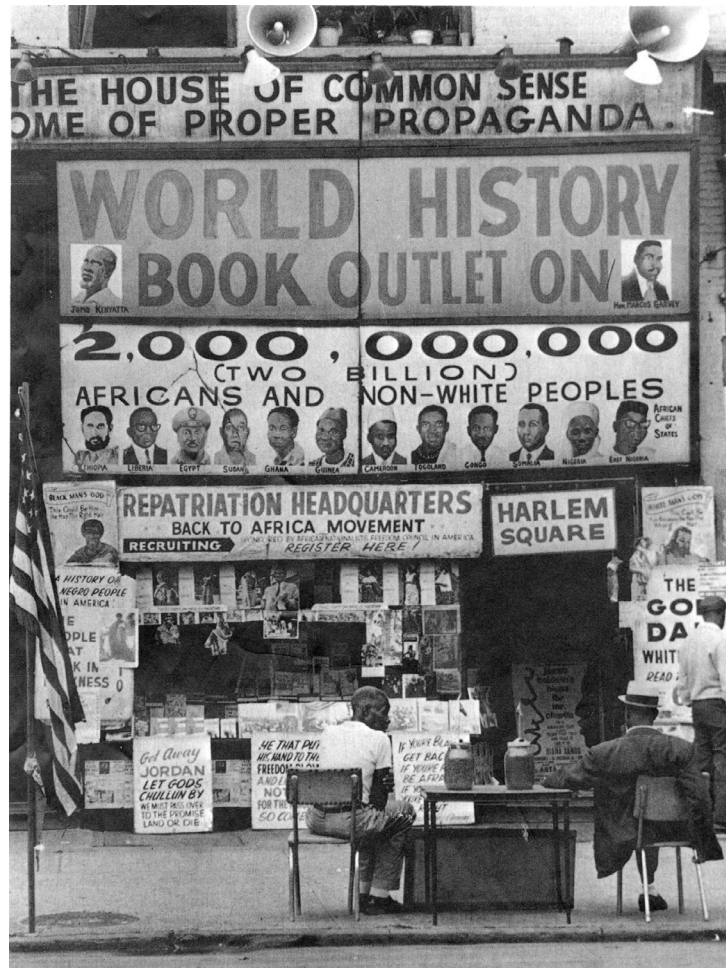


The Black Arts Movement

By Ron Scott

The Black Arts Movement took a radical turn in America as a result of the civil rights movement, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, and the Black Power movement. During the 1960s artists became creative warriors expressing politically engaged work that explored Black culture, its roots and historical experience. It was time to define the world in their own terms, not through the white perceptions. *Time Magazine* (1994) described the Black Arts Movement as the “single most controversial moment in the history of African American literature—possibly in American literature as a whole.”

The most significant arts movement group was formed in Harlem in 1965 by 50 artists calling themselves the Weusi Artists Collective. They became the pacesetters for much of the cultural movement in Harlem, and the rest of the country. The Weusi tradition of Black art is seen in the new art galleries in Harlem and beyond today. In 1968 the Studio Museum in Harlem became the premier museum dedicated to African American art; an institution that grew out of the Black Arts Movement.



The development of Black theater groups with ties to community organizations and its issues were also a direct result of the Black Arts Movement. Black theaters served as the focus of poetry, dance, and music performances in addition to formal and ritual drama. Black writers moved to form the Harlem Writers Guild, led by John O. Killens, which included Maya Angelou, Jean Carey Bond, Rosa Guy, and Sarah Wright, among others. The Movement gave birth to such dance companies as Diane McIntyre's Sounds in Motion and Dance Theatre of Harlem, the first Black classical ballet company founded by Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook.

The most important figure during the Black Arts Movement was Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones). Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Amiri Baraka made a symbolic move from Manhattan's Lower East Side to Harlem, where he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS). By 1970 Black theaters and cultural centers were active throughout Harlem and America. These Harlem theaters are responsible for generations of theatergoers, as well as giving aspiring actors an opportunity to perfect their craft.

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