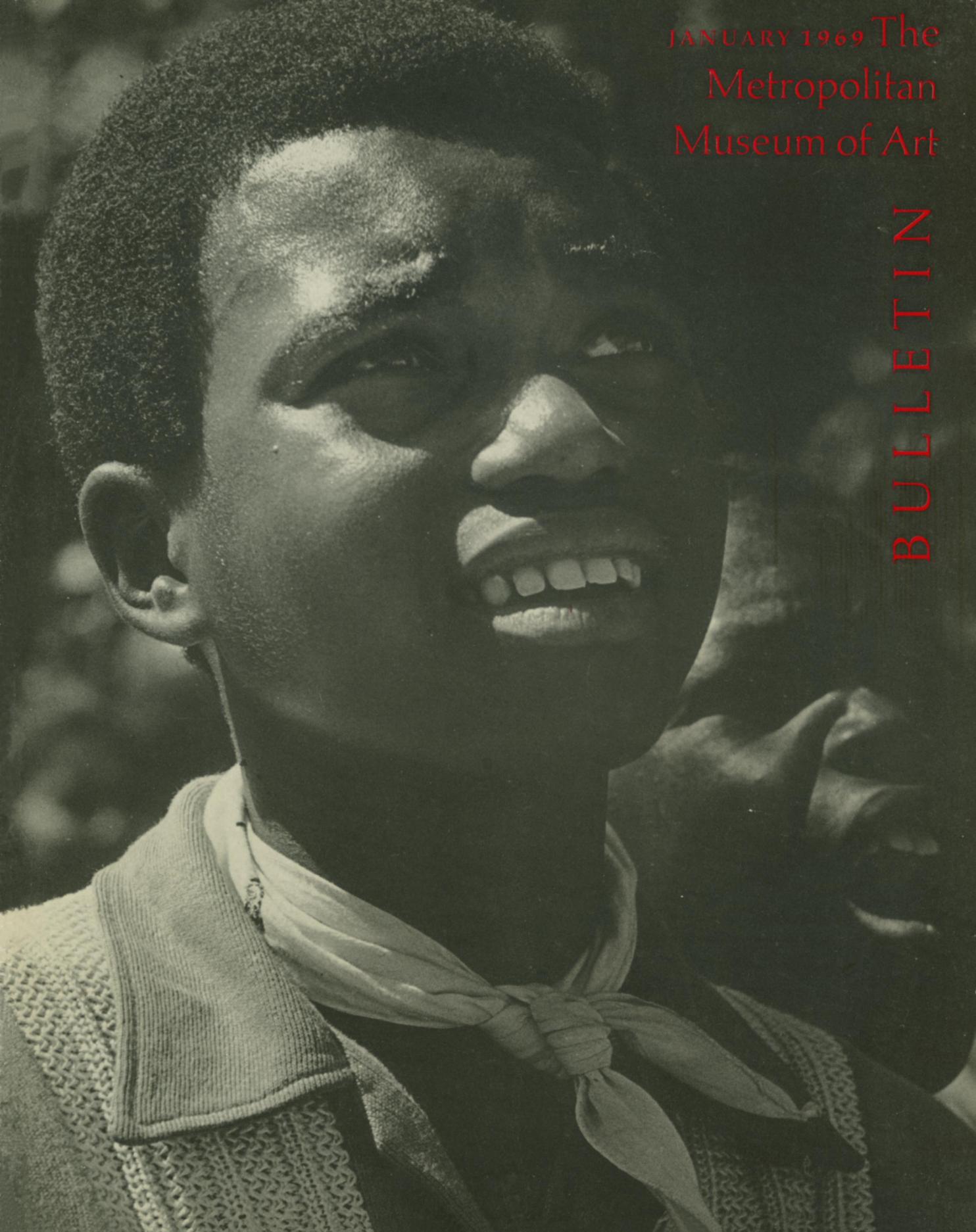


JANUARY 1969 The  
Metropolitan  
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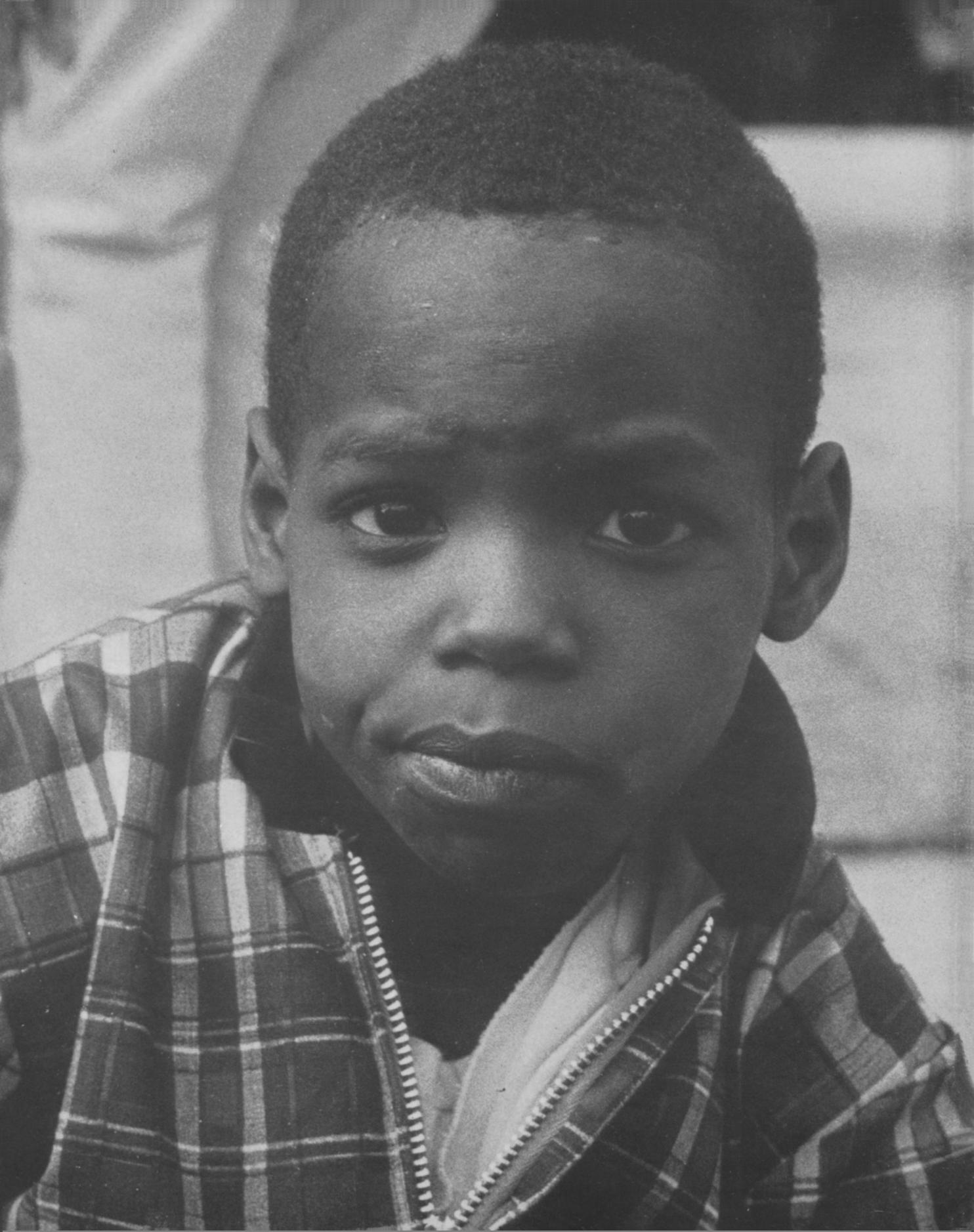
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ON THE EIGHTEENTH of this month The Metropolitan Museum of Art will open an exhibition that has nothing to do with art in the narrow sense – but everything to do with this Museum, its evolving role and purpose, what we hope is its emerging position as a positive, relevant, and regenerative force in modern society. The title of the exhibition is “*Harlem on My Mind*”: *The Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*.

It is an exhibition that attempts, through photographs, films, television, documentary recordings of sounds and voices, music, and memorabilia, to convey that most difficult of things, a cultural and historical experience, a total environment – one particular world, in fact, which has been known intimately only to the Black people of New York City – Harlem. It doesn’t interpret or explain. It sticks to the facts, Harlem’s historical events over the past sixty-eight years, its literature, theater, politics, music, art, and business. Three Blacks and three whites conceived the show and put it on, in thirteen of the Metropolitan’s Special Exhibition Galleries. The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., acting with imagination and concern, generously underwrote the cost of the exhibition.

Why The Metropolitan Museum of Art? The question was asked of us right from the beginning, posed almost as a challenge, and it will, I am sure, continue to be asked.

