. "A number of prominent exhibitions in recent decades illustrate the broad turn in museum policy."³⁰ Museums like Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art are developing anti-racism and diversity plans to address the disparity in the art world. "Over the years, there has been a significant lack of diversity in the art world. In fact, around 85% of artists represented by U.S institutions are white, and many classical paintings have been found to have racist undertones or themes."³¹ Franklin Sirmans, Director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami, is actively addressing this issue. He contends institutions must better serve their communities and combat systemic racism on every level. "It is

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Marstine, Janet. "Challenging the Gendered Categories of Art and Art Therapy: The Paintings of Jane Orleman." 631–54.

³⁰ McClellan, Andrew. *The Art Museum from Boullee to Bilbao*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

³¹ "How the Art World Is Tackling Racial Inequality." The Art Post Blog | Art and Artists Italian Blog, May 10, 2022. <https://www.theartpostblog.com/en/how-the-art-world-is-tackling-racial-inequality/#:~:text=Over%20the%20years%2C%20there%20has,have%20racist%20undertones%20or%20themes.>

important institutions build trust with their communities so that the people whose ideas they reflect and stories they want to tell have a real role at every level of the organization.”³² Sirmans engages the public in exhibitions through informed dialogue, round table discussions, and symposiums.

During the 1960s and 70s, art became a “potent language to speak against various forms of oppressions and persisting inequalities regarding gender, race or class.”³³ Artists interrogated past inequities that continued to play out in daily race-based stressors. By interacting with the past in the present, artists who endured historical trauma started to dissolve their gatekeepers to change the future individually and collectively. It was during this time the Black Arts Movement took hold.

After Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, The Black Power Movement was divided into two camps, the Revolutionary Nationalists, represented by the Black Panther Party, and the Cultural Nationalists, a group of Black, politically motivated poets, artists, dramatists, musicians, and writers. They called for the creation of art that reflected pride in black culture and history. “This new emphasis was an affirmation of the autonomy of black artists to create black art for black people as a means to awaken black consciousness and achieve liberation.”³⁴ The Movement was formally established when poet Amiri Baraka opened Harlem's Black Arts Repertory Theater. Although it began in New York, the movement spread to Chicago, Detroit, and San Francisco. Many black

³² Leung, Gabrielle. “It’s Time for Art Museums to Address Their Racist Histories.” Hypebeast. Hypebeast, September 17, 2020. <https://hypebeast.com/2020/9/art-museums-steps-to-address-racism-exclusive-interviews>.

³³ “A History of Protest Art through Examples - from Ai Weiwei to Banksy.” Widewalls. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/protest-art>.

³⁴ Foster, contributed by: Hannah. “The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975) •.” THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT (1965-1975), January 9, 2023. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/black-arts-movement-1965-1975/>.

artists emerged during this time. One of whom was Betye Saar; she was not only part of the Black Arts Movement, but she was also a feminist. At that time, the Feminist Movement was dominated by white women, while the Black Art Movement was dominated by Black men. Wendy Ikemoto, associate curator of American art for The New York Historical Society, dubbed Saar one of the most prominent female black artists. “Being at the intersection of both movements, she became one of the most prominent black female artists for presenting strong, recognized women who are fighting off the legacy of slavery. I think it did open doors for other artists to follow.”³⁵ In 1972, she answered a call from a black cultural center in Berkeley, California, to create a black heroes exhibit. Saar created the piece titled *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* that sparked the black women’s movement. The artwork is made of a “mammy doll” armed with a rifle that stands in front of Aunt Jemima pancake labels (figure 1.Smarthistory.org, 2023). Forty-six years after creating the piece, Saar’s legacy went on view at the New York Historical Society. The exhibit, *Keeping it Clean*, featured 24 pieces made by Saar between 1997 and 2017 from her continuing series incorporating washboards. “Saar says that it’s about keeping everything clean, keeping politics clean, keeping your life clean, your actions clean. She wants America to clean up its act, and a lot of her art has to do with this idea that we haven’t cleaned up our act.”³⁶

Joe Overstreet was also a member of the Black Arts Movement. Over six decades, he pushed boundaries and not only intersected with the Black Arts Movement, but with

³⁵ Nadja Sayej. “Betye Saar: The Artist Who Helped Spark the Black Women's Movement.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, October 30, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/oct/30/betye-saar-art-exhibit-racism-new-york-historical-society>.

³⁶ Ibid

many of the most important art movements of the 20th century, from the Beat scene in San Francisco to Abstract Expressionism.³⁷ During the late 60s, Overstreet actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement and worked as art director of the Black Arts Repository Theatre/School in Harlem. In 1964, he created *The New Jemima*, one of his best-known works depicting the syrup mascot with a machine gun (figure 2, hammer.ucla.edu, 2023).³⁸ Overstreet was also a co-founder of the Kenkeleba House, a 1970s art center in Manhattan dedicated to showcasing the work of black and brown artists who had few opportunities to exhibit their work in a white dominated art world. Other prominent artists of the Black Arts Movement were Maya Angelou, Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and Lorraine Hansberry. These artists drew attention to stereotypes, especially in advertising, and created art that reflected pride in black culture and history.

While the Black Arts Movement took hold, so too did the American Indian Movement. AIM began in the summer of 1968 in Minnesota. The movement, led by Indigenous activists George Mitchell, Dennis Banks, and Clyde Bellecourt, addressed decades of discrimination and biased federal policies, and from it, the Red Power Movement was born. The Red Power Movement used art to interrogate the discourse of resistance, persistence, and tradition. It encouraged Indigenous artists to “challenge the dominant society’s erasure of indigenous history and to promote tribal sovereignty.”³⁹ In 1975, The movement facilitated the opening of an Indigenous center art school in Santa

³⁷ Halperin, Julia. “Artist Joe Overstreet, Whose Paintings Jumped off the Stretcher and into the Gallery Space, Has Died at 85.” Artnet News, June 5, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-joe-overstreet-obit-1565785>.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Artifact. “Shared Ideologies.” Rising: The American Indian Movement and the Third Space of Sovereignty. Accessed February 12, 2023. <https://muscarelle.wm.edu/rising/shared-ideologies/>.

Fe, New Mexico. The school, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) responded to the political activism that was emerging among aspiring Indigenous artists. The robust curriculum was grounded in contemporary and traditional forms of artistic practice, including graphic design, media arts, indigenous studies, museum studies, and creative writing. The artwork produced at IAIA reflects the shared ideology of Indigenous communities' political, economic, environmental, and spiritual concerns. In 1996, IAIA opened the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in downtown Santa Fe. This space promotes the work of former and current students, working at the intersection of tradition and Native agency.⁴⁰ Some prominent Indigenous artists from the IAIA include the late T.C. Cannon (Kiowa/Caddo). Cannon attended IAIA after a tour in Vietnam and was a student of the legendary Indigenous artist Fritz Shoulder. An accomplished printmaker, Cannon explored the contradictions inherent in Indigenous identity by using contemporary backgrounds for historical figures (figure 3. Wikiart.org, 2023). Julie Buffalohead exhibited her artwork in IAIA's Museum of Contemporary Native Arts. Her work invites the viewer to enter an indigenous space where animals have mystical power and agency, and as a result, the entanglements of the discrimination and chaos of Indigenous life are explored (figure 4, iaia.edu, 2023). Cara Romero is a digital photographer; her work forcefully challenges the stereotypes of Indigenous people who reside in the imagination of the dominant society as creations of Hollywood (figure 5, cararomerphotgraphy.com, 2023). Interestingly, Andy Warhol is the only non-native artist who exhibited his work at the museum.

⁴⁰ Ibid

By the early 1980s, graffiti became wildly popular in New York and harnessed a form of political expression and social commentary. “As street art gained traction as a conceptual art movement, its central players were exhibited in prominent art galleries in New York.”⁴¹ One of the most important figures in the development of this genre was Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose “enigmatic and prolific SAMO tags quickly caught the attention of the public and were well-known to many long before they entered the commercial art world.”⁴² His work often expressed themes of anti-government, class struggle, and racism, and he quickly became one of the faces of the neo-expressionist artistic movement in America. Basquiat found the art world was one dominated by racism and exploitation. He was vocal about historical trauma on a personal and collective level, and his work was dedicated to bringing society’s problems to light. He called on society to reflect on his work and its meaning and, by extension, to reflect on themselves.⁴³ Many of his works depicted police brutality and the hypocrisy of black policemen (figure 6, artnews.com, 2023).

In addition to Basquiat, the 1980s saw many minority artists pushing the envelope and shining the spotlight on racism and historical trauma. “Transitioning from the civil rights movement of the ‘60s and the unapologetic pride of the ‘70s, art in the 1980s saw a significant shift in technique and creativity.”⁴⁴ The socioeconomic disparities endured

⁴¹ Shirley, Written By Andrew, and Andrew Shirley. “The Rise of Street Art.” Global Real Estate Consultants, September 22, 2021. <https://www.knightfrank.com/research/article/2021-09-22-the-rise-of-street-art#:~:text=Graffiti%20became%20wildly%20popular%20in,art%20galleries%20in%20New%20York>.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Aragon, Janice. “Jean-Michel Basquiat's Graffiti Combines Art with Social Justice.” Pow Wow News, March 1, 2021. <https://bhspowwownews.bufsd.org/10732/features/jean-michel-basquiat-combines-art-with-social-justice/>.

⁴⁴ OKLA JONES. “12 Black Visual Artists Prominent in the '80s Not Named Jean-Michel Basquiat.” Okayplayer, November 26, 2021. <https://www.okayplayer.com/culture/12-black-visual-artists-prominent-in-the-80s.html>.

by minorities during this time became painfully evident. Black and minority artists interrogated a country in transition “but still a country unwilling to move on from the prejudice that it was built upon.”⁴⁵ Some of these artists, including Carrie Mae Weems and Kerry James Marshall depicted both the beauty and pain of the Black experience.

During the 1990s, minority artists addressed historical trauma and racial injustices and explored how AIDS intersected with marginalized communities. Darrel Ellis, a black gay artist known for his conceptual portraits, transformed images of photographers into unique pieces of work. “Many of his paintings are based on photographs, including family pictures taken by his father, Thomas Ellis, who was killed by police shortly before Darrel was born.”⁴⁶ One seminal piece of Ellis’s work is a poster published by Visual AIDS in 1994 (figure 7, cooperhewitt.org, 2023). The poster is a self-portrait painted from a photograph taken by Robert Mapplethorpe. Ellis skillfully depicts his gentle, mournful expression. His crossed arms convey both vulnerability and strength. “Mapplethorpe, a hugely successful white photographer, often produced images of young men of color who were less economically and socially secure than himself. In creating this painting, Ellis took back Mapplethorpe’s portrait and made it his own. Ellis’s black-and-white brushwork preserves a crucial element of photography while making a gestural, deeply personal image.”⁴⁷ Ellis died of AIDS in 1992. Several years later, Indigenous artist, PrEPahHontoz created The Tipi Project. The two-spirit performance and pop artist helped redefine the HIV response through multidisciplinary arts. PrEPahHontoz blended indigenous sign

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Lupton, Ellen. “Darrel Ellis: Human Touch: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.” Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, July 13, 2022. <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2019/06/27/darrel-ellis-human-touch/>.

⁴⁷ Ibid

language, urban voguing, music, and tradition to bring attention to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention in an innovative way that honors Indigenous traditions in a modern world.

The infamous 1993 Whitney Biennial rocked the art world. While it was one of the most highly criticized exhibitions in history, it was also one of the first times a long-standing New York institution with a strong reputation “unapologetically addressed identity politics.”⁴⁸ The Whitney gave many unrepresented artists of color a seat at the table where they “covered issues like AIDS, gender, and the construction of sexuality and race during a politically charged environment not entirely unlike our current moment.” The curators decided to put a video of Rodney King's beating at the exhibition's entrance. While video recordings of police brutality are not foreign to us now with the presence of smartphones, back then, to have this violent video, which was not seen as a piece of art by any means, at the front of this exhibition was a bold political statement. This exhibition also included the work of artist Daniel Martinez, who created admission buttons that stated, “I CAN'T IMAGINE EVER WANTING TO BE WHITE”⁴⁹ (figure 8, whitney.org, 2023). Following suit in 1994, the exhibition, *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, (curated by Thelma Golden) marked the effective end of visual culture's being mainly white, Western, straight, and male.⁵⁰

For the first time, biography, history, the plight of the marginalized, institutional politics, context, sociologies, anthropologies, and privilege have all been recognized as “forms,” “genres,” and “materials” in art. Possibly the core materials. That shift put the artistic self front and center, making it perhaps the primary carrier of artistic content since the 1990s.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Amelia Ames, “Can the Whitney Biennial Ever Live up to Its Controversial, Politically-Charged 1993 Exhibition?,” Artspace, March 13, 2017, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/in_focus/the-whitney-biennial-1993-the-role-of-institutions-in-a-turbulent-society-54620.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Jerry Saltz, Rachel Corbett. “The Reviled Identity Politics Show That Forever Changed Art.” Vulture, April 21, 2016. <https://www.vulture.com/2016/04/identity-politics-that-forever-changed-art.html>.

⁵¹ Ibid

The Biennial artists were diverse; black, white, men, women, gay and straight. Together they created a cohesive vision of Black manhood that was both negative and positive. They challenged preconceptions “often poignantly, sometimes angrily and painfully, with misconceptions.”⁵² The exhibition, curated by Thelma Golden, was unapologetic, graphic and made no attempt to “conceal its social engagement.”⁵³ It was unsurprisingly received with cutting disapproval, primarily by white male art critics, because it challenged the anti-political “correctness.” Many of these critics could not appreciate that the art exhibited maintained a highly inventive, formal, and esthetic standard while challenging the status quo, demanding representation, dismantling stereotypes, and seeking truth and justice.⁵⁴ The Whitney Biennial provided a venue for artists looking for new ways to speak to new audiences who couldn’t get their voices heard or work seen. It aggressively interrogated the racist tradition of stereotype and caricature, “omnipresent in both high and popular art but most widely visible in the production of mass culture that has characterized the representation of the black male in modern times.”⁵⁵

The '90s allowed the door to open for minority artists. This was the decade responsible for these artists to immerse themselves in the challenges and opportunities of cultivating black and indigenous audiences, interrogating historical trauma, and dismantling historically white institutions. However, some Black artists did not see identity politics as the best route to take and strove to cultivate an audience and challenge

⁵² Nochlin, Linda. “From the Archives: Linda Nochlin on Black Male.” ARTnews.com. ARTnews.com, February 7, 2017. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/from-the-archive-linda-nochlin-on-black-male-63243/>.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

historically white institutions from a different angle. Amy Sherald, a Baltimore-based painter, paints black subjects in grayscale. Sherald became prominent in 2013 with her piece *Miss Everything (Unsuppressed Deliverance)* (figure 9, [ncartmuseum.org](https://www.nga.gov/artists/amy-sherald), 2023), which depicts a young girl with gray skin against a nondescript and blue-red background. Sherald contends that painting black subjects is a political statement in and of itself, especially when hanging on museum or institution walls. “I knew I didn’t want the work to be marginalized any further, and I didn’t want the conversation to be solely about identity or politics — our images deserve more than that.”⁵⁶ Sherald was often asked by white collectors if she would paint white people. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Sherald responded to this question. “It’s interesting to me because it shows me they recognize the absence of themselves in a room full of my paintings but don’t recognize the absence of us in the greater narrative. I always tell them, You should go look at a history book and get back to me. Thumb through and take note of how many times you see something that looks like this, and then let’s have another conversation.”⁵⁷ Michael R. Jackson, a New York-based playwright, joined Sherald in confronting the white gaze. Jackson explains that his work has always been informed by his black experience. He understood how whiteness shaped the world his blackness lived in but did not cater to it.⁵⁸ In 2019, Jackson produced the musical *A Strange Loop*, which had a limited run at Playwrights Horizons, and in 2020 won a Pulitzer Prize in drama. The protagonist, a black queer man is writing a musical about a black queer man, who is writing a musical about a black queer man ad infinitum. Jackson explains he constructed the play in that manner

⁵⁶ “Nine Black Artists and Cultural Leaders on Seeing and Being Seen.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, June 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/t-magazine/black-artists-white-gaze.html>.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

so he could interrogate a black man's inferiority without sacrificing him to the trauma of slavery or police violence. "I wanted to capture the everyday misery of being a self. For some, this structure is about confronting the white gaze. For me, it's about what it's been since I first began writing stories: being myself."⁵⁹

Tschabalala Self, a Connecticut-based painter, also challenges the white gaze by challenging the falsehoods associated with black people. Self grew up in Harlem, and her subjects are informed by her experiences there. When confronting the white gaze and the historical trauma suffered by her community, Self creates charismatic and complex characters that function as true subjects instead of objects (figure 10, presenhuber.com, 2023), an important distinction. As a black artist painting black bodies and experiences, Self explains:

I'm a descendant of slaves in this country, so it's unfathomable that people could come to me, with glee, to ask if I'm excited about seeing my work, which shows black figures and bodies, being auctioned. That shows me that people have no real understanding of black American history, and they don't understand anything about me and the specificity of my ethnicity as a black person in America. It's over their heads.⁶⁰

In an article in The New York Times, Self mentions that she will never see her work at auction because of the lack of benefits from secondary sales. She also finds the auction house process "uncomfortably reminiscent of the institution of slavery."⁶¹ This position held by Self showcases the presence of psychological triggers regarding historical trauma in the art market. Self, Sherald, and Jackson join other minority artists who confronted the

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Pogrebin, Robin. "With New Show, Tschabalala Self Explores Black American Identity." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 2, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/02/arts/design/tschabalala-self-black-identity.html>.

white gaze during this period. Their work cultivates black audiences while dismantling historically white institutions. They help the black community heal while holding white people accountable for the past, present, and future.

LA-based Indigenous artists were also part of the street art movement. Votan Henriquez has been committed to educating children about indigenous people, their heritage, and their legacy, all of which have been virtually omitted from history books. Henriquez is of Mayan and Nahua descent and blends his knowledge of his ancestry, his experience of graphic design and art, and his awareness of the issues facing Indigenous people to create street art that blends contemporary art techniques with old Mayan symbology to make a statement (figure 11, lifeandsoulmagazine.com, 2023).

In response to the recent global pandemic, political divisiveness, and uprisings calling for justice such as the Black Lives Matter movement, Alison Amick, Curator and Collections Manager at Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, curated an exhibit entitled *Trauma and Loss, Reflection and Hope*, May 28–November 28, 2021 in Chicago. The exhibit reflected shared experiences of suffering and loss with the possibility of healing and hope. “It is our hope to provide a space for each of us to be present, to sit with thoughts and emotions, to contemplate works of art, or to be inspired or fortified by the narratives of those who made them.”⁶² The pieces in the exhibit were prompted out of personal necessity to process historical trauma and grief.

Together, the distinct works of the exhibition tell us more about trauma, loss and hope than they would apart. These works make it clear that the cries against violence and the desire for justice are not singular but are constructed with many

⁶² Intuit. “Trauma and Loss, Reflection and Hope: Selections from the Collection.” Intuit, February 22, 2022. <https://www.art.org/trauma-and-loss-reflection-and-hope/>.

materials and told from disparate perspectives. Each artist's attempt to process and wrestle with their trauma or loss gives viewers the opportunity to confront their own. As a collective, they challenge the current world and call out for necessary hope and change.⁶³

Two works by Malcah Zeldis bring the exhibition's themes into the present. Her paintings *"The Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr."* (figure 12, art.org, 2023) and *"Amadou Diallo"* (figure 13, art.org, 2023), depict the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the 1999 police killing of Amadou Diallo, a twenty-three-year-old Guinean immigrant, shot at forty-one times by police. The pieces painted in bold, primary colors depict these violent acts with everyday happenings, a setting sun, and an idyllic landscape as if nothing violent or unusual is happening. This exhibit challenges the viewer to confront racial violence while encouraging dialogue in hopes of understanding and healing. It is an example of how art, created through the lens of historical trauma, can effectively respond to social and political upheaval and interrogate the consequences of systemic racism.

Indigenous artists also responded to the pandemic. Because COVID decimated Indigenous communities, artists had to find alternative ways to showcase their art. Douglas Miles, an Indigenous artist living in a multi-generational household on the San Carlos Apache Nation in Arizona, changed the direction of his art from tangible projects to digital work such as photography, short videos, and film projects. His work sheds light on his Indigenous heritage through a contemporary, cutting-edge lens. In his words, it captures "Indigenous reality, not romanticism, triumph, not tragedy."⁶⁴

⁶³ Natzke, Josepha. "The Important Complexity of Hope: A Review of Trauma and Loss, Reflection and Hope at Intuit: Newcity Art the Important Complexity of Hope: A Review of Trauma and Loss, Reflection and Hope at Intuit." Newcity Art, June 12, 2021. <https://art.newcity.com/2021/06/18/the-important-complexity-of-hope-a-review-of-trauma-and-loss-reflection-and-hope-at-intuit/>.

⁶⁴ Douglas Miles. Accessed February 12, 2023. <https://www.douglasmiles.co/about/>.

In 2021, Andre Henderson, an Atlanta, Georgia-based Fine artist and apparel designer, created two series of works, entitled “*The Journey*” (figure 14, andre-henderson.com, 2023) and “*Clotilda: The Final Journey*” (figure 15, andre-henderson.com, 2023), for an exhibition at Gallery 72 in Atlanta sponsored by the City of Atlanta Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs. “*The Journey*,” hung in one gallery, honors all of the enslaved Africans. “*Clotilda: The Final Journey*,” which honors the last slave ship to touch American shores in 1860, was placed in the corridor next door for an interactive experience. This exhibition is an example of how art interrogates historical trauma and how it can bring a community together and help it heal from decades of injustice, discrimination, and systemic racism.

In 2019, archaeologist James Delgado of Search Inc. found the burned wreckage of the Clotilda in a Mobile, Alabama Bay near the old homestead of Timothy Meaher, a wealthy landowner who illegally imported 110 young men, women, and children on the Clotilda.⁶⁵ Importing slaves had been illegal since 1808, but Meaher, a wealthy landowner, wagered “he could smuggle a cargo of Africans into Mobile Bay under the nose of federal officials.”⁶⁶ After unloading the slaves, Meaher burned the ship in the Bay, and the Clotilda remained hidden for the next 160 years. This event was a painful secret. Descendants did not speak of how their ancestors arrived for fear of lynching. They survived together in a small area called Africatown. They suffered extreme poverty and discrimination. Many have developed various forms of cancer resulting from a paper mill

⁶⁵ Joel K. Bourne, Jr. “Exclusive: ‘Last American Slave Ship’ Discovered in Alabama.” Culture. National Geographic, May 3, 2021 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/clotilda-the-last-american-slave-ship-found-in-alabama>

⁶⁶ Ibid

built on the graves of their ancestors. The discovery of the Clotilda and Andre Henderson's work has fostered healing in a community suffering from decades of historical trauma. It has given them a voice, the power to speak their truth, and to heal from the horrible secret they have carried for decades. Descendants of Timothy Meaher, the man responsible for the illegal enslavement of the 110 black people, were invited and attended the exhibition and participated in a ceremony celebrating the discovery of the Clotilda. This was a moment of healing for the oppressed and the oppressor. It is the perfect example of how art can act as a catalyst to educate the oppressor and heal the oppressed.

The following year, the College of Saint Benedict, Saint Johns in Minnesota, hosted the exhibit *Indigenous Survivance*, centered around healing the Indigenous community. The College was in the process of reckoning that The Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict were involved in four Indigenous boarding schools. Though any connection to those boarding schools was severed decades ago, the impact of being involved prompted the school to issue a formal apology for its role in that history. The exhibit featured Indigenous artists whose work interrogated Indigenous historical trauma. One particularly moving piece, *Cultural Crucifixion* by artist Steve Premo (figure 16, csbsju.edu, 2023), depicts an Indigenous man on a cross, being stabbed by a monk with a spear. In the background of the left side of the painting is another Indigenous man dressed in a suit and tie, adjusting a noose around his neck. On the other side of the image, Jesus is fleeing the scene. Premo is one of five Indigenous artists participating in this exhibit intended to provide healing for the Indigenous community and a reckoning for the college.

However, not all exhibitions depicting historical trauma encourage healing. In 2017, LA-based artist Sam Durant, a cis-gendered white man, caused controversy when his piece *Scaffold* was displayed at the Walker Art Center's sculpture park in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The piece listed gallows used in various executions in American history and is described by Durant "as a meditation on capital punishment in America."⁶⁷ The exhibition was immediately protested by members of the Dakota community. In 1862, thirty-eight indigenous men convicted of participating in the Dakota war, also known as the Sioux Uprising, were hung in Mankato, not far from the installation site of *Scaffold*. This was the largest mass execution in American history. Durant did not include the Dakota gallows, and the community was adamant his appropriation of cultural objects was insensitive. Durant made no attempt to communicate his plan to the Dakota community, who contended it was not his story to tell. By failing to include those most affected by his work, he left the community questioning what constitutes art. Who gets to tell which stories, and at what point does art about historical violence reinstate that violence? This prompted a discussion on what guiding principles are necessary to respect painful feelings arising from art and how it is essential to ensure equity in art that examines that historical trauma.

In her book, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, Art Critic Jennifer Doyle explores the damage when controversial art addressing historical trauma dispossesses the ones who have lived it. Doyle examines how personal feelings are the framework for understanding the dynamics during an art controversy. She insists

⁶⁷ "Explore Brown University." "It's Only Art": How Art Controversy over Cultural Appropriation and Historical Trauma Can Move Toward a More Ethical Public Humanities | Public Humanities | Brown University. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://www.brown.edu/academics/public-humanities/blog/%E2%80%99Cit%E2%80%99s-only-art%E2%80%9D-how-art-controversy-over-cultural-appropriation-and-historical-trauma-can-move>.

that emotional response to controversial art must be considered in the context of historical trauma, and artists must be sensitive to intergenerational inheritance expressed in work. Art that interrogates historical trauma is not “just art”; it is art that has real-world impact. Doyle contends the art world must be held accountable. It cannot neglect the harm and traumatization of audiences whose political stake in art “is erased by the claim that art does not have political stakes.”⁶⁸ The Dakota community contends Durant unwittingly exploited their historical trauma to his financial and professional benefit. This controversy demonstrates how artists must be sensitive to cultural appropriation and recognize the importance of including those whose stories are being told. Today, art interrogating historical trauma is more important than ever as segments of our country's population refuse to acknowledge our racist history. Critical Race Theory is challenged by institutions, politicians, and the privileged white. CRT advances the idea “that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies.”⁶⁹ Books are being banned, and curriculums are ordered to leave out essential parts of our turbulent history. Accordingly, art plays a critical role in advancing the truth. It has the ability to shine a light on this truth and hold the oppressor accountable not only for past injustices but daily ongoing race-based stressors. It challenges the status quo by engaging in dominant discourse and questions existing ideologies. When art interrogates historical trauma, it challenges the viewer to confront racial, ethnic, and social injustice. It prompts us to ask how we can be better by facing the past, individually and collectively. As the world

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Sawchuk, Stephen. “What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It under Attack?” Education Week. Education Week, January 6, 2023. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>.

struggles to come to terms with the atrocities of racial violence, these questions are contentious and uncomfortable. Still, art, by its very nature, can be a catalyst for meaningful dialogue.

Chapter 3: Black Historical Trauma

Black Americans not only bear the burden of deeply rooted historical trauma but must confront raced-based stressors on a daily basis. Discrimination, micro-aggression, poverty, violence, mental health issues, and substance abuse plague Black communities as they struggle to reconcile the past. Institutionalized racism and oppression have resulted in multigenerational adaptive behavior. These behaviors tend to be harmful and destructive and perpetuate damaging cycles. “The sign of ultimate oppression working is when the oppressor can take away his hands, stand back and say look at what they’re doing to themselves.”⁷⁰ We see this happening in our society today. Black individuals, families, and communities are suffering not only at the hands of oppressors but also from the multigenerational adaptive behavior that has caused self-inflicted violence, aggression, and internalized oppression. These internalized feelings and experiences have become part of the cumulative experience of black historical trauma. Looking at these experiences alongside Slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and Segregation, together they represent the history of “sustained community disturbance and devastation.” Before the further exploration of Black history and the individual and collective suffering, it is imperative to note that providing this insight is not intended to serve as a history lesson but serve as a way to demonstrate how the patterns of systemic racism perpetuates historical trauma.

⁷⁰ “Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing.” UMN Extension. Accessed January 10, 2023. <https://extension.umn.edu/trauma-and-healing/historical-trauma-and-cultural-healing>.

It is crucial to examine how and when this construct of race began, and what led to the initial enslavement of Africans that ultimately became responsible for the racial hierarchy we are familiar with today. The definition of race, as defined today, is very different from its origin. It was previously used to identify people with kinship or group connections. The enlightenment period marshaled in the definition of race that we are familiar with that is based on physical traits, appearance, and characteristics. This new definition morphed into a hierarchy, putting white men at the top and black Africans (or of black African descent) at the bottom. “The idea that white people were inherently smarter, more capable, and more human than nonwhite people became accepted worldwide.”⁷¹ These scientific classifications and groupings created by lead thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, became the justification for the enslavement of Africans who were seen as savages that needed to be kept in bondage. This later caused their subsequent descendants to be seen as weak, cowardly, and incapable of achieving the ideal qualities of courage, morality, and civility. In the early 17th century, as the North American colonies grew, white European settlers looked to replace indentured servants with a free, more plentiful labor source, enslaved Africans. The first African slaves were kidnapped from Central Africa, or modern-day Angola, and arrived in the United States in 1619. This enslavement marks the beginning of race-based bondage and the historical trauma inflicted upon African American people. While impossible to ascertain definitive numbers, historians have estimated that close to 7

⁷¹ Natasha Phelps. Racism as a public health emergency. Hennepin lawyer: Racism as a Public Health Emergency. Accessed January 11, 2023. <https://www.mnbar.org/hennepin-county-bar-association/resources/hennepin-lawyer/articles/2021/04/30/racism-as-a-public-health-emergency>.

million people were enslaved and brought to the New World in the 18th Century⁷². Still licking their wounds from the American Revolution, many colonists, particularly those in the North who did not need slaves to support their economy, likened slavery to their oppression by the British Monarchy. While George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both slaveholders in Virginia, were sensitive to the concept of oppression, they nonetheless facilitated the Constitution, which guaranteed the right to “repossess any person held to service of labor,” an undeniable euphemism for slavery. With the rise of the cotton industry in 1793, there was increased demand for slaves in the south.⁷³ With this demand came the prospect of slave rebellion and escape, and in that same year, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, making it a crime to help an enslaved person escape. While the number of abolitionists was growing in the north, this Act “helped enshrine and legitimize slavery as an enduring American institution.”⁷⁴

While deeply rooted and legitimized, there were people who rebelled. In 1831, Nat Turner, a slave born on a small plantation in Virginia, instigated a revolt. He and a group of recruited slaves killed his owners, and approximately 60 more people before being overwhelmed by state militia forces. While Turner escaped and spent six weeks on the run, he was eventually found and hanged.⁷⁵ This revolt sparked a wave of fear and anxiety throughout the south. Supporters of slavery used Turner as “evidence that Black people were inherently inferior barbarians requiring an institution such as slavery to discipline

⁷² History.com Editors. “Black History Milestones: Timeline.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Rise of the Cotton Industry, 1793.” SamePassage, February 16, 2021. <https://samepassage.org/rise-of-the-cotton-industry-1793/>.