Let me say first that our Charter, which is almost a hundred years old, enjoined the Museum to apply itself vigorously not only to the study of the fine arts but to relate them to “practical life” as well. “Practical life” in this day can mean nothing less than involvement, an active and thoughtful participation in the events of our time. For too long museums have drifted passively away from the center of things, out to the periphery where they play an often brilliant but usually tangential role in the multiple lives of the nation.

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## The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

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JANUARY 1969

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*Photographs: cover, frontispiece, p. 242, by George Frye; p. 241, by Reginald McGhee*

Speaking for this Museum, we have by and large been unresponsive to social and political events. Perhaps, given our own struggle to grow, it couldn't have been otherwise. But to continue to do so would be irresponsible. "*Harlem on My Mind*" signals the turning point.

The exhibition, frankly, is an experimental one, the first major step toward rethinking and expanding our concepts of what exhibitions should do. We want to explore the essential nature of the Museum, of works of art, and of our changing relationship to the visiting public, to scholars, to the educational process, and to the urban environment in which we find ourselves.

The Metropolitan Museum's role has always been to make people see. Today we must ask them, and ourselves, to look as well: to look searchingly at things that have to be faced, such as our communities and our environment. If we pretend to any maturity as an institution we have to begin directing our resources toward larger humanist ends.