⁷⁵ History.com Editors. “Black History Milestones: Timeline.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>

them.”⁷⁶ However, the abolitionist movement in the North strengthened. In the late 18th century, black and white abolitionists established the Underground Railroad, a network of escape routes and safe houses that helped Harriet Tubman, who would later go on to spearhead the network, escape. Another slave that participated in the Underground Railroad was Frederick Douglass. His participation was perhaps his first and most sustained form of activism. A revolutionist and leader in the abolitionist movement, Douglass gained a reputation as a public speaker and traveled around the North and Midwest, speaking about the injustice of slavery. On the 76th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, he addressed a crowd in Rochester, New York. Douglass did not use this opportunity to celebrate the successes of the United States; rather, he used it as an opportunity to fight for the equality of the African American community. He addressed the racial hierarchy established during the 17th Century and how African Americans have proved they are capable and deserving of manhood despite being placed in an inferior position.⁷⁷ While perhaps unknowingly, Douglass was addressing the historical trauma resulting from slavery and the depiction of blacks as inferior. Even after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation in 1861, blacks endured unimaginable hate, discrimination, and racial stereotypes. Though the Union victory in the Civil war gave nearly 4 million slaves their freedom, and the 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery, blacks were still confronting the demons of historical trauma, and new injustices continued to play out, creating new trauma for future generations. Eventually, the forces of white supremacy regained control, and the first

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ BlackPast, contributed by: “(1852) Frederick Douglass, ‘What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July’ •.” (1852) Frederick Douglass, “What, To The Slave, Is The Fourth Of July” •, August 24, 2020.

segregation laws enacted by southern state legislatures, known as the Jim Crow laws, were passed. Named after a white actor, who often performed in blackface, Jim Crow became a derogatory term for blacks in the post-Reconstructionist south.⁷⁸ In 1896, the Supreme Court issued a verdict in Plessy v. Ferguson that upheld a Louisiana law that required the segregation of passengers on railroad cars. “By asserting that the equal protection clause was not violated as long as reasonably equal conditions were provided to both groups, the Court established the “separate but equal” doctrine that would thereafter be used for assessing the constitutionality of racial segregation laws”. This “separate but equal” doctrine dictated the lives of Blacks until 1954 when the Supreme Court reversed its decision in Brown v. Board of Education. In that decision, the Court held that separate public educational facilities were “inherently unequal.” This meant that the Jim Crow laws imposed by Southern states were now unconstitutional. While this was seemingly a step forward for Black communities, many whites, particularly those in positions of power, denounced the law and unleashed even more hate against the black community.

In 1955, two significant events happened that continued to trigger strong emotions and force the black community to face the consequences of historical trauma. In August of that year, Emmet Till, a 14-year-old black boy who allegedly whistled at a white woman, was dragged from his uncle's home in Money, Mississippi, beaten, shot, and thrown into the Tallahatchie River with a large metal fan tied to his neck with barbed wire (figure 18. umbc.edu, 2023). The men responsible for the murder were acquitted of all charges by

⁷⁸ History.com Editors. “Black History Milestones: Timeline.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>

an all-white, all-male jury.⁷⁹ Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley, The American educator, activist, and mother of Emmett, insisted on an open casket and for a photo of his mutilated body to be released to the public (figure 19. umbc.edu, 2023). Although this was a time of great loss, mourning, and anger, she wanted to “Let the people see what I’ve seen.”⁸⁰ By using the power of imagery, Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley used this traumatic event to force the world to look at his body and “reckon with the brutality of American racism” that took her 14-year-old son away from her.⁸¹ Four months later, in Montgomery, Alabama, while riding a city bus, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man. Park’s refusal prompted Martin Luther King, then a young, relatively unknown pastor, to facilitate a boycott of Montgomery’s municipal bus company. This boycott ultimately resulted in a Supreme Court decision that declared the bus company’s segregation seating policy unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. Parks later explained, “I had been pushed as far as I could stand to be pushed. I had decided that I would have to know once and for all what rights I had as a human being and a citizen”.⁸² This sentiment is felt today as blacks continue to question their rights in the face of extreme racial unrest.

The 1950s continued to see racial unrest and discrimination. In 1957, after the federal court ordered the desegregation of Central High School located in Little Rock, Arkansas, the Governor, Orval Faubus, thumbed his nose at this ruling and ordered the

⁷⁹ “Emmett Till.” FBI. FBI, May 18, 2016. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/emmett-till>.

⁸⁰ Photo, TIME. “The Photo That Changed America’s Civil Rights Movement.” Time. Time, July 10, 2016. <https://time.com/4399793/emmett-till-civil-rights-photography/>.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² “Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.” Bill of Rights Institute. Accessed January 13, 2023. <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/rosa-parks-martin-luther-king-jr-and-the-montgomery-bus-boycott>.

state's National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering the school. He was later forced to call off the Guard, but only after a tense standoff between the students, the Guard, and an intense white mob. "For millions of viewers throughout the country, the unforgettable images provided a vivid contrast between the angry forces of white supremacy and the quiet, dignified resistance of African American students" (figure 20. nbcnews.com, 2023).⁸³ In 1958, Mildred and Richard Loving, an interracial married couple, were pulled from their bed at 2 am on July 11, 1958, and taken to jail for violating a Virginia law that prohibited interracial marriage. They were ultimately given a choice, spend 25 years in prison or leave the state of Virginia. These are just the instances that resulted in public attention. Every day blacks encounter, and continue to encounter, similar incidents of racism, discrimination, and hate that are not documented but have become part of our racist, cultural fiber, contributing to the cycle of historical trauma experienced by subsequent generations of the black community.

The Civil Rights movement gained momentum in the 1960s. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organized sit-ins, and civil rights leader James Farmer founded Freedom rides to improve race relations. Freedom riders were attacked outside of Alabama, and one bus was firebombed. Although Robert Kennedy ordered the State Highway Patrol to escort the freedom riders so they could continue their journey to Montgomery, once there, they were met with violence and resistance. Martin Luther King facilitated marches and speeches aimed at inspiring justice and racial harmony, yet the violence against Blacks continued. After the federal government ordered the integration of Alabama's school system in 1963, white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist

⁸³ History.com Editors. "Black History Milestones: Timeline." History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>

Church, a key civil rights meeting place in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four black girls and injuring more than 20 others. The bombing was a “clear act of racial hatred.” In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, giving the federal government power to protect against discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin. It established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, ensuring equal treatment of minorities in the workplace and guaranteeing equal voting rights.⁸⁴ Yet, the violence continued despite these laws, or perhaps in spite of them.

In February of 1965, Alabama State Troopers shot a young black man who was demonstrating against social injustice and registering black voters. A massive March from Selma to Montgomery was organized in response to this violent act. John Lewis, then a 25-year-old activist, led nearly 600 Marchers who were blocked and attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge outside of Selma.⁸⁵ These peaceful Marchers were beaten with whips and nightsticks and sprayed with teargas. This brutal, dehumanizing attack, known as Bloody Sunday, prompted another march; this time, marchers were joined by Martin Luther King. This march was also interrupted as state troopers aggressively blocked their path. Later that night, a group of white supremacists beat and killed James Reeb, a young white minister who participated in the march.⁸⁶ We still see this cycle of peaceful protests

⁸⁴ “Civil Rights Act (1964).” National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act#:~:text=This%20act%2C%20signed%20into%20law,civil%20rights%20legislation%20since%20Reconstruction.>

⁸⁵ Madeo. “Mar. 7, 1965: Alabama Law Enforcement Attacked Civil Rights Activists on 'Bloody Sunday' in Selma.” Home. Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/mar/7.>

⁸⁶ History.com Editors. “Black History Milestones: Timeline.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>

turning into a scene of dehumanization and violence in our streets today. This repetition of these same events adds to the cycle of trauma experienced by the black community.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated by James Earl Ray on a hotel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. King's death perpetuated the problems between white and Black Americans. Consequently, many blacks resisted the idea of nonviolent protest, deeming it useless, and several days of riots, burning, and looting ensued. While the world mourned King's death, it was memorialized in the historical trauma of the black community.

From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, many blacks were relegated to inner city "ghettos." During this time, welfare recipients were prohibited from having an adult male in the home. In 1960 22% of African American children lived with single parents. In 1968, rose to 31.4%.⁸⁷ In the mid-1980s, drugs, specifically crack cocaine, crime, and family disintegration took a heavy toll on inner-city black communities. This crisis produced an "institutionalized generation" wherein Blacks became dependent on social services and enrichment services outside the family dynamic.⁸⁸ Many, although not all, developed coping mechanisms that did not foster self-sufficiency, accountability, or responsibility. This created feelings of inferiority and a dependent culture. Internalized oppression and learned helplessness plagued communities.⁸⁹ These were direct consequences of historical trauma and our broken political systems that were built on a foundation of white supremacy and racist ideologies.

⁸⁷ Brandon Jones M.A. Psychotherapist and Behavioral Health Consultant. *Legacy of Trauma: Context of the African American Existence*, n.d.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

By the late 1990s, historical trauma took on a new name for the black community, the “War on Drugs.” In 1980, fewer than 300,000 people were in prison; by 2000, there were over 1 million incarcerated, not because of changes in the level or nature of crime itself, but because of the “War on Drugs” and associated sentencing practices.⁹⁰ A disproportionate number of those incarcerated were black. In their article *Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System*, Lawrence D. Bobo, Dean of Social Science at Harvard University, and Victor Thompson, Professor of Sociology at Rider University, contends that in 2004, law enforcement practices and policies were unfair by design and resulted in the vastly disproportionate incarceration of African Americans.⁹¹ Moreover, they argued these practices and policies threatened the “legitimacy and claim to fairness that should be a hallmark of legal institutions in a democratic society. A legal system seen as illegitimate is a system likely to face suspicion, guardedness, and even open resistance and challenge from important segments of the citizenry”⁹² In other words, the black community has reason to distrust the legal system.

While federal, state, and local mandates pursued a “War on Drugs,” local police departments were under pressure to show progress. The quickest way to show results (for example, arrests) is to enhance policing and arrest in already disadvantaged neighborhoods, which are disproportionately poor and black. The predictable outcome is a rise in black arrests and incarceration. Indeed, the end result has been a rising disproportion of black-to-white in jails and prisons. In 2004, for example, black males constituted 43.3 percent of those incarcerated in state, federal, and local prisons or jails, though only 13 percent of the total population. Whites, on the other hand, represented 35.7 percent of the male inmate population in 2004, well under 75 percent of the total male population.⁹³

⁹⁰ Bobo, Lawrence D., and Victor Thompson. “Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System.” *Social Research* 73, no. 2 (2006): 445–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971832>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid

The racialized mass incarceration of blacks resulting from the War on Drugs had negative reverberating social effects that reached beyond the fact of imprisonment. Families were fractionalized, dependency and internalized oppression were dominant, and children were displaced.

Along with this distrust the black community felt toward the legal system, there was a large amount of distrust felt within the healthcare system; which is specifically felt by black mothers and children. In 2017 a study spearheaded by Maeve E Wallace entitled "Look at the Whole Me": A Mixed-Methods Examination of Black Infant Mortality in the US through Women's Lived Experiences and Community Context, serves as another example of how our current systems that are still plagued by deeply rooted white supremacy are failing the black community. This study highlights the United States healthcare system, specifically the mortality rates of black infants. The findings concluded that the "non-Hispanic Black infant mortality rate exceeds the rate among non-Hispanic Whites by more than two-fold." During this study, eighteen black women were interviewed and discussed their experiences of infant loss. As mentioned by Wallace, there were many commonalities among these women "individual experiences (trauma, grieving and counseling; criminalization); negative interactions with healthcare providers and the healthcare system; and broader contextual factors." To conduct their research, they used linked live birth-infant death records from 2010-2013 in every statistical city in the United States. "Poisson regression examined how contextual indicators of population health, socioeconomic conditions of the Black population, and features of the communities in which they live were associated with Black infant mortality and inequity in Black-White

infant mortality” The findings of this study displayed that in metropolitan areas with poor “social, economic, and environmental conditions, Black infant mortality rates were on average 1.24 times higher than rates in areas where conditions were better (95% CI = 1.16, 1.32). These findings highlight how our healthcare systems are actively failing black mothers and children and are therefore responsible for traumas experienced both mentally and physically.

In 2020, COVID-19 and the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police officers became salient for Black Americans and cannot be divorced from past historical traumas. COVID exposed the health inequalities in America.⁹⁴

In Chicago alone, black residents [made] up more than half of all cases and about 70 percent of those who’ve died of the disease. That’s despite African Americans only making up about 30 percent of the city’s population. The barriers and biases that laid the groundwork for African Americans to be potentially harder hit in this crisis have been in place for generations.⁹⁵

David Willaims, a professor of public health at Harvard University, contends black communities were at greater risk for COVID and COVID-related deaths because of the social conditions created in this country. “When you look at [COVID-19] that particularly is virulent for persons who have higher rates of disease, that’s exactly the picture of African Americans. But it’s not their genes. It’s the social conditions that we have created. I hope this is a wake-up call for America.”⁹⁶ COVID-19 health disparities also triggered

⁹⁴ Akinyemi, A.A. Historical trauma compounds experiences of racial injustice. *Nat Hum Behav* 6, 1183 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01435-2>

⁹⁵ Calma, Justine. “America Set up Black Communities to Be Harder Hit by Covid-19.” *The Verge*. The Verge, April 8, 2020. <https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/8/21213974/african-americans-covid-19-coronavirus-race-disparities>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

historical trauma for many Black Americans. From 1932 to 1972, the Tuskegee syphilis study was conducted, during which Black men were deprived of effective care for syphilis.

Similarly, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were reminiscent of slave patrols — armed and unarmed white civilians permitted by law to perpetrate violence against Black people.⁹⁷ Many Black Americans were enraged but, at the same time, unsurprised by the events of 2020, given the injustices they have historically suffered in the US healthcare and criminal justice systems. This enragement prompted momentum in The Black Lives Matter Movement.

While The Black Matter Movement was first organized in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of killing Trayvon Martin and unarmed 17-year-old boy, the circulation of videos depicting the unjustified killing of George Floyd, reinvigorated cries of injustice his death and the deaths of so many African Americans, such as Tanisha Anderson, Rekia Boyd, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Eric Garner and India Kager.⁹⁸ Protests and unrest erupted in at least 140 cities across the United States. Tens of thousands of people swarmed the streets to express their outrage. Incidents of looting and vandalism required the National Guard to be activated in at least 21 states.⁹⁹

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the events outlined above are not intended to provide a history lesson or a timeline of the black experience in America. They are provided to showcase how the patterns of systemic racism that have been built into our nation's educational, political, healthcare, and law enforcement systems perpetuate

⁹⁷ Akinyemi, A.A.

⁹⁸ Heaney, Michael T. "PROTEST AT THE CENTER OF AMERICAN POLITICS." *Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 2 (2020): 195–208. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26939975>.

⁹⁹ Taylor, Derrick Bryson. "George Floyd Protests: A Timeline." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, May 30, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-protests-timeline.html>.

the historical trauma experienced by the black community. One cannot heal from the past if it is the past, present, and future. Indeed, for black Americans, historical trauma is not just in the past; it plays out daily, triggering “emotional and physiological responses that can be impossible to control and extremely difficult to cope with.”¹⁰⁰ We need only rub the underbelly of society to know racism will not go away. However, empowering marginalized communities by recognizing that historical trauma is a problem for which we are all responsible may be an effective start. Understanding, acknowledging, and engaging in dominant discourse and existing ideologies is critical for our nation's health. We must challenge racial, ethnic, and social injustice and help Black communities foster a strong cultural identity emblematic of public resiliency, affiliation, and unification. Art can be a catalyst for healing and understanding. Indeed, as will be demonstrated below, we will see how it can bring marginalized communities together in the face of adversity and effectively respond to social and political upheaval.

¹⁰⁰ Kyaien O. Conner Ph.D “Why Historical Trauma Is Critical to Understanding Black Mental Health,” *Psychology Today* (Sussex Publishers, October 1, 2020).

Chapter 4 Black Contemporary Artists' Interrogating Historical Trauma

This chapter focuses on the work of both British and US black contemporary artists. Specifically, it will address Carl Robert Pope's 1994 installation *"Some of the Greatest Hits of the New York City Police Department: A Celebration of Meritorious Achievement in Community"*, British based artist Barbara Walker's *Untitled* mixed-media from her 2006-2009 collection *Louder Than Words*, and Arthur Jafa's 2016 seven minute and thirty second film *"Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death."* While we have focused on the history of collective and individual historical trauma in the United States, it is important to note that these events of historical trauma and the work that artists are doing is not unique to the United States. Black artists from all over the world are addressing the physical and psychological suffering the black community has and continues to endure due to white supremacist ideologies. Therefore, exploring the work of Barbara Walker is imperative and emphasizes that black trauma extends beyond the borders of the United States. The works of these three artists are actively engaging in a mix of mediums such as charcoal, pencil and paint along with techniques such as sculpture and videography, to confront racial, ethnic, and social injustices and draw attention to breaking the cycles of historical trauma. Their works emphasize how in order to change the trajectory of our future, we must interrogate our racist history that is built into our nation's current law enforcement, as well as our political, healthcare, and educational systems and confront the traumatic effects it has and continues to have on the Black community.

The social conditions of the black community is extremely important to the contemporary artist Carl Robert Pope. While photography and cinema are the two mediums Pope primarily works in, he also creates powerful installation pieces which he uses as a catalyst for challenging racial injustice. Born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1961, Pope attended the University of Southern Illinois, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in cinema and photography. Through his own visual language, Pope addresses issues of the present that have manifested in society due to deeply rooted historical trauma. Police brutality is one of them, and it is explicitly represented in his 1994 installation *"Some of the Greatest Hits of the New York City Police Department: A Celebration of Meritorious Achievement in Community"* (figure 21, whitney.org, 2023). What catapulted Pope into this piece was the fellowship he received from the Guggenheim in 1993. He used it to look into the NYPD records of violent interactions with black residents. Documented incidents, such as the shooting of Cynthia Scott in 1963, the Watts Riots of 1965, and the beating of Rodney King in 1991, served as motivation for creating this installation that sheds light on even more victims of police brutality.¹⁰¹

As mentioned by Pope in an interview with Phillip Barcio from Hyperallergic, "A lot of what I do is based on experimentation, on how it's going to be perceived. It's like that African-American thing of call and response."¹⁰² Throughout his work the call he is creating is inspired by his own reactions to the world around him "but then I'm looking at the responses that I'm receiving to further anything else that I'm doing."¹⁰³ Pope does just

¹⁰¹The brutal murder of Cynthia Scott · Detroit under fire: Police violence, crime politics, and the struggle for racial justice in the Civil Rights Era · Omeka Beta Service. Accessed February 11, 2023.

¹⁰² Rodney, Seph, and Phillip Barcio. "Carl Pope Returns from His Hiatus with His Largest Installation Ever." Hyperallergic, November 28, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/472470/carl-pope-returns-from-his-hiatus-with-his-largest-installation-ever/>

¹⁰³ Ibid

that in this installation at the Whitney Museum in New York City.¹⁰⁴ Pope juxtaposes congratulatory objects such as trophies and plaques with the trauma of police brutality and violence. The installation is set toward the back of the exhibition space. This gives viewers the ability to both experience the installation from afar and observe the trophies and plaques collectively, and also allows the viewer to get very close, and establish a connection with an individual trophy or plaque. He placed the trophies on a white shelf and mounted the plaques above on a white wall. This draws the viewers in and makes the colors of the objects stand out. Pope arranged the trophies in what appears to be no specific order. However, he creates a focal point in the center of the shelf. This viewer's eye meets a trophy with an eagle mounted on a wooden podium. The 50 plaques that hang above the trophies are arranged in 3 rows. The top two rows consist of 17 plaques, the third row consists of 15, and a large plaque with a clock in the center above them. From a distance, these trophies and plaques appear to serve their traditional purpose. Pope's installation seems to express praise and honor. However, visual interrogation reveals the true meaning. Each trophy or plaque represents a specific event related to police violence and brutality against a black person. Spanning over five decades, this unique strategy forces the viewer to reflect and find the message encoded in the installation. The name of the victim, the officer responsible, or both is inscribed on each trophy and plaque. While some of the names and killings were known by the public, Pope included names and events not highlighted in the press. Pope uses sarcastic "humor" as a strategy to address the traumatic events of police brutality. He purchased these trophies

¹⁰⁴ "Carl Pope, Some of the Greatest Hits of the New York City Police Department: A Celebration of Meritorious Achievement in Community Service: Video in American Sign Language." Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://whitney.org/media/36804>.

and plaques from a business that strictly produces them with the idea they will be awarded to officers honorably and with respect. Pope ironically uses the trophies and plaques to expose police brutality instead of honorable mentions. Even the title he chose sarcastically mocks law enforcement. He calls these events "Some of the Greatest Hits" and refers to them as "Achievement in Community." The satirical inscriptions on the trophies and plaques are intentionally provocative. One plaque reads, "To officer Richard Pike. For Excellence in Law Enforcement And Community Service. Your Words And Actions Lit The Uncharted Path We Followed. You Are The Leading Example"(figure). Officer Pike and another officer brutally beat 19-year-old Mark Davidson and tortured him with a stun gun for illegally selling \$10 worth of Marijuana. Davidson, then a high school Senior, was not deemed violent and had no prior trouble with the law, yet he suffered 43 shocks to his back, stomach, and buttocks.¹⁰⁵ Pope's strategic juxtaposition between a trophy, a symbol of success intended to impress others, and the brutal violence inflicted by the officers is jarring. It is a visceral reminder of the painful regularity of police brutality and how blacks are the predatory targets while law enforcement officials are held up as the heroes. Pope's work raises awareness and is a clear expression of his anger over these systemic incidents. This installation addresses both the collective trauma and individual trauma the black community has endured due to the racist foundations and ideologies of our law enforcement system. This powerful combination of collective and individual allows Pope to address this institution system at large while also preventing these victims of police brutality from becoming a nameless statistic; this actively inserts

¹⁰⁵ Fried, Joseph P. "Officer in Stun-Gun Trial Denies That He Aided in an Assault." The New York Times. The New York Times, April 30, 1986. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/30/nyregion/officer-in-stun-gun-trial-denies-that-he-aided-in-an-assault.html>.

their identity and personal story. By using their names, he is bringing justice back to these individuals and also supplying their families and the black community at large with a piece of art that aids in healing from the trauma inflicted by the law enforcement system that has lingered on the souls of black people for decades. Including this exhibit at the Whitney is an important step toward encouraging other institutions to expand the art historical narrative to interrogate black trauma and its continued consequences. Pope's work continues the discourse to encourage dialogue and compel viewers to confront the truth, not wane from its brutality.

Pope continues to remain active in the community, and this engagement fosters understanding, acknowledgment, and perhaps healing. Most recently, in January of 2022, Pope and his twin sister Karen exhibited their work and participated in the opening discussion of the exhibition *A Site of Struggle* at Northwestern University's Block Museum of Art, curated by Janet Dees, Steven, and Lisa Munster Tananbaum. This exhibition "explores how artists have engaged with the reality of anti-Black violence and its accompanying challenges of representation in the United States over a 100 + year period."¹⁰⁶ The works focused on in this collaborative exhibition range from representational to complete abstraction and span from the 1890s and 2013. Pope his sister, and the several other artists included, raised their voices and used their own visual languages to display what contemporary artists can bring to the ongoing conversation about racial violence and injustice. Having a space to engage in these conversations serves to both educate the oppressor and heal the oppressed who have suffered from

¹⁰⁶ "Opening Conversation: A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence [Online]." Block Museum - Northwestern University. Accessed February 11, 2023.
<https://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/events/2022/opening-conversation-a-site-of-struggle-american-art-against-anti-black-violence.html>.

either individual or collective trauma. Exhibitions like this can be attributed to the work done in the 90s to unapologetically make room for the inclusion of artists of color to have a seat at the table, produce art, and lead conversations that confront the past and present in order to work toward a future of inclusion and equality.

The social, cultural, and political realities that have shaped the life of British-based artist Barbara Walker and those around her are reflected in multi-media works using charcoal, pencil, and paint. For over two decades, Walker's art refused to cater to art fads or fleeting fixations. Instead, she provides invaluable and vital social commentary about the often unseen aspects of contemporary life in Britain, specifically the plight of black people. She creates emotively charged paintings and drawings that change the narrative from white-centered histories to black narratives and memories, dramatizing black subjects' invisible and misrepresented lives. By refusing to sanitize white injustice, she gives a voice to the voiceless. She asserts her artistic prowess to create images beyond the offensive caricatures of black people and intuitively asks the question, "Where is the Black presence?"¹⁰⁷ Walker is a life-long resident of Birmingham, England, a multicultural city where police make extensive use of their "Stop and Search" powers, which gives officers the power to stop and question anyone anytime. In certain situations, it permits officers to search the individual. While "police are not allowed to stop and search just because of your religion, race, age, the way you look, or the clothes you're wearing, black men are the overwhelming target of police attention."¹⁰⁸ This racial profiling increases

¹⁰⁷ Bernier, Celeste-Marie. "No More "Poisonous, Disrespectful, and Skewed Images of Black People": Barbara Walker's Louder than Words." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 38 (2016): 122-133. muse.jhu.edu/article/639573.

¹⁰⁸ "Stop and Search." *nidirect*, July 2, 2021. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/stop-and-search#toc-0>.

tension between the black community and the police. Statistical data indicates that in the UK “black people are seven times more likely to than whites to be stopped and searched in this way....”¹⁰⁹

In her 2006-2009 collection *Louder Than Words*, Walker skillfully fuses her personal experiences, those of her family, and scholarly research to examine the intersection between black masculinity and the perpetual criminalization, racial profiling, stereotyping, physical persecution, and psychological wounding projected by white power. Her use of public archives creates a body of work that offers a provocative perspective, acknowledging the historical trauma endured by blacks. *Louder Than Words* offers visual images of both people and places that interrogate the racial bias of “Stop And Search,” and Walker uses her most intimate subject to provoke emotion and encourage dialogue, her son.

Between 2002 and 2006, Walker’s son Solomon, then 17-21 years old, was the subject of at least eight ‘Stop and Search’ incidents. Between April 2020 and March 2021, there were “7.5 stop and searches [in England] for every 1,000 white people, compared with 52.6 for every 1,000 black people,”¹¹⁰ In the West Midland area where Solomon received his tickets, black people held the highest rate of stop and searches per 1000 people.¹¹¹ Of course, this racial bias is not unique to England. A recent study conducted by Ravi Shroff, assistant professor at New York University, found that:

In a dataset of nearly 100 million traffic stops across the United States, black drivers were about 20 percent more likely to be stopped than white drivers relative

¹⁰⁹ “Barbara Walker Series.” *n.paradoxa* 21 (n.d.): 44.

¹¹⁰ “Stop and Search.” GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures. Home Office, May 27, 2022. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/stop-and-search/latest>

¹¹¹ Ibid

to their share of the residential population. The study also found that once stopped, black drivers were searched about 1.5 to 2 times as often as white drivers, while they were less likely to be carrying drugs, guns, or other illegal contraband compared to their white peers.¹¹²

Another study using data on 3.4 million traffic stops made in 2019 by California's 15 largest law enforcement agencies revealed that Black drivers make up approximately one-third of traffic stops around midnight, roughly twice the share of white drivers. Local law enforcement officers are especially likely to search Black and Latino drivers during nighttime stops, but discovery rates for contraband or evidence are lower than those of white drivers.¹¹³ These racially biased 'Stop and Search' incidents spurred Walker's artistic curiosity and anger. Why were the young black men of Birmingham the ritualistic subjects of racial profiling? As stated by Vane Contemporary, who showcased this exhibition, Barbara's work poses the question "[H]ow do the police (and others) consider 'suspicions' and what are the consequences and the implications of these attitudes on the forming of the identity of a young Black male...".¹¹⁴ At each stop, Solomon was asked a series of questions. At the conclusion of the interrogation, he was handed a legally mandated duplicate copy of an official, yellow A5 document. Walker kept these duplicate forms and used them as her canvas. Several pieces in the series are enlarged digitized scans of the A5 documents. Over the scans, Walker draws or paints areas in and around

¹¹² Communications, NYU Web. "Research Shows Black Drivers More Likely to Be Stopped by Police." NYU, May 5, 2020. <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2020/may/black-drivers-more-likely-to-be-stopped-by-police.html>.

¹¹³ Person, Magnus Lofstrom, Joseph Hayes, Brandon Martin, and Deepak Premkumar. "Racial Disparities in Traffic Stops." Public Policy Institute of California. Public Policy Institute of California, February 2, 2023. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/racial-disparities-in-traffic-stops/>.

¹¹⁴ Stone, Paul. "Louder than Words." Vane. Vane, March 9, 2022. <https://www.vane.org.uk/exhibitions/louder-than-words>.