At one level the Museum's collections are individual, fragmented statements – great works of art isolated from their time and place. At a much more difficult level they interrelate; it would not be far-fetched to suggest that what the complex DNA structure is to the mystery and secret of life, works of art are to the secret of the human condition, human relations, and what we really mean by man's cultural heritage and history.

"*Harlem on My Mind*" is this Museum's attempt to plumb the secret of Harlem, of its unique achievements and contributions to American life, its energy, genius, and spirit. I don't know of any institution better qualified, by reason of its basic humanist orientation, its acute and intelligent sensitivity for a disparate range of cultural expressions, better qualified than this one to attempt such an exhibition.

Our hope for the exhibition is that it communicate a sense of place and a way of living. That it engender an appreciation of the tragedies and triumphs of Black Harlem. That it make us realize that we must begin to look to the great Negro past for our understanding of the American experience, and look to it as well for whatever common hope we have for the future.

THOMAS P. F. HOVING, *Director*

# The Black Artist in America:

## A Symposium

ROMARE BEARDEN, *Moderator*

SAM GILLIAM, JR.

RICHARD HUNT

JACOB LAWRENCE

TOM LLOYD

WILLIAM WILLIAMS

HALE WOODRUFF

MR. BEARDEN: We are here to discuss some of the problems of the Black artist in America. I think one of the most perplexing is the problem of making a living. During the last two or three years this problem has been met to some degree by more teaching jobs being made available to us, but it's still hard for the Black artist to support himself. I'd like to hear some of the members of the panel respond to this question.

MR. LLOYD: Many Black artists can't support themselves through their art – there may be one or two, but it's most difficult. First of all because the Black artist's very existence has been denied so long that people don't know of him – even in the Black community. Therefore his struggle to reach the top has been a great one, and I envy three gentlemen who are sitting here – Mr. Bearden, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Woodruff – who have made it. I know what kind of struggle any Black artist who's made it has gone through, and therefore I bear a great deal of respect for you gentlemen.

MR. BEARDEN: Well, Tom, would you like to explore that a little further? You said that the Black artist is unknown in the Black community. What could be done to have him better known? Within his own community and within the mainstream of American art?

MR. LLOYD: First, I think he has to be accepted in the galleries; the museums have to recognize that he has something to contribute to his own culture, to the Black communities, and I think they have failed miserably to do this. Sure, within the last couple of years I've heard about exhibitions dedicated to show the accomplishment

of the Black artist and I've been in some, but what has happened for the two hundred years before that? What has happened with some three hundred, four hundred art galleries in greater New York? What has happened with the museums?

MR. BEARDEN: Maybe Hale Woodruff can reply to these questions, because he has a great knowledge of art history and has lived through some of these problems.

MR. WOODRUFF: Well, I agree that it's very tough for the Black artist not only to make a living but even, first, to make anything out of his art. I think this is also true of the white artist. I suspect the economic problem varies for all artists, and each must come to grips with it, somehow, in his own way. Of course the ideal solution would be the ongoing sale of his art product. This opportunity has come to a few artists and will doubtless come to others, although slowly, in the future. Scholarships and grants have been awarded to a few Black artists, but such grants are usually of short duration and therefore do not meet the long-term needs of artists in general. The majority of artists, Black and white, resort to teaching as a means of meeting economic needs, while some artists engage in other types of employment.

Generally speaking, the Black artist has not had the same opportunities to exhibit in the big national annuals and biennials as other artists have. A number of galleries exhibit the works of a few leading Black artists, but by and large the Black artist has not come before a very large public through gallery shows, which could open up to him channels of purchase and public recognition.

Support from the Black community for the Black artist is gradually developing, but it seems that the real job still remains in the hands of the art institutions – galleries and museums – to provide the Black artist with that kind of professional and prestigious support he needs for his continued development on both the economic and aesthetic levels.

MR. BEARDEN: In writing about this once I said that the best-known Black artist since Henry O. Tanner was certainly Jacob Lawrence. Jacob has been one of the artists who has been in shows and represented us through the years, and I'd like Jake to give us his thoughts on the economic problems of the Black artist.

MR. LAWRENCE: I surely agree with Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Woodruff, but I think it takes on another dimension than just the economic. I think it's a psychological one. Mr. Lloyd asked what can be done, what can help. I think one thing we can do is just what we're doing now, and more of it. It's going to take education – educating the white community to respect and to recognize the intellectual capacity of Black artists. We've been accepted in the theater to a greater degree than we have in the fine arts. Why is this so? I think it's because in this area we are recognized to have a natural ability. But still, there's a psychological problem. You take a man like Bill Robinson, who never attains the same kind of recognition as a Gene Kelly. They say we're supposed to be good cooks, but we've never been made chefs in the Waldorf-Astoria, we've never been asked to give cooking lessons on television. Why? Because this calls for a certain recognition on the part of the white community that you have an intellectual capacity that either they don't want to recognize or are so brainwashed that they can't accept.

On the other hand, none of us wants to be selected as “the one and only” or “one of the few.” Mr. Bearden and Mr. Woodruff and I have been participating in shows for a number of years, and the rest of you have come along – I've seen your names. But none of us appreciates the idea of “We'll accept *you* and this is it.” It's going to take just what we're doing now to educate the white community. I think they must have a psychological block because they refuse to see and refuse to recognize what we can do. The mere fact that we're here, having this discussion, indicates this. We're always in *Negro* shows, not just shows. I don't know of any other ethnic group that has been given so much attention but ultimately forgotten. You take a man like Horace Pippin, who I'm sure was a greater “primitive” than Grandma Moses. But compare the amount of recognition the two have received.

MR. WILLIAMS: It seems that one of the underlying

things we're talking about is that basically we come from a nonvisual culture or people. There haven't been that many visual arts – paintings, sculpture – exposed to the Black community itself. I think that one of the mechanisms that helps a young person decide to be an artist is what resources there are for him to go to. One of the things I'm interested in, one of the necessities, is to provide facilities. Provide a situation where these young people can come and be helped in a constructive manner, not just in the usual superficial art-school methods.

Getting back to shows, one of the things that's happening is that every show that concerns Black artists is really a sociological show. The “*Harlem on My Mind*” show is a pointing example of total rejection on the part of the establishment, of saying “Well, you're really not doing art,” or of not dealing with the artists that may exist or do exist in Harlem. These shows deal with the sociological aspects of a community, a historical thing. I think the nature of this panel is just that again – another sociological thing, instead of dealing with pressing issues. The question is “You're a Black artist; what are you doing, what do you want to do, where do you want to go?” instead of saying “You are in it, you're an artist who has been suppressed, how can we help you?” I'm somewhat irritated by and somewhat opposed to the nature of this panel, especially when you attach the “Black artist” thing to it, because I think we're perpetuating the ideas that we're trying to get away from. There are two different questions about Black identity. Black *men* and Black *artists* – they're different questions and somehow they seem to be thrown together as one that can be answered with some simple statement. There are as many answers to that question as there are people sitting here.

MR. BEARDEN: Bill, we're going to discuss some of these questions of identity later, so at this point I'd like you to develop some of the programs you have in mind for the community and, to use an old cliché, for the economic betterment of the artist.

MR. WILLIAMS: One of the things that we've thought and talked about was an artist-in-residence program. The nature of this program would be that we ask an artist or group of artists, as professional people, to serve as artists in residence in a particular community. They would be totally supported; that is, their studio bills and living expenses would be paid. We're not talking about the usual grant level of two or three thousand dollars; we're talking about ten or fifteen thousand dollars. What they would be asked to do in return would be to produce their own work, produce it on a serious, aggressive level, and also to act as male images, symbols of attainment for the

community. An aspiring artist could come to them – they could be almost apprentices – and could be supported, that is, provided with a studio and materials or with minimum living expenses. This is kind of an idealistic proposal, but I'm sure if we can have this panel, if we can have fifty Black shows, we can have this idealistic proposal.

MR. HUNT: There are things like that in operation in other cities, in St. Louis, for example. They have a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and from the Danforth Foundation to set up this kind of artist-in-residence program, with apprentices and studio space, and something like a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year stipend. I don't see why it couldn't be done in New York, because there are even more resources here, certainly in terms of artists available. That sort of thing has been developed in Illinois, too; I've been involved with the Illinois Arts Council. They've started an artist-in-residence program that doesn't deal specifically with Negro communities, but with a number of outlying communities that for one reason or another don't have access to this cultural-enrichment type of program.

MR. GILLIAM: A similar kind of artist-in-residence program is going on in Washington, in which I'm a participant. The stipend is five thousand dollars and studio facilities are provided. It's not specifically directed toward the Black community, but the majority of Washington's population is Black.

Since I'm from Washington my experiences have been totally different, and that leads me to raise another question in relation to the problem of economics, and this is about the extent that the Black artist has been recognized by the Black community. The answer might be what Mr. Williams has suggested, a matter of sociology or a matter of economics on a greater scale. We've been prevented from being visually minded because we've had to be so industrially minded. This economic factor would probably prevent someone like myself from a southern community from coming to school in New York, as opposed to staying in my own community and going to school. How are you going to think about things like art when it's all you can do to get any kind of job? These kinds of things have been prevalent issues.

MR. BEARDEN: Hale, perhaps you could sum up some of these economic problems in relation to the future. Do you think a young man like Williams will have a better prospect of making a living as an artist than you had?