Birmingham (see figure 22). These areas are places where her son has been subjected to police scrutiny. “The work gives voice to personal experience and frustration while interrogating, on a broader level, the deeper societal implications these decisions and judgments might induce or represent.”¹¹⁵ It reflects on the past treatment of black men and the intersection of present events which have become part of the contemporary black narrative. This series highlights the traumatic impact of the 'Stop and Search' and examines how opinions and stereotypes are quickly created by law enforcement based on someone's visual appearance.

One particularly moving piece in this collection is a powerful drawing of her son. Unlike the Birmingham landscape scenes often depicted by Walker in this series, this untitled 81 x 106cm mixed-media, multi-layered piece features Solomon in a poignant, emotional drawing (figure 22, barbarawalker.co.uk, 2023). The yellow background is an enlarged, digitized scan of one of the A5 documents given to Solomon. The corners are folded and tattered. One gets the sense that the document was aggressively crumpled up and either shoved into his pocket or thrown on the car floor. The words ‘*Search Record of Person/Vehicle/Stop Form*’ appear in bold at the top of the document. White paint is haphazardly layered over the document's center, covering up written details. There are few legible parts of the ticket—the date, 08/11/02, and his height, 5"10 are the only ascertainable details. Deleting the details appears to be strategic, forcing viewers to create their own narrative and question the stop's legitimacy. On top of the white paint, Walker draws a picture of her son. The simplicity of the drawing is perhaps the most

¹¹⁵ “Artist.” Barbara Walker. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.barbarawalker.co.uk/index.php/project/louder-than-words/>.

poignant part of the piece. While Solomon dominates the foreground, his downward gaze emotes sadness, even fear. Walker skillfully captures this raw emotion with her soft, delicate lines drawn in charcoal. Influenced by the work of Alberto Giacometti, Walker uses charcoal for its fluid nature.

I was very focused on Giacometti in making some of the work. I am interested in his marks, his compositions, and how he cuts into the drawing with charcoal. I am interested, too, in how he draws the viewer into the work. I am very fascinated by that and the use of charcoal as a material. Charcoal is so accessible. So fragile. It's easy to apply, and it doesn't restrict you. It's quite poetic. You can play with it and have fun with it. It's not like painting. Painting is a different language. It can be very rigid and stiff, and static. With drawing (or working within drawing), there is a looseness. There is freedom.¹¹⁶

Walker's use of charcoal effectively captures the emotional fragility of Solomon. Wearing a pulled-up hoodie, Solomon intentionally appears to make himself small and unnoticed. The low-profile image that is amplified by his hood and diverted eyes, is known to spark controversy or be seen as "suspicious." "The garment has been long associated with a racist stereotype of criminality in Black communities and a device for racial profiling in the United States."¹¹⁷ It was most famously brought up as a stereotype On February 26, 2012, when, while out buying a pack of Skittles, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by a "neighborhood watchman." His hoodie was a source of controversy in the acquittal of his shooter, George Zimmerman. Richard Thompson Ford, the author of *Dress Code*, explains how the hoodie has become a symbol of black young men.

As the hoodie because (sic) associated with 'Black hoodlums' in the media, some Black people avoided them, and others embraced them: the public image of the hoodie made it into a statement of racial pride and defiance, solidarity with a

¹¹⁶ Yvettegresle. "Barbara Walker: 'Sometimes Work Can Exclude People'." writing in relation, October 10, 2014. <https://writinginrelation.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/barbara-walker-sometimes-work-can-exclude-people/>.

¹¹⁷ "Nine Years after Trayvon Martin's Killing, Hoodies Still Spark Debate." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, February 27, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/feb/27/trayvon-martin-hoodies-black-young-people>.

community, an emblem of belonging, and all of that reinforced the negative associations for those who were inclined to be afraid of assertive Black people,” Putting on a hoodie as a Black man involved a decision to make a statement that could make some people mistrust you, get you hassled by police, even killed.¹¹⁸

By drawing her son in a pulled-up hoodie, Walker questions these stereotypes and prompts the viewer to do the same. The contrast between the stark, haphazard white paint and the delicate drawing of Solomon layered on the A5 document is also evocative. While Solomon dominates the piece, his presence is soft. The crumpled yellow document, however, seemingly barks behind his simple, fragile portrait. This piece represents the trauma, frustration, fear, and confusion that mothers, sons, and the black community have felt for centuries. Much like Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till, Barbara Walker uses the power of imagery to tell the story of her son and the trauma he went through. While these boys' stories occurred in different times, and countries and had different outcomes, the work of Barbara Walker connects these mothers and sons. It emphasizes that despite the passing of time, racial violence, oppression, and discrimination are still playing out all over the world and are still creating an impact on the black community.

In some of her more recent work, Barbara addresses historical trauma by reinterpreting the image of blacks in classical European paintings. *Vanishing Point* is a major exhibition of work by Walker in 2018 that confronts and readdresses the under-representation of Black figures in Western art history. Originally displayed at the Crisea

¹¹⁸ Ford, Richard T. *Dress Codes How the Laws of Fashion Made History*. New York: From DRESS CODES: How the Laws of Fashion Made History by Richard Thompson Ford. Copyright © 2021 by Richard Thompson Ford. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2022.

Roberts Gallery in London, this substantive series places Black figures at the center of each piece, “offering an alternative and balanced depiction of the European artistic cannon.”¹¹⁹ The series comprises twenty graphite and blind-embossed drawings that make the invisible visible. Black figures in classical paintings were typically relegated to the footnotes, scattering the edges of classical western paintings for centuries. “[Walker’s] reinterpretations of scenes by artists such as Paolo Veronese and Pierre Mignard center on those peripheral characters who, in the original works, if described at all, are referred to as some variant of negro servant.”¹²⁰ In her work, Walker flips the narrative making the black figure the dominant subject. Other works depict Black subjects in the role of slaves, servants, or attendants. The white figures in the picture are embossed out, leaving a blank sheet of white paper onto which Walker draws the Black figures in graphite. This embossment technique is explicitly used in the 2021 piece *Costanzi* (figure 23 barbarawalker.co.uk, 2023). Here, the original central white figure takes a backseat while the viewer’s eye focuses on the young black male holding onto a horse. Walker occasionally reconstructs the landscape or sky, adding a touch of color. The end result draws the viewer to the Black figure, “demonstrating artistic and historical erasure and inviting contemplation on how history is made and unmade.”¹²¹ While this collection depicts oppressions of the past, they are intrinsically linked to present events, such as police violence and brutality. Walker continues to grow her body of work into a grand compilation of pieces that explore the intersection between historical trauma and

¹¹⁹ “Barbara Walker: Vanishing Point.” Cristea Roberts Gallery. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://cristearoberts.com/exhibitions/235-barbara-walker-vanishing-point/>.

¹²⁰ Lauren Dei | 20 OCT 22. “Barbara Walker Fills in the Blanks.” Frieze. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.frieze.com/article/barbara-walker-vanishing-point-2022-review>.

¹²¹ “Barbara Walker: Vanishing Point.” Cristea Roberts Gallery

contemporary events. She actively gives voice to personal experience, frustration, and fear while, on a broader level, interrogating the deeper societal implications of historical trauma.

Arthur Jafa is an American artist, filmmaker, and cinematographer. For over three decades, Jafa has worked to develop a dynamic practice comprising films, artifacts, and happenings that question what it means to be black, both physically and emotionally. Born in 1960 in Tupelo, Mississippi, Jafa was raised in Clarksdale, Mississippi, a city highly segregated at the time. As a child, Jafa assembled binders of images into collections he called "the books." He watched science fiction shows like *I Spy*, which informed his artistic practice as an adult.¹²² After studying film and architecture at Howard University, Jafa worked as a cinematographer with directors Julie Dash and Spike Lee. In 1991, he won "Best Cinematography" at Sundance for his work on Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. In 2016, Jafa produced a short film, *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death*. This powerful montage, composed of original and appropriated footage, examines the black narrative of this country. It speaks to the current responsive reckoning to ongoing discrimination, racial profiling, police brutality, and violence against Black people and interrogates how those contemporary consequences intersect with historical trauma. Harnessing his love for science fiction, Jafa uses James Tiptree's 1973 short story, *Love is the Plan, and the Plan is Death*, as inspiration for this short film. In only seven-minute and thirty seconds, Jafa includes raw, expressive emotion. Provocative clips are all laid over the modern gospel song *Ultralight Beam* by Kanye West, and Jafa pushes his

¹²² "Biography Arthur Jafa". Moderna Museet i Stockholm. Retrieved 2019-11-12.

audience to be uncomfortable. He dares them to look away by memorializing the historical trauma, violence, grief, success, and joy of the black experience.

Capitalizing on his cinematographic talent, Jafa takes a unique approach and uses the strategy of affective association instead of a linear narrative to organize his film. He skillfully weaves together viral YouTube videos, stock video sites, and original footage from the past and present, and some clips alluding to the future, all in varying degrees of quality. Some clips are crisp and clear, while others are old and grainy, reminding the viewer of the deep, old roots of racism. Jafa also uses a strategy he calls "black visual intonation," a technique of manipulating frames by slowing them down or speeding them up to call attention to certain parts of the clip, whether it be a facial expression, a movement, or dialogue to function in a manner "that approximates Black vocal intonation."¹²³ In this film the viewer is exposed to brutal police beatings, men in Blackface, KKK lynching's, and videos depicting black people possessed and out of control are interspersed with pivotal, hopeful, and successful moments in the black experience. We watch Michael Jordan dominate the basketball court, and a young boy slap his drug-addicted mother in the face. Jafa celebrates black pride and culture as the American hip-hop group Cali Swag District teaches the world how to *Dougie* as black school girls hold hands and dance. Gospel revivals feed into the traffic stop of a black woman with her child in the car who emerges, terrified, hands above his head. Louis Farrakhan and Martin Luther King Junior join Biggie Smalls in expressing anger over the plight of the black community. We witness a young black boy being put into handcuffs and escorted from his home by a white police officer as he screams for his "mamma"(4:11)

¹²³ Perezartmuseummiami, "Notes on the Collection: Arthur Jafa's Black Visual Intonation," pammportraits.org, October 22, 2018, <https://pammportraits.org/2018/10/15/notes-on-the-collection-arthur-jafas-black-visual-intonation/>.

(figure,24, youtube.com, 2023). We see the deep emotion of black pride and the terrors of teargas and fire hoses. Serena Williams, Keven Garnett, and Michael Jackson unapologetically take up space center stage and celebrate the positive impact blacks have had on society. Jafa showcases the resiliency of the black community in the face of historical and ongoing trauma. Showing these resilient black figures who have taken the world by storm supplies the black audience, especially younger generations, with a sense of empowerment and confidence. These figures are a symbol of hope and showcase that black men and women are capable of success, despite the efforts our political systems that were built on a foundation of white supremacy make to work against them.

In a 2017 interview with American writer, editor, and curator Antwaun Sargent, Jafa explains that all is life, he chose to "do the opposite of what's human nature, and that is to recoil from things I don't like. Over the last few years of doing this, I've pushed myself to push toward things that disturb me. I've developed a habit of recording these things because these things often disappear. I've promised myself that I'll try to record the spiritual quality of the things that strike me. To a certain degree, *Love Is The Message* grew out of [this] practice." The process of creating this film was a swift one. It took Jafa two hours to complete 85% of it. Once he heard Kanye's song *Ultralight Beam*, he laid it over the compiled clips to add a new dimension. The music is powerful and creates a contrast against the video clips, the volume rises, fades, and sometimes is removed so the viewer can hear the original audio. This is first seen at second 43 when President Barack Obama is singing "Amazing Grace" after a white supremacist killed nine black Americans in a Charleston, South Carolina, church (figure, 25, youtube.com, 2023). We hear the sorrow and empathy in his voice, along with the emotion coming from the crowd.

Jafa's decision to fade out Kayne's song at this point creates a powerful, raw moment. It allows the audience to be transported to this moment and experience the efforts being made by a black political figure to heal the black community at large from the traumas endured by the nine victims, their families. Jafa repeats this at minute 4:02 when the music fades, and we hear a young black woman ask, "what would America be like if we loved black people as much as we love black culture?" This provocative statement forces the viewer to examine their biases and reflect on the position black men, women, and children hold in society.

Minute 3:56 is a prime example of Jafa's affective association strategy. This scene depicts a group of black people running away from a fire hose being sprayed by white police officers (figure, 26, youtube.com, 2023). The scene directly following it is a black NFL player running down the field (figure, 27, youtube.com, 2023). This juxtaposition effectively conveys the black experience in an emotional, raw, and unrelenting manner. The contrast between success and suffering is palpable. In the old fire hose scene, the audience is seeing the backs of several black community members as they are running away from these white police officers and the person filming. However, in the scene with the NFL star, the audience receives a frontal view as the player runs with confidence and speed toward the camera, toward the end zone, and toward success. By watching this scene, you can hear his breath, and feel his determination and grit. This scene serves to symbolize overcoming those historical traumas of the past; events where previous generations were running away for protection, and for their lives. The juxtaposition of these scenes serve to highlight the resilience and perseverance of the black community and the emotions that lie within them as they continue to push and work through this world

that was built on a foundation of institutions and ideologies built against them instead of for them.

As an experienced artist in cinema, Jafa understands that this is an artistic medium that was constructed by white European practitioners, because of this Jafa uses his strategy of "black visual intonation," to attempt to create a film that exists outside of white limitations and boundaries. This practice creates space for freedom and experimentation. It allows Jafa to work outside the constructed confines of white cinema and create works that he and the black community at large can form an emotional connection to. This strategy of alteration, sequence disruption and distortion that is working to appeal to the black audience is seen from minutes 4:13- 4:18, where Jafa draws attention to the emotion on Olympian Derek Redmond's face as he tries to finish the 400-meter semifinal race in Barcelona (figure, 28, youtube.com, 2023). In this race Redmond pulled his hamstring. We can see the effort he is making as he is trying to limp towards the finish line but the pain is too severe. At minute 4:14 we start to see an older man running toward him from behind, it's his father coming to help and give him a shoulder to lean on. He makes it a few steps further until we see him fully break down in tears and fall onto his father. This was a powerful and impactful clip to include. In this film it symbolizes the power and perseverance of the black community. However, it also represents the breakpoint, and how one person or community can only take so much trauma whether it be emotional or physical until they can't handle it anymore. So, while this clip does show perseverance it also symbolizes what can happen when someone's mind and body is pushed to the breaking point.

This short film uses unique strategies to create a film that breaks through the confines of Eurocentric limitations and establishes a connection to the black audience through video and auditory experiences. While addressing collective and individual physical and psychological traumas of the past and present, Jafa's film is also a tribute to the beauty and resilience of black culture, allowing this film to also serve as a vehicle for healing and understanding among the black community.

Currently, Jafa is participating in MoMA's *Just Above Midtown-Changing Spaces* exhibition, which runs through February 18th, 2023. Just Above Midtown was an art gallery that "foregrounded African American artists and artists of color. Open from 1974 until 1986, it was a place where Black art flourished, and debate was cultivated."¹²⁴ This exhibition presents the works of several artists, including Jafa, that were shown at Just Above Midtown that "connect us to our innate ability to use what we have to create what we need,"¹²⁵—bringing back the works of these black artists emphasizes the importance of providing safe spaces for dialogue, conversation, understanding, and education. A space like this can serve to heal from silencing historical trauma and its brutal contemporary consequences.