MR. WOODRUFF: First, I'd like to say that I don't agree entirely with Williams and Gilliam on the notion that we are not visually minded. I'm older than anybody here

and I've lived long enough to see scores of Black artists, who never really made it, come and go. They didn't make it for many of these economic reasons, but basically I think they didn't make it because there was no kind of world for them, either in the Black community or the white community. I don't want to sound chauvinistic, but I think every Black man has certain sensitivities and sensibilities that come out in various art forms. The fact that music is one of our strengths probably is no accident. The fact that we don't have a visual history or a history of creating visual works in this country is a fact of circumstance, and doesn't mean that the visual world was never open to us or that we never opened our eyes to it. I think it's chiefly economic. In the twenties and thirties there were many Black artists. Read some books about it: you'll see name after name of artists who have since disappeared from the scene. They simply could not make it in the so-called fine arts, but many of these fellows got into the non-fine-arts areas, like illustration, design, teaching. You rarely, if ever, hear about them, but they are there. What we're discussing now is the so-called fine arts area. When you ask me what's going to come – we don't know. But here is a practical point: I believe that in the visual arts there's something more than just painting for Madison Avenue or a gallery show or a museum show. I know of many young Black artists who are successful designers – TV designers, industrial designers, and so on. This is a very real and practical world.

The American has a notion that fine arts are the greatest thing that ever existed, and he may very well be right. I don't know that you've got to worry too much about that youngster who's going to be an artist, whether he's in the ghetto or in Nob Hill or wherever. Circumstances are going to lead him into it, and I think just about every man at this table has come into art in that way. The establishment of centers in the ghetto and elsewhere, available to all people as well as the people who live there, will be a way of not only discovering talent but also of encouraging it and helping it to develop. But I'm very wary of urging these fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds to go into art as a profession. Let them make up their own minds. I think the whole world of art should be open to them and made available for them to become involved, either as active participants or appreciator-consumers of art.

MR. LLOYD: But is that world open to them?

MR. WOODRUFF: In terms of what it has been and is now for a lot of people, I don't know. It's hard enough for the best to make it in the fine arts area. I see the future as being one where there are conducive atmos-

pheres, facilities, and people to work with these youngsters. There might be no teaching in the sense of having classes, but simply every facility imaginable, and guides and teachers to work with them. If a youngster wants to throw some clay around, let him do it: if he gets sick of that and wants to carve some wood, that's fine. This is the kind of orientation I think would be helpful in developing interest, activity, and participation.

MR. LLOYD: I think there needs to be a gigantic effort to bring art to young Black kids in an enormous project. I don't think they have anywhere near the same opportunity as anyone else. I think young white kids are exposed to art at a very early age; their mothers go to museums and drag the kids along and they get a look at art when they're three or four. This doesn't happen with Black kids.

MR. WOODRUFF: When I said the visual world was open to Black kids, I meant things that every man sees, even if it's an old back fence. I certainly agree that they need art brought to them.

MR. LLOYD: This is one of my pet things: it's very important to bring art to Black people. Right now, we're not going to museums and to art galleries. I've been going to them for something like twenty-five years and I could count the Black people I've seen. We have to bring art to the Black communities. We should have things like the "wall of pride." We have to beautify the Black communities, with trees or whatever; we have to have monuments to Black heroes, right on Seventh Avenue. It's important for Black people to have this identity. They have to feel this pride. It's our responsibility to bring it to them. We can begin by using posters, by using existing billboards, and we have to get the money to do this. A group of Black artists should get together and do these posters and put them up and let people see them. Perhaps a place like the Metropolitan should finance something like that.

MR. GILLIAM: Up to now our major interest hasn't been in promoting culture, in promoting awareness of Black art and artists. We do have to begin to make the Black community more aware, more visually oriented.

MR. BEARDEN: It seems to me that a big problem confronts the Black artist after he decides to become a professional artist. He's twenty-five, or twenty-six, or twenty-seven. He's married. He has one or two children. It's difficult getting a foothold into the art world; trying to have his work exposed; trying to make a living, probably by having another job—teaching or something. I'd like Mr. Hunt, Mr. Gilliam, Mr. Lloyd, and Mr. Williams to begin this discussion on professional problems they

themselves are probably dealing with. How does the young Black artist make a living? What are some of the things that are wrong? What would you like to see done?

MR. LLOYD: There should be many more opportunities open to the young Black artist. It's a peculiar thing: I teach painting and sculpture in a program called the Adult Creative Arts Workshop, sponsored by the Department of Parks: a ceramics class was introduced and I went around looking for a potter, a Black potter. I searched the whole of New York and I found three. There might be more, but I only found three and they were already employed. I really thought about that. Here in New York, with millions of people, how is it that there are only two or three Black potters? There's something wrong here; someone has perpetrated some kind of evil on the Black race that's unbelievable.

MR. GILLIAM: Why is the issue finding a Black potter to teach a Black child as opposed to finding a potter?

MR. LLOYD: Oh, I think that's very important. We were talking about Black art: I think there's going to be Black art, I think there's going to be a separate Black community. If there is separate Black art it might be a good thing, because what's gone before hasn't been a good thing.

MR. WILLIAMS: How would this Black art be different from white art?

MR. LLOYD: Well, it would be different inasmuch as one of our main aims should be relating to Black people. Black artists should be working in Black communities.

MR. WILLIAMS: The question I'm really posing is how does one make art relevant to its community?

MR. LLOYD: I think the artist is more than just someone who paints or someone who makes sculpture. I think he has a compact, a relationship with the people that the ordinary person doesn't have. I think he can bring about changes.

MR. BEARDEN: Well, let me ask you a question, Tom. You're going to have a show shortly at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Tell us how you feel what you have done relates to the Harlem community. Do you wish to direct your art to the community?

MR. LLOYD: Yes. I hope my show will make Black people aware of what's happening in art today. A lot of Black people are involved in helping me form that show, in helping me make my sculptures; that's part of the museum idea, and I don't think this has happened before. But mainly I think Black people can relate to my work—it's a visual thing. When I was working in my studio little Black kids would come up to my door and just look at my light sculpture and they'd like it and

somehow relate to it.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, but would a white kid do the same thing, though?

MR. LAWRENCE: Yes.

MR. LLOYD: But I'm interested in a Black kid.

MR. WILLIAMS: And if so, if a white kid would do the same thing, what makes it Black art then? Beyond that you did it?

MR. LLOYD: I don't know what makes it Black art except that it exists in the Black community.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, but you could have made the same forms on 10th Street as well, so it's not uniquely related to that particular community.

MR. LLOYD: It's related because I'm Black, and I know where my feelings lie.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yes, but see, what I'm trying to get at is that we talk about making Black art. And if we're really talking about Black art, we're talking about something in which the forms are uniquely Black.

MR. LLOYD: We're talking about communication. I don't even know that we're talking about *forms* necessarily. It's like how you feel and what you're doing. I mean, with the kind of thing I do, most people don't even associate me with being Black, and when they see me they're rather shocked and in some cases rather hurt and I don't know why.

MR. GILLIAM: Is there a specific form of art that a Black artist does that should be immediately identifiable?

MR. LLOYD: There has been in the past—Black artists were primarily known as social painters. But that's not what I mean: I know that it's very important for me to relate to Black people with my work, and I have to tag myself as being Black and being interested in the Black man. This is part of my very existence. It's important to somehow relate to our own people.

MR. WOODRUFF: What you're supporting and asserting then is the Black *artist*, not Black *art*.

MR. LLOYD: Yeah, I'm supporting the Black artist, but by supporting the Black artist, naturally I'm also supporting the Black community. I think that this is so important.

MR. WOODRUFF: It is.

MR. WILLIAMS: Maybe I'm dwelling on a point, but "Black art's" kind of a touchy thing with me . . .

MR. LLOYD: No, don't you see? Black art can be any kind of art, it can be anything. It can be a painting of a little Black child or a laser beam running around the room. We have to project that the artist is Black.

MR. WILLIAMS: My point is that it *can* be a laser beam or a de Kooning drawing or a number of other things.

It seems to me that we're belaboring the label of Black art for nothing. What you're saying is that you should have a commitment to the Black community, to educate them to the visual world. We're not talking about Black art per se.

MR. LLOYD: Not in that sense, no. But only in the sense that the Black artist hasn't ever been publicized. He doesn't exist. I'm with a group called Black Visual Environments, and we're a group of professional artists who hope to bring a big, big change about in New York through various means—putting pressure on people if we have to, but mainly by working in the Black communities. We're not going to teach art, we're going to get involved in the whole political structure.

MR. WILLIAMS: It seems to me that you couldn't really make art as we know it now welcome or relevant to the Black community.

MR. LLOYD: Why not? You mean to say if there was a statue of Martin Luther King on Seventh Avenue . . .

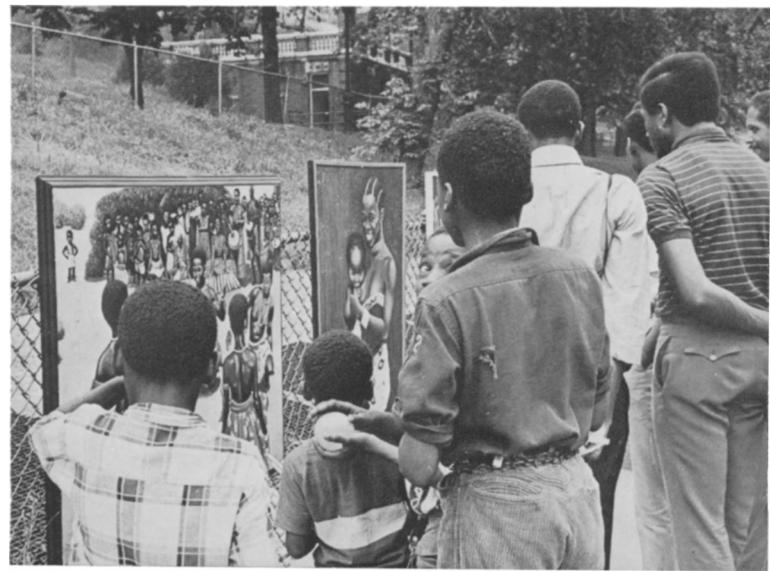
MR. WILLIAMS: We're not talking about statues. There's a difference.

MR. LLOYD: But we're talking about art.

MR. WILLIAMS: Yeah, but statues aren't necessarily art. What I'm trying to say is that if you took your light pieces and put them on 125th Street there would be a certain amount of exposure to your community, but would that exposure make the pieces *relevant* to the community—the total Black community and not just the kids you're working with?

MR. LLOYD: It's relevant to the Black community if they can identify with it. If I put up a statue of Stokely Carmichael, like, people are going to identify with that.

MR. WILLIAMS: But then by the same token I can take a newspaper clipping of Martin Luther King and blow it up and everyone will identify, but I can't necessarily call that art.



Photograph: George Frye

MR. LLOYD: No, I wouldn't call that art either.

MR. WILLIAMS: It's a higher aesthetic that we're talking about.

MR. LLOYD: Of course it is—I'm a professional artist, you know. I'm talking about a certain form of art that's meaningful.

MR. BEARDEN: Tom, in other words, you're saying that you want to direct your efforts toward the Black community, and the mere fact that you are there and making your work accessible and in a certain sense directing it to them would classify the work as Black art. This work could take any form?

MR. LLOYD: Yes. It could be kinetic or light sculpture, it could be painting, it could be anything, if the person who does it has these things in mind.

MR. LAWRENCE: We're involved in many problems here. I agree with Mr. Bearden that economic problems lead into the professional ones. Somehow we've missed one very important thing—government involvement in art. If we go back about thirty years we'll find that some of the greatest progress, economic, professional, and so on, was made then, by the greatest number of artists—not only Negro artists but white ones as well. The greatest exposure for the greatest number of people came during this period of government involvement in the arts. That is what many professional organizations like Artists Equity, the theater groups, and so on, have been trying to do. The government has made stabs at it—you've got various committees and they've given stipends, but nothing massive like the thing thirty years ago. I think what we need is a massive government involvement in the arts—by municipal groups or by the state or by private organizations or by museums like the Metropolitan. What we need is more concern with the philosophy of socialism—that's the only way we're going to achieve this sort of progress, and we, the Negro artists, are going to benefit by this.

That leads me into another thing. I think we must be very careful not to isolate ourselves, because many of the things we're talking about not only pertain to the Negro artist but pertain to the artist generally. If they're accomplished we will all benefit by them.

I also think that many of these problems we're mentioning have to be solved individually. You may feel, Mr. Lloyd, and I may feel that we have to work in a community that's predominately Negro, like Harlem. Others may feel that we will benefit to a greater degree by working outside of the community and being (this is an unfortunate term) "integrated into the mainstream" of the overall national community.

MR. LLOYD: Yeah, but haven't we been integrated for so long? I mean, where are we now? We're here, you know, talking about the bad situation we're in because we've been integrated.

MR. LAWRENCE: Who's been integrated? We've never been integrated.

MR. LLOYD: There's never been any real unity amongst the Black artists.

MR. LAWRENCE: Oh sure there's been, man, you don't know your history. I think Black artists had a greater degree of unity when I was a youngster than they have now. Probably Mr. Woodruff can give you a better account of this since he's older than I am, but at any rate, right after the Reconstruction and maybe before, you had various art communities among your Negro artists. You had your Walker group, your Darktowers group, you had your Negro Renaissance, which was a very tight organization. There were cultural groups—maybe too isolated, but you did have them, even more than you do now. I'm not saying this was a totally good thing, but it had its good aspects.

MR. LLOYD: What were some of the good aspects and what were some of the bad?

MR. LAWRENCE: One of the good things was that there was a community of artists who had a spiritual relationship, I guess you'd call it. And there were a few paternal organizations like the Harmon Foundation that would help the Negro artist. One of the bad aspects was that maybe we never attained the top degree of professional status because of the economic aspects of the situation. There was no way for artists to make a living except for a few people who were teaching in Negro colleges, and artists could never get into the economic mainstream. But aside from that, this community relationship was very good, and it existed then more than it does now.

MR. LLOYD: Well, I haven't heard about it. I never read about it in school or anywhere.

MR. LAWRENCE: I think the young people today don't know these things because there isn't that kind of interest.

MR. LLOYD: It's not there isn't an interest—the material's not available to them. How could one hear about this group you're talking about? How could one learn about it? Certainly not by coming in this museum and buying a book.

MR. HUNT: I've seen this material in the Schomburg Collection [the branch of the New York Public Library on 135th Street].

MR. LLOYD: Even that collection is not that publicized.

MR. HUNT: Well, I must say you sort of want everybody to bring it and put it in your lap.

MR. LLOYD: I want it to be where I'm at.

MR. HUNT: The kind of thing Jake Lawrence is talking about was going on in Chicago during the WPA days. There was the South Side Community Art Center, for instance.

It's interesting to see how things have gone one way at one point and another way at another point. After the war a few Negro artists were more integrated in the larger scene, and now things are sort of going backward – Tom Lloyd is getting more and more identified with the Negro community, he's sort of going back into it. The kind of history that Jake Lawrence is outlining gives you a kind of perspective, something that you can start from – like maybe not making the mistakes of the past and helping you develop this idea of making your art relevant to the Negro community.

I must say I think you're talking about two different things. Okay, you're a Black artist and living in a Black community. That's fine. Whether your art is Black or not doesn't make any difference. I think you needlessly confuse the issues by insisting that there's something about living in a Black community that makes your art Black. That's just not true.

MR. LLOYD: I'm not just talking about me. The white community hasn't accepted Black artists for years and years, and they're not even ready to now, really. And so I'm not just an artist. Therefore I'm a Black artist. If white society is not going to accept my work, I'm a Black artist. I'm not a white artist.

MR. LAWRENCE: I've seen a couple of your pieces and I would put it this way: I think you are an artist who happens to be Black, but you're not a Black artist. See, that's the difference.

MR. LLOYD: No, I'm a Black artist who has refused to be conditioned . . .

MR. LAWRENCE: Wait a minute. From what I've seen of your work – although you may be a terrific artist – there's no possible way that I can see anyone in the Black community *relating* to your work. They may respond to it aesthetically, they may feel that it's a terrific piece – but I can't see how anyone would *relate* to it, and I don't see why they should.

MR. LLOYD: They would relate to it if they knew that I am Black. That's very important.

MR. LAWRENCE: That's not important in a work of art.

MR. LLOYD: It's important to Black people, you know. I'm not only concerned with art. With me art is a secondary thing.

MR. LAWRENCE: I think you're begging the question here and you're making an excuse that you don't have

to make. You can be a very fine artist and I think you'll be contributing. There's no reason why you have to paint or work in a certain way, and have the image of Blackness written on your work to be a fine artist.

MR. LLOYD: It doesn't have to be written on. But don't tell me that Black people can't relate to my work. When they see me and they see my work, I know what they say. They say, "Dig it, a Black cat did that." And that means something to them, I know it does.

MR. WILLIAMS: But what happens when you're not there?

MR. LLOYD: I'm talking about my work being meaningful to Black people, and that's very important.

MR. BEARDEN: Suppose the Black community didn't accept your work and the white community did. Suppose you had been accepted by the white community, fully accepted. Would you have gone to the Black community to show your work if you had that kind of acceptance? Think about it.

MR. LLOYD: I've thought about that before. I've made it – I'm making a living off my art, a pretty good living. I can just keep my mouth shut and go ahead and make nice constructions for people to buy. But I'm not talking about me. I'm talking about Black artists. I'm talking about Black artists in the past, Black artists in the future. Simply because they're Black, there are millions of roadblocks in front of them.

MR. GILLIAM: I think I worry more about the quality of the experience coming to the Black community. And I think there is a need to raise the visual orientation of the Black community. During the riots in Washington, when the whites didn't come in from the suburbs, gallery attendance fell way off. If Washington has a sixty per cent majority of Black people, why does museum attendance fall down when something happens so the whites don't go? It's easy to see that we could easily hustle up to Harlem or over to 14th Street and put up a lot of structures that would be meaningful. But instead, isn't it that museums as such have not served the total community? Why can't museums really emphasize the kind of programs that will bring a person from where he is to where the better facility is? And when he's there why can't you make him actually welcome? This is the kind of point we should pursue, not dwell on "art meaningful to Black people." What we should be talking about is the quality of aesthetic experiences available to persons within the Black community, and raising the level of this quality. But let's not forget about what has gone before, let's not forget about Black history. In fact, let's emphasize this more.

MR. BEARDEN: I think that's very true. And I think what Jake was saying about the community spirit of the Harlem Artists Guild was true. This is what it did for me: I went to the first meeting: I was surprised to see fifty or sixty people there. I hadn't known there were that many Negro artists in New York!

When they did the news release on Tom for his show, it was stated that the Harlem Studio Museum is the first museum in Harlem. That's not true! There was one on 125th Street and Lenox Avenue all during the thirties—Jake and I showed at it. It wasn't only a museum, but they had teaching there, workshops, textile weaving, lithography.

MR. LLOYD: That's what we need now.

MR. LAWRENCE: I can appreciate what you say, but I think you're going to fall into a trap if you pursue this to the degree to which you are pursuing it. Because you're going to have people from downtown saying, "Well, let's give these people uptown a little something and we can forget about them for a couple of years."

We *are* more involved now—it may not be to the degree that we think ideal, but we are more involved now in the total community structure than we've ever been. I think all of us will agree with that. But I think the thing for us to pursue—and I repeat this—is not only to get massive aid and help within the Negro community, but not to tear us away from the main community, not allowing people downtown to say, as I said before, "Well, let's give them a little something and we can forget about them."

MR. LLOYD: I'm not interested in what they think. No, they *haven't* done anything up to this point. And you say that we're involved. I don't think we are involved. I think there are a lot of Black artists that aren't making a living and that are not communicating with the people in the ghetto. I mean like nothing's happening. So if some form of separatism is going to make things happen, I'm all for it. And I think it will.

I like the things you were saying about the various programs in the thirties, Blacks being together. I don't know what came of it, but I'm sure some good things came of it. And I'm all for that again.

MR. BEARDEN: What came of it was . . .

MR. LAWRENCE: People were involved. It brought a camaraderie . . .

MR. WOODRUFF: It brought a greater degree of professionalism.

MR. BEARDEN: Jake was