Every day Carl Robert Pope, Barbara Walker, and Arthur Jafa are using their art as a tool to confront racial, ethnic, and social injustices and break the cycles of historical trauma. Their work challenges the status quo while also serving as a catalyst for dialogue, understanding, acknowledgment, and healing from current events that are partly the lasting consequences of historical trauma passed down through generations. These three

¹²⁴ "Just above Midtown: Changing Spaces: Moma." The Museum of Modern Art. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5078>.

¹²⁵ *ibid*

artists' work emphasizes how important it is to examine racist history in order to change the future.

Chapter 5 Indigenous Historical Trauma

**The term Native American is the result of colonization and the assignment of American Nationality. Therefore, this paper uses the designation Indigenous to clarify the community referred to herein occupied the land first.*

Indigenous groups have long suffered horrific atrocities that course through their communities as historical trauma since the first settlers arrived in the 15th and 16th centuries. As explorers landed in the Americas and sought to colonize territories occupied by various Indigenous groups, they were met with varying degrees of cooperation, indignation, and revolt. In the United States the enduring effects of colonization, forced assimilation, war, massacres, relocation programs, cultural desecration, and land seizures manifest as depression, substance abuse, internalized racism, suicidal ideation, and domestic abuse. Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of New Mexico, introduced the concept of historical trauma in the Native American context in 1988, defining it as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan across generations, emanating in massive group trauma.”¹²⁶ Braveheart contends historical trauma is collective unresolved grief and likens it to a “soul wound.”¹²⁷ The root of this soul wound is colonization and the accompanying tragic impact of forced assimilation to white man’s language, values, beliefs while stealing the land, elder knowledge, connection to nature, art, healing

¹²⁶ “Healing Historical Trauma.” Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://magazine.jhsph.edu/2022/healing-historical-trauma>.

¹²⁷ *ibid*

ceremonies, and traditional practices. From 1492 through 1814, white settlers brutally massacred and displaced millions of Indigenous people. Those not murdered would become part of the “Indian Problem.”¹²⁸ White settlers feared and resented the Indigenous groups who occupied the newly discovered land that they believed was rightfully theirs thus the term “Indian Problem” began to be used in the 19th century as “Native nations getting in the way of white settlers acquiring all the land.”¹²⁹ The white settlers deemed the indigenous communities barbaric savages and felt entitled to their land.

In the early years of the American republic, some officials, including George Washington, felt the only way to solve the “Indian Problem” was to civilize them.¹³⁰ The goal was to make Indigenous people as much like white Americans as possible by “encouraging” them to convert to Christianity, speak, read, write English, and otherwise adopt European-style practices. Along with George Washington, Andrew Jackson and his concept of “Manifest Destiny”¹³¹ was used in the 19th century to support the need for westward expansion and in turn the domination of indigenous people. Five Indigenous groups in the southeastern United States (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee) adopted these customs and became known as the “Five Civilized Tribes.”¹³² The remaining groups resisted and revolted.

¹²⁸ Smoke Signals. “Watchlist: The ‘Indian Problem.’” Smoke Signals. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.smokesignals.org/articles/2021/04/29/watchlist-the-indian-problem/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9CIndian%20Problem%E2%80%9D%20was%20controversially,settlers%20acquiring%20all%20the%20land.%E2%80%9D>.

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ “Trail of Tears: Definition, Date & Cherokee Nation - History.” Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>.

¹³¹ “Manifest Destiny - Definition, Facts & Significance - History,” accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/manifest-destiny>.

¹³² Ibid

The land located in Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee was valuable as white settlers flooded the region. They wanted the land to grow cotton and often resorted to violence to take land from their Indigenous neighbors. The settlers stole their livestock, burned and looted their homes, and squatted on Indigenous land. State governments joined the white settlers to drive Indigenous groups out of the south, passing state laws limiting Indigenous sovereignty. President Andrew Jackson had long terrorized Indigenous groups. As an Army General, he advocated what he called “Indian removal.” He spent years brutalizing the Creek Tribe in Georgia and Alabama and the Seminole Tribe in Florida. His brutality resulted in the transfer of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous acres to white settlers.¹³³ In 1830, Jackson signed the *Indian Removal Act*. This Act gave the federal government the power to exchange Indigenous “cotton land” for land west of the Mississippi. This “Indian Territory” was located in present-day Oklahoma. At this time, over 125,000 Indigenous people were living on millions of acres in Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, and Florida.¹³⁴ Despite the Act, by 1838, only about 2,000 Indigenous people had left. By then, Martin Van Buren was president and ordered the immediate removal of the remaining Indigenous groups. He instructed General Winfield Scott and 7,000 troops to march the Indigenous groups more than 1,200 miles to “Indian Territory.” This journey would become known as the infamous *Trail of Tears* (figure, 29, cnn.com, 2023). Led by gunpoint and some bound in chains, Indigenous groups were marched double file without food or water. Whooping cough, typhus,

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ “Native American History Timeline - History.” Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-timeline>.

dysentery, cholera, and starvation infiltrated the march, and more than 5,000 Indigenous people died on the journey.¹³⁵

In 1851, Congress passed the *Indian Appropriations Act*. This act created the Indian Reservation System, which mandated Indigenous groups stay on the reservation unless they received express permission from the government. The next decade saw revolt by the Indigenous groups and their brutal massacre. In November of 1864, Colorado volunteers killed and mutilated more than 150 men, women and children in what would become known as the *Sand Creek Massacre*.¹³⁶ Four years later, General Custer led an attack on the Cheyenne tribe and Chief Black Kettle, killing more than 100 men, women, and children. As retaliation, in 1876, the Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne tribes led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull defeated Custer and his troops in the *Battle of Little Bighorn*, also known as *Custer's Last Stand*.¹³⁷ This increased already tense relations between the Indigenous groups and white settlers.

This takeover of indigenous people led to the first off-reservation boarding house, the *Carlisle Indian Industrial School*, which was opened in Pennsylvania in 1879 (figure 30, home.epix.net, 2023). The school, founded by Richard Henry Pratt, was designed to assimilate Indigenous students. Pratt's infamous quote, "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man,"¹³⁸ symbolizes the brutality of the boarding school system. "Carlisle and other boarding schools were part of a long history of U.S. attempts to either kill, remove, or

¹³⁵ "Trail of Tears: Definition, Date & Cherokee Nation - History."

¹³⁶ "Native American History Timeline - History."

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ National Conference of Charities and Correction (U.S.). Session. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, at the ... Annual Session held in ...* Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis.

assimilate Native Americans.”¹³⁹ The United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price, explained the “logic” for the boarding houses “[i]t’s cheaper to give them education than to fight them.”¹⁴⁰ As a part of this push towards assimilation, Indigenous American students were prohibited from using their own language and names. They could not acknowledge nor practice their religion and were given “new Anglo-American names, clothes, and haircuts, and told they must abandon their way of life because it was inferior to white people’s”¹⁴¹(figure,31 cbcradio,2023). In her journal article, *American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives*, historian Julie Davis explains Indigenous Boarding schools. She describes them as “[W]aged cultural, psychological, and intellectual warfare” that was inflicted on these Indigenous students as a way to turn this younger generation into proper Americans.¹⁴² The schools existed throughout North America, and at one point, there were 350 boarding schools. At a very young age these children were forced to abandon all that they knew and create a new identity. They were forced to change their names, the food they ate, the clothes they wore, and were forced to engage in a militaristic schedule that was implemented as a form of control and discipline. Large parts of their identity such as their beloved languages and cultural practices were taken away and replaced with English and Christianity. These young students were also taught skills which related to the gender role of European Americans; The boys would work in manual labor or farming, and the girls would become

¹³⁹ “How Boarding Schools Tried to ‘Kill the Indian’ through Assimilation.” Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.history.com/news/how-boarding-schools-tried-to-kill-the-indian-through-assimilation>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Davis, Julie. “American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives.” *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 2 (2001): 20–22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163421>.

domestic servants. For many indigenous children this severing of their beloved physical, cultural, and spiritual connections along with their familiar way of life was extremely traumatic mentally and physically and led to “confusion and alienation, homesickness, and resentment.”¹⁴³ It forced them to second guess their purpose and belonging in the world, which then in turn led to extremely high suicide rates among these young children. While the effects of these boarding schools had suicidal effects on generations who experienced them, it was noted by The Canadian Press in “one in four teenagers on reserve who had a parent who attended a residential school had considered suicide, compared with one in 10 teenagers who didn't have a parent or grandparent attend.”¹⁴⁴ This statistic makes it apparent that psychological effects of these residential schools have been passed down from generation to generation.

The schools were highly regimented, and discipline was violent. Students endured physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, and starvation, which prompted some students to take their own lives.¹⁴⁵ The cultural losses inflicted on the students were felt and processed deeply. These institutions sought total control over students' lives to assimilate them completely into the dominant society. They left a devastating legacy and have become part of Indigenous historical trauma. The forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities interrupted the

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ “Residential School Survivors and Their Descendants Show Poorer Health Outcomes: Survey | CBC News,” CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, March 14, 2018), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/residential-school-health-survey-1.4576430>.

¹⁴⁵ Chapman, Nada Atieh and Mike. “America's Dark Past”: Emotional Scars Linger from Indian Boarding Schools.” How Indian boarding schools left emotional scars that remain. Record Searchlight, October 12, 2022. <https://www.redding.com/in-depth/news/2022/10/12/how-indian-boarding-schools-left-emotional-scars-remain-history/10053835002/>.

family structure; this trauma manifested in subsequent generations as unhealthy parenting styles, abuse, and neglect.¹⁴⁶

Vanessa Scholfield, a clinical social worker at Redding Rancheria Trinity Health Center in Weaverville, California, treats Indigenous people suffering from the historical trauma of boarding schools and other injustices associated with colonization and assimilation. A common issue she sees among her clients is a loss of identity. This loss can perpetuate a sense of not belonging, which manifests in anger issues, alcoholism, depression, and low-self-esteem.¹⁴⁷

Anger is a natural response of a child or young adult when they learn about the abuse of their ancestors at boarding school and through other means: Katherine Evans, associate professor of education at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, says, "If a student learns their great grandparent was taken from their home and placed in a boarding school, or that his family was driven off their land, but reads a "white-washed version" of that story in a textbook, "that child is going to feel less connected to that environment, and the consequence of that is behavior challenges, checking out, being angry."¹⁴⁸

The anger felt in Indigenous groups was again triggered in 2021 when the remains of 215 bodies, most likely children who attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School, were found in British Columbia. The following month, 751 unmarked graves were discovered at the Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, Canada. These

¹⁴⁶ Brown-Rice, Kathleen. "Examining the Theory of Historical Trauma among Native Americans." *The Professional Counselor* 3, no. 3 (2013): 117–30. <https://doi.org/10.15241/kbr.3.3.117>.

¹⁴⁷ Nada Atieh and Mike Chapman, "'America's Dark Past': Emotional Scars Linger from Indian Boarding Schools," *How Indian boarding schools left emotional scars that remain*

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

discoveries prompted the United States Department of Interior to investigate the locations of once-occupied residential schools. “The department has found 53 burial sites at or near the U.S. boarding schools, both marked and unmarked.”¹⁴⁹ The discovery of these graves has had a devastating impact on Indigenous groups. This discovery and the long-endured historical trauma manifest in detrimental ways. However, work is being done on the construct of healing by community members, practitioners, and artists.

Many years after the creation of indigenous residential boarding schools, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted citizenship to all Indigenous people. However, citizenship privileges were largely governed by state law, and the right to vote was often denied to Indigenous groups in the early 20th century; thus, discriminatory practices continued, and prejudices and stereotypes prevailed. In 1968, Lyndon Johnson signed the *Indian Civil Rights Act* granting Indigenous people benefits and protection under the Bill of Rights. This prompted the American Indian Movement (AIM) which was established in Minneapolis Minnesota in July of 1968.¹⁵⁰ It initially was an urban movement formed in response to police brutality and racial profiling. AIM grew rapidly and became a driving force behind the Indigenous Civil Rights Movement. However, the consequences of Indigenous historical trauma continued to manifest in a myriad of ways, including assaults on tribal sovereignty, cultural and social structures, and traditional practices.¹⁵¹ It wasn’t unusual during this time to see restaurant and shop signs reading, “No Indians Allowed”

¹⁴⁹ Press, The Associated. “U.S. Report Identifies Burial Sites Linked to Boarding Schools for Native Americans.” NPR. NPR, May 11, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1098276649/u-s-report-details-burial-sites-linked-to-boarding-schools-for-native-americans>.

¹⁵⁰ “Libguides: American Indian Movement (AIM): Overview,” Overview - American Indian Movement (AIM) - LibGuides at Minnesota Historical Society Library, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://libguides.mnhs.org/aim>.

¹⁵¹ Evans-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507312290>

(figure 32, wyohistory.org,2023) Four years later, AIM released a document called *Twenty Points* that responded to the numerous treaties that had been broken by the US Government. This document included a list of demands, including the re-recognition of Native Tribes, the abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and federal protections for Indigenous cultures and religions. It was not met with much enthusiasm and failed to secure any meaningful change for Indigenous people.¹⁵²

Violence perpetrated by whites against Indigenous people has been and continues to be a serious problem. According to a 2016 National Institute of Justice report, the Department of Justice found whites are responsible for most violent crimes against Indigenous people. Indigenous women are two to three times more likely than white women to be victims of violent crimes, including sexual assault and stalking. “More than 4 out of 5 Indigenous women reported they had been the victim of violence, and 96 percent of them described their attacker as non-Native American.”¹⁵³ Echoing those statistics, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found “the murder rate is ten times higher than the national average for women living on reservations, and the third leading cause of death for Native women.”¹⁵⁴ Additionally, Indigenous women are significantly more likely to experience rape in their lifetimes compared to Non-Indigenous women and protection is limited.

¹⁵² “Native American History Timeline - History.

¹⁵³ Rosay, André B., and About the author André B. Rosay was an NIJ visiting executive research fellow from May 2012 to April 2016. He is also the director of the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage. “Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men.” National Institute of Justice. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-women-and-men>.

¹⁵⁴ “Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis.” Indian Affairs. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>.

In 1978, the Supreme Court held “tribes have had limited authority to detain and prosecute non-tribal citizens.”¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, if a white person committed an act of violence against an Indigenous person on tribal land, it was up to federal prosecutors to decide whether to pursue the case, tribal enforcement had no authority. This case was partially overturned in the 2021 court case *United States v. Cooley*, which held tribes’ law enforcement has the authority to detain Non-Indigenous people on Indigenous land if they find “an apparent violation of state or federal law.”¹⁵⁶ However, *prosecuting* Non-Indigenous criminals, “even those who commit violent crimes against Indigenous people, is still rarely an option for tribal nations.”¹⁵⁷ This is an invasive problem that has been devastating for victims of domestic and sexual abuse “contributing to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the United States.”¹⁵⁸ The National Crime Information Center reported that in 2016 there were “5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, though the US Department of Justice’s federal missing persons database, NamUs, only logged 116 cases”. There has been very little concrete data surrounding this national crisis but is understood that this number is continuing to rise. We are seeing the community, especially contemporary artists responding to this issue. Artist Jaime Black put together an outdoor installation piece in 2019 at The National Museum of the American Indian that displayed empty red dresses in hopes to “draw attention to the gendered and racialized nature of violent crimes against

¹⁵⁵ *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 435 U.S. 191 (1978)

¹⁵⁶ *Cooley*, 141 S. Ct. at 1643 (quoting *Montana v. United States*, 450 U.S. 544, 566 (1981)).

¹⁵⁷ “Native American Women Face an Epidemic of Violence. A Legal Loophole Prevents Prosecutions.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-american-women-face-epidemic-violence-legal-loophole-prevents-prosecutions-n1272670>.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

Native women and to evoke a presence through the marking of absence”¹⁵⁹ (figure,33 womenshistory.si.edu,2023). This installation functions to both confront the traumatic violence faced by indigenous women and serve as a catalyst for healing these victims' families and the indigenous community at large. Mary Kathryn Nagle, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and an attorney for the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center, urged Congress to act quickly in regards to this traumatic crisis; otherwise, she said, “non-Indian perpetrators will continue to abuse Native American children with impunity. They will continue to assault our tribal law enforcement who show up at the scene of a domestic violence crime to help a Native American woman who has called 911, without any consequences.”¹⁶⁰ In addition to white aggressors, domestic violence and physical and sexual assault is 31:2 higher within Indigenous communities than the national average. Additionally, Indigenous children are the most overrepresented groups in Child Protective Services organizations, and fewer have high school diplomas as compared to the national average. Many of the violent episodes within the Indigenous community are triggered by alcohol. Indigenous groups “have the highest weekly alcohol consumption of any ethnic group.”¹⁶¹

Before their arrival the only exposure indigenous people had to alcohol was in the form of weak beers or other fermented beverages that were used in ritual ceremonies. Today, a large number of Indigenous people engage in binge drinking and illicit drug use, and the deadly introduction can be traced back to the original colonizers. This alcohol

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women: New Efforts Are Underway but Opportunities Exist to Improve the Federal Response,” Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women: New Efforts Are Underway but Opportunities Exist to Improve the Federal Response | U.S. GAO, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104045>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

¹⁶¹ Brown-Rice, Kathleen. “Examining the Theory of Historical Trauma among Native Americans.”

abuse perpetuates “low self-esteem, loss of cultural identity, lack of positive role models, abuse and neglect...”¹⁶². When a vast amount of spirits and wine were produced by earlier colonizers and available to indigenous people, the lack of developed guidelines made them more susceptible to the addictive effects. While this introduction to alcohol was not their doing, in the 20th century their now addicted behaviors were used against them and made the indigenous community seem like they were proper citizens. These ideals prompted the creation and circulation of images that depicted indigenous people as drunks who were not contributing to the great good of society and needed to be saved by the white man (figure 34, archive.org,2023).

Violence and substance abuse is not the only issue plaguing Indigenous communities; there is a crisis in health equity as well. Indigenous groups have inadequate access to comprehensive health care. This can be traced back to the origin of colonization. Knowledge that had been passed down for generations in regards to plant medicines and teachings that aimed to support the body and mind were stripped from Indigenous communities during their forced assimilation.¹⁶³ This in turn made the indigenous people suffer from the illness that were spread to them by white settlers. Not only did this create suffering on a physical level, it also created suffering on a psychological level. The connection indigenous people have to the earth and using it to better the mind, body, and spirit was and is still a part of their identity. Having that stripped away left them feeling lost, confused, and disconnected from their cultural and sense of belonging. This inequity became glaringly evident during the recent Covid crisis. The virus

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Guest Blogger, “Reclaiming Traditional Healing Practices: Canadahelps - Donate to Any Charity in Canada,” CanadaHelps, September 29, 2021, <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/giving-life/the-power-of-reclaiming-traditional-healing-practices/>.

took a disproportionate toll on many Indigenous communities. According to an analysis by APM Research Lab, one in every 475 Native Americans has died from Covid since the start of the pandemic, compared with one in every 825 white Americans and one in every 645 Black Americans.¹⁶⁴ During the height of the pandemic, Andi Egbert, senior analyst at APM, explained that Indigenous people have the highest rate of Covid deaths and that rate was accelerating, and the disparities with other groups was widening. “This latest data is terrible in every way for indigenous [people].” This triggers so many layers of trauma for Indigenous groups, said Amber Kanazbah Crotty, a tribal council delegate in the Navajo Nation. “Everyone has been impacted. Some families have been decimated. How can we go back to normal when we’ve lost so many after so many layers of trauma? It’s unbearable.”¹⁶⁵ The collective grief and historical trauma suffered by Indigenous groups in regards to the physiological impacts of a disregard for proper and deserved healthcare were severely compounded by Covid. They lost 1% of their population in the United States alone, an equivalent of 3 million people.¹⁶⁶ Covid perpetuated their historical trauma and po triggered a sense of hopelessness and insignificance that heavily impacts Indigenous groups' physical and mental health.

Negative stereotypes of Indigenous groups are deeply ingrained in our cultural narrative. The appropriation of traditional dress, dances, and tribal names, whether unintentional or not, communicates negative and derogatory messages. These negative stereotypes and microaggressions disparage and undermine the cultural identity of

¹⁶⁴ “Exclusive: Indigenous Americans Dying from Covid at Twice the Rate of White Americans.” The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, February 4, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/04/native-americans-coronavirus-covid-death-rate>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

Indigenous people. The critical connection between historical trauma and contemporary stressors manifest in Indigenous communities with severe consequences.

Echo-Hawk, the director of the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) and the chief research officer for the Seattle Indian Health Board, contends the system of colonialism has created and continues to increase risk factors for poor health outcomes in Indigenous communities. When governments removed Indigenous communities from their land and confined them to “Indian Territories,” many didn't have access to medical care. “They were cut off from their traditional diets and lifestyles, including spiritual practices tied to their homelands.”¹⁶⁷ Today, indigenous people have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma, and heart disease than white Americans, as well as higher rates of suicide.¹⁶⁸ Unsettled grief, depression, high mortality, and significant alcohol and drug abuse plague communities of Indigenous historical trauma.

In 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, suicide was the second-leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Natives ages 10–34. AI/AN adults are almost three times more likely than white adults to be diagnosed with diabetes. The infant mortality rate among the AI/AN population is almost twice that experienced by whites.¹⁶⁹

These indicators demonstrate that the effects of historical trauma are still pervasive in the contemporary narrative, no matter how far removed one may be from the historical event. While these younger generations “inherited the pain, loss, and frustrations of their ancestors”, it is also the presence of modern-day racial aggressions that has an effect on

¹⁶⁷ Lizzie Wade, “Covid-19 Data on Native Americans Is ‘a National Disgrace ... - Science,” September 24, 2020, <https://www.science.org/content/article/covid-19-data-native-americans-national-disgrace-scientist-fighting-be-counted>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ “Healing Historical Trauma,” Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health Magazine

their mental health.¹⁷⁰ Among this fusion of past and present traumas experienced by current generations, work is being done by indigenous community members, practitioners, and artists to create a space where this community can heal and connect to their culture and memories of past generations.

¹⁷⁰ Geriatrics, accessed February 11, 2023, <https://geriatrics.stanford.edu/ethnomed/alaskan/introduction/history.html>.

Chapter 6 Indigenous Contemporary Artists' Interrogating Historical Trauma

The work of several Canadian and U.S Indigenous contemporary artists, have engaged with the horrors of past indigenous injustices and the historical trauma left in its wake. Specifically, this can be seen in the work of U.S artist Wendy Red Star, and Canadian artists Kent Monkman and Nicholas Galanin. Indigenous artists from both Canada and the United State are addressing the physical and mental suffering their communities have endured due to colonization, forced assimilation, war, massacres, relocation programs, cultural desecration. The diverse works created by these three artists' are actively engaging in a mix of mediums such as paint, steel, iron, photography, painting, and installation to confront the physical and psychological injustices they have endured by the indigenous community and break the cycles of historical trauma; while also serving to heal and re-insert the identity of the indigenous people and their culture.

In 1981, the contemporary multimedia artist Wendy Red Star was born in Billings, Montana as a member of the Crow (Apsáalooke) tribe. At 18, Wendy left the Apsáalooke reservation where she was raised and received her BFA in Sculpture at Montana State University in 2004 and her MFA in Sculpture from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2006. While Wendy took her sculpture expertise into her artistic career, she also works in other mediums such as photography, fiber, and performance to create pieces that address the collective historical trauma faced by her Crow (Apsáalooke) ancestors as well as the personal effects these traumas have had on her and other current Crow tribe members. In her 2014 collection entitled *1880 Crow Peace Delegation*, Wendy reexamines American history and brings awareness to the collective trauma experienced

by six well-known Crow Chiefs. In this collection, Wendy uses cultural artifacts and historical imagery of these six Crow chiefs who journeyed from their reservation to Washington, D.C, to discuss land rights and negotiate the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad that was intended to pass through Crow territory¹⁷¹ (figure 35, smarthistory.org, 2023). While in D.C., their portraits were taken by the American photographer Charles Milton Bell. While these are individual portraits, they were constructed by Anglo-Americans, therefore becoming a subject of their gaze that is fogged by white supremacist ideologies. To most indigenous people, especially those of the Crow (Apsáalooke) tribe, these portraits represent the intentional dehumanization of their leaders and the traumatic disregard of their vibrant culture. By using these six portraits, Wendy strives to reclaim her ancestors and culture by asserting their missing identities, individuality, and successes through annotations done in red ink. While her work catalyzes healing and redemption, her work also serves to educate the oppressor or those who may not know the history of the stripping of Crow culture that has had lasting effects on their community. The portrait of Peelatchiwaaxpáash / Medicine Crow (Raven) will be analyzed for this visual analysis of Wendy's work (figure 36, wendyredstar.com, 2023).

Throughout her research, Wendy observed that many historic photographs of indigenous people, including a photograph of Medicine Crow, had been appropriated and has circulated in the public domain for centuries with no information about the sitter or their cultural significance. Chiefs and other significant tribe members were plastered

¹⁷¹Wendy Red Star at Portland Art Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker, Wendy Red Star at Portland Art Museum, and Dr. Steven Zucker. "Restoring Meaning to Crow Chiefs." Smarthistory. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://smarthistory.org/seeing-america-2/peace-delegation/>.

nameless on packaging for butter, tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and clothing. Medicine Crow specifically was seen in an Honest Tea Advertisement¹⁷² (figure 37, smarthistory.org, 2023). His image was plastered on bottles and cans with no information regarding who he was or his significant role in the Crow (Apsáalooke) tribe. Medicine Crow had accomplished great deeds, moved up in rank, tackled wildlife, and was respected in his culture. He sat down for that portrait taken in 1880 to convey these achievements through his appearance; however, his individuality was stripped away once he entered the lens constructed by white men. To them, Medicine Crow and the five other chiefs that made the journey were seen as specimens and part of the natural world. These ideologies made them easier to dehumanize and put their faces in advertisements. Therefore, educating the public on who Medicine Crow was and why he sat down for the portrait motivated Wendy. She outlines Medicine Crow's regalia with her red ink. These sacred clothing and accessories highlighted his achievements and status in the Crow tribe and were to be worn for tribal ceremonies and celebrations. However, because they were sitting down for these portraits on an official visit to the president, they wanted to display the superiority they held among their tribe. The other remaining red annotations surrounding Medicine Crow were iconographic, informative, personal, and humorous.¹⁷³ Wendy uses informative annotations to label the Conch shells by his ears, the brass rings on his fingers, and the eagle feather in his hand. However, she takes a more humorous approach when outlining his headdress. Wendy's annotation reads, "hairbows were out of fashion in 1880". This addition of humor is also seen in several other of these portraits,

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ "1880 Crow Peace Delegation: Birmingham Museum of Art." Birmingham Museum of Art |, June 29, 2022. <https://www.artsbma.org/1880-crow-peace-delegation/>.

specifically in the one of *Alaxchiiaahush/Many War Achievements / Plenty Coups*. The annotation over his left shoulder reads “I shook hands with Prince Albert of Monaco. He was lucky to shake my hand (figure 38, wendyredstar.com, 2023). The majority of the other annotations included are factual. They share his marital status, appointed positions as a tribal judge in 1890, and information regarding his regalia. One of the most powerful annotations runs along the left side of the photo. It is a quote written by John Bourke, a captain in the United States Army and an author and diarist who wrote about the old American west and the indigenous people who inhabited the land.¹⁷⁴ The quotes stated that Medicine Crow “looked like a devil in his war bonnet of feathers, furs, and buffalo horns.” This quote highlights the ideologies of the original oppressors who were responsible for the centuries of historical trauma and dehumanization faced by indigenous people. Here Medicine Crow is described as a wild animal, unlike a man or an accomplished leader. By including this quote, Wendy is creating a space where the past can be remembered and held responsible for the pain that lives on through her and other ancestors of these Crow leaders. Through this collection, Wendy exposes the understudied history of indigenous people, provides a counter narrative to the white essentialism of indigenous people and related stereotypes. Through these efforts Wendy is addressing the physiological trauma of identity stripping and re-establishes the sense of self and identity of these chiefs who fought to protect the future generations of Crow people.

¹⁷⁴ “John Gregory Bourke.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, October 29, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Gregory_Bourke.

Wendy's current work still serves as a catalyst for comfort and healing and a tool for education. Her series of 15 pigment prints titled "Accession" was recently on display at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in the group exhibition "Speaking with light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography". The exhibition highlights "the dynamic ways that Indigenous artists have leveraged their lenses over the past three decades to reclaim representation and affirm their existence, perspectives, and trauma."¹⁷⁵ Much like Wendy's *1880 Crow Peace Delegation* collection, her 2019 series titled *Accession* connects the past to the present and addresses indigenous people's place in history. What prompted this series was Wendy's discovery of hand painted card catalogs that were from the "Works Progress Administration era that detailed the museum's holdings of Native objects, including such items as clothing, moccasins, leggings, belts, and elk tooth dresses."¹⁷⁶ Wendy felt a connection to these crafted cards which prompted her to use them in the *Accession* series. She used the objects on the cards as a reference point and took photos of Crow members who wore similar materials during their tribal parades. Her works combine the isolated photo of the parade goer and a painted representation of the chosen material. By combining the photo with the painted object "the detail of their outfits, their facial expressions, and their finely-adorned horses came into sharper focus, highlighting the richness of Crow culture and giving context to the catalog cards themselves."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ "Speaking with Light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography." Speaking with Light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography | Amon Carter Museum of American Art. Accessed February 11, 2023.
<https://www.cartermuseum.org/exhibitions/speaking-light-contemporary-indigenous-photography>.

¹⁷⁶ "Accession," Wendy Red Star, accessed February 27, 2023,
<https://www.wendyredstar.com/accession#:~:text=Accession%2C%202019,historically%20and%20in%20contemporary%20society>.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

In her painted collaged piece *Catalogue Number 1949.105*, 2019, (figure 39, wendyredstar.com, 2023) Wendy included a cut out image of a man on his horse that sits upon a similar painted depiction of the hat he is wearing. While *Accession* is working to create a connection to an indigenous audience, it can also serve to educate non-indigenous community members on the purpose and use of the traditional sacred dress and clothing of indigenous people. Supplying this education can limit the continuation of negative stereotypes and or appropriation of traditional indigenous dress and customs that is responsible for contemporary stressors manifest in Indigenous communities with severe consequences. Wendy's *1880 Crow Peace Delegation* collection, and her 2019 *Accession* series showcases both the love she has for her Crow culture as well as her commitment to re-insert the identity and culture of the indigenous community back into the narrative of the United States.

Kent Monkman, a contemporary artist of Cree, English, and Irish descent, was born in Saint Mary's, Canada, in 1965. He currently lives and works in Dish With One Spoon Territory in Toronto, Canada, where through several mediums, he strives to disrupt people's perception of the one-sided history they have received in regard to the settlement of North America. He supplies an alternate perspective and visuals regarding events of historical traumas and contemporary complexities of the indigenous experience that have been covered up, untold, or forgotten. In recent years his painting practice has caught the attention of many. Monkman explores these traumas by appropriating artistic traditions of 19th-century western historical paintings. These strategies are explicitly seen in his 2017 piece titled *The Scream* (figure 40, kentmonkman.com, 2023) - which derives its title from

Edvard Munch's *The Scream* from 1893.¹⁷⁸ This large-scale work responds to the horrors of the residential school system and puts this traumatic forced separation of children from their parents in the spotlight. Hundreds of thousands of children would be taken from their families and placed in these schools, where they would be stripped of their language and culture and suffer from psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Monkman's construction of this painting is unique. It did not start out with a basic initial sketch that then, over time, morphed into the final piece. For *The Scream*, Monkman brought in actors into his studio to act out scenes from these horrific events. He took thousands of photos until he found the ones he would use in his piece. He then edited, cropped, and finally projected the photos onto the canvas, where the actor's bodies were traced and painted over with rich reds, purples, blues, and greens.¹⁷⁹ This unique creative process adds a layer of visceral depth and emotion to his work. The outdoor scene of the image takes place in a more modern setting rather than the colonial past seen best in the age of the home. It displays Royal Canadian Mountain Police, nuns, and priests ripping young children from their mothers in front of their own home to send them to boarding schools. Two officers and a screaming mother take up the foreground of the painting. The officers are holding her back like a wild animal as she reaches out for her baby, who a priest is carting off. Her brow is furrowed, and her face is in an emotional state of rage, panic, and fear. Along with this central female figure, two others on the left side of the painting are also trying to protect their children from this heartbreaking separation. As the viewer's

¹⁷⁸ Art Canada Institute - Institut de l'art canadien. "The Scream, 2017." Art Canada Institute - Institut de l'art canadien. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/kent-monkman/key-works/the-scream/>.

¹⁷⁹ "10 Things about Kent Monkman's the Scream." What Next?, June 4, 2021. <https://maryloudriedger2.wordpress.com/2021/06/04/10-things-about-kent-monkmans-the-scream/>.

eyes travel to the top right corner, they can see the backs of three older children who have escaped and are seeking refuge in the nearby forest. Monkman harnesses the movement and expressions of the actors and transports the viewer into this scene, where one can hear the squawking crows overhead, the howling wind, and the screams of the mothers and children as they try to hold onto each other and their culture. To emphasize the modernity of this scene Monkman has the actors wear contemporary clothes such as jeans and colorful shirts seen on the older children. This modern feel reminds the viewer that these residential schools were not a traumatic horror of the past, they continued as late as the 90s and still have lasting psychological effects on present day indigenous generations.¹⁸⁰ These traumas are still deeply felt in the indigenous community through ongoing emotional trauma, language loss, and cultural change.

The recent discovery of the unmarked graves in Canada prompted Monkman's pieces to be circulated worldwide and serve as a visual reminder of this trauma that lingers on the souls of current generations. While Monkman's work serves as a tool for educating his viewers on this collective trauma of the indigenous community, it also serves as a way to heal the indigenous community. Having these events depicted on a large scale sends the message to members of the indigenous community that their stories that have been covered up by a white-centered history will be rewritten into our cultural narrative and not be forgotten. While his work has this large collective impact, it has also left a personal mark on Monkman himself. His grandmother was a survivor of the Brandon Residential School in Manitoba, Canada but only opened up about her experience on her deathbed. Due to this personal family connection, Monkman dedicated this piece to her

¹⁸⁰ "An Overview of the Indian Residential School System - Anishinabek," accessed February 28, 2023, <https://www.anishinabek.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/An-Overview-of-the-IRS-System-Booklet.pdf>.

and her experience. Currently, Monkman is still doing work responding to these residential school horrors. In 2018 Monkman created a similar piece to *The Scream* titled *The Scoop* (figure 41, kentmonkman.com, 2023). Its name directly responds to the “scooping up” of indigenous children, taking them away from their families and stripping them of their culture. Upon examination of this painting, it is evident that there are similar figures in both *The Scream* and *The Scoop*. The women in the blue dress lunging for her child and the three children who have escaped the scene are the most obvious. These paintings both viscerally capture the aggressive assimilation that has led to centuries of ongoing physiological trauma while also serving as a tool of individual and collective healing among the indigenous community.

Nicholas Galanin is a multi-disciplinary artist and musician of Tlingit and Unanga descent. He currently lives in his hometown of Sitka, Alaska, where he uses his art practice to engage with the past, present, and future to expose the obscured collective memory of history concerning indigenous people. While working in mediums such as photo, video, and installation, Galanin uses his work as a catalyst for opening a much-needed dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous people, specifically about the traumatic effects land loss has had on the indigenous community. This is explicitly seen in his 2021 installation “*Never Forget*” (figure 42, peterblumgallery.com, 2023) which was created for the Desert X Biennial in Palm Springs, California. California is one of the several states with a long history of removing indigenous people from the surrounding land. Just by looking at the street signs, it is evident that this taken land has been turned into a “playground” for Hollywood.¹⁸¹ This Biennial serves to recognize that and includes

¹⁸¹ “Nicholas Galanin.” Desert X. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://desertx.org/dx/archive/never-forget>.

site-specific work that responds "meaningfully to the conditions of desert locations, the environment, and indigenous communities."¹⁸²

Galanin's installation, created with iron, paint, and steel, mimic's the infamous and highly problematic Hollywood sign. In 1923 the sign we now know once spelled "HOLLYWOODLAND" and served to promote "a whites-only real estate development,"¹⁸³ which still harms several communities. Galanin's work that is located on the site of Desert X in Palm Springs turns this initial narrative on its head. Standing tall with 45-foot letters, his sign reads "INDIAN LAND." By spelling "INDIAN LAND", Galanin takes agency over the term "Indian," which has blanketed the tremendous diversity of indigenous culture for centuries. He uses it to create a monumental call to action by prompting landowners to transfer land rights and titles back to the indigenous communities. While land acknowledgments have begun to rise in the 21st century, they are merely just lip service with no action behind them. Indigenous communities, who have been stewards of this land for over 10,000 years, only have 3% of land titles.¹⁸⁴ Their reservations are still considered Federal lands that the U.S. government owns; therefore, those who live there do not have any actual ownership. The land this installation and the others included in the Desert X Biennial are on once belonged to the Cahuilla people. This indigenous tribe lived in this surrounding area for over 3,000 years.¹⁸⁵ While the Desert X Biennial acknowledges the tribe on its website, that is not enough. Words mean nothing unless

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ "Nicholas Galanin - Never Forget." Peter Blum Gallery. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.peterblumgallery.com/viewing-room/nicholas-galanin2>.

¹⁸⁴ "Nicholas Galanin." Desert X.

¹⁸⁵ "The Cahuilla People." Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians. Accessed February 11, 2023. <https://augustinetribe-nsn.gov/cahuilla-people/>.

there are supportive actions behind them. That is why, along with creating this installation, Galanin started a GoFundMe campaign to purchase a section of the land and return it to the Cahuilla people. There have been almost 500 donations to the campaign that have helped raise over 55,000 dollars. "*Never Forget*," along with the activism spearheaded by Galanin, marks the present and future. It serves as a vehicle for educating the community about the horrific reality of land loss and for healing the indigenous community by recognizing their original territories and making strides to return them. Galanin's was recently on display alongside the work of Wendy Red-Star in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art exhibition *Speaking with light: Contemporary Indigenous Photography*. His 2012 photograph titled "Get Comfortable" (figure 43, cartermuseum.org, 2023) displays the phrase "INDIAN LAND" in a new form.¹⁸⁶

Wendy Red-Star, Kent Monkman, and Nicholas Galanin use their art to confront the sense of not belonging felt among indigenous communities' along with many other traumatic past and current realities. Their work makes room for different perspectives and emphasizes the one-sided history and stories of colonialism we have been told. Within our nation is a whole other community that has inhabited the land for thousands of years with a disregarded history. These artists are striving to poke holes in this streamlined narrative and fill them with untold truths and hidden stories. Through their own visual language, these three artists are constantly educating the community about the critical connection between historical trauma and contemporary stressors that manifest in Indigenous communities, and the horrific realities that have been left out of history. Their

¹⁸⁶ "Contemporary Indigenous Photography: In Pictures." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, January 12, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2023/jan/12/contemporary-indigenous-photography-in-pictures-amon-carter-museum>.

work also serves as a catalyst for healing the indigenous community and recognizing that their past is an integral part of history that must be rewritten into our cultural narrative.

Conclusion

The collective and individual historical trauma black and indigenous communities have sustained is profound and pervasive. While it is evident that the compounding events for these groups are different, they are similar in that both communities have been victims of violence, displacement, discrimination, and racial injustice that have threatened their position and sense of belonging in our world. As these events have played out in society, we have seen past and present artists revolt against the racial violence, discrimination, and hierarchies imposed by those in privileged positions of power. Specifically, the artists Carl Robert Pope, Barbara Walker, Arthur Jafa, Wendy Red Star, Kent Monkman, and Nicholas Galanin use their work as a catalyst to educate the oppressor and heal the oppressed by interrogating historical trauma and its contemporary consequences on an individual and collective level. Along with the works of these artists, we see collective works such as influential exhibitions and conversations that are challenging the status quo in the art world and making space for difficult discussions regarding events that have been strategically left out of our history books. The works of these artists and the effort the art community is making as a whole are highly imperative in the process of combating racial and social injustices as well as crucial to the reinsertion of lost identity and belonging felt by both the black and indigenous communities that are a result of these collective and individual historical traumas that have plagued generations of both the past and present.

Figures



Figure 1: Betye Saar, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, 1972
Sunanda K. Sanyal, "Betye Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima*," in *Smarthistory*, January 3, 2022, accessed February 28, 2023,

<https://smarthistory.org/betye-saar-liberation-aunt-jemima/>.



Figure 2: Joe Overstreet, *The New Jemima*, 1964 "The New Jemima: Hammer Museum." The New Jemima | Hammer Museum. Accessed February 28, 2023.

<https://hammer.ucla.edu/now-dig-this/art/the-new-jemima>.



Figure 3: T.C. Cannon *Waiting for the Bus (Anadarko Princess)*, 1977, , Cannon, T. C. "Waiting for the Bus (Anadarko Princess), 1977 - T. C. Cannon."

www.wikiart.org, January 1977 <https://www.wikiart.org/1977>



Figure 4: Julie Buffalohead, *Trickster Showdown*, 2015 Jason. "The Truth about Stories: Julie Buffalohead." Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), February 15, 2017.

<https://iaia.edu/event/truth-stories-julie-buffalohead/>.



Figure 5: Cara Romero, *Evolovers*, 2019
"Evolvers." Cara Romero Photography. Accessed February 28, 2023.

<https://www.cararomerphotography.com>



Figure 6: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Defacement*, 1983
Miller, Leigh Anne. "Jean-Michel Basquiat Guggenheim." ARTnews.com, July 9, 2019.

<https://www.artnews.com/gallery/art-in-america/aia-photos/jean-michel-basquiat-guggenheim/jean-michel-basquiat-2/>

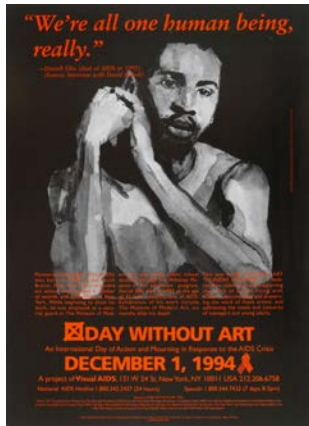


Figure 7: Lupton, Ellen. “Darrel Ellis: Human Touch: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.” Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, July 13, 2022.

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2019/06/27/darrel-ellis-human-touch/>.



Figure 8: Daniel Martinez, *Museum Tag Project*, 1993 “Whitney Biennial 1993.” Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed March 1, 2023.

<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/biennial-1993#exhibition-videos>.



Figure 9: Amy Sherald *Miss Everything (Unsuppressed Deliverance)*, 2013 “Amy Sherald Portrait on View.” North Carolina Museum of Art, June 25, 2021.

[https://ncartmuseum.org/amy_sherald_portrait_on_view/#:~:text=Miss%20Everything%20\(Unsuppressed%20Deliverance\)%20by,and%20naturalistic%20blue%2Dred%20background.](https://ncartmuseum.org/amy_sherald_portrait_on_view/#:~:text=Miss%20Everything%20(Unsuppressed%20Deliverance)%20by,and%20naturalistic%20blue%2Dred%20background.)



Figure 10: Tschabalala Self, *Black Face with Yellow Breast*, 2020 "Tschabalala Self." Galerie Eva Presenhuber. Accessed March 1, 2023.

<https://www.presenhuber.com/exhibitions/tschabalala-self#tab:slideshow;tab-1:slideshow;slide:11>.



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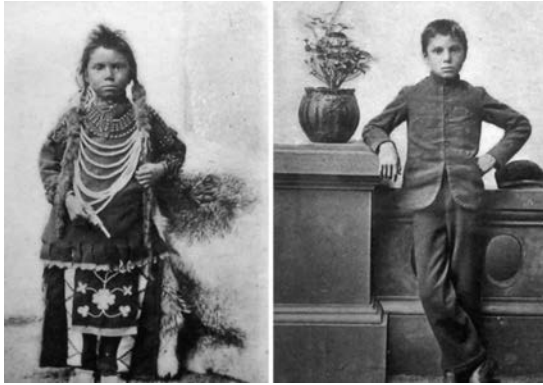


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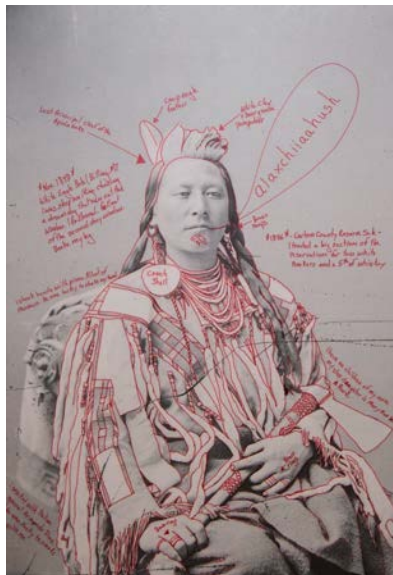


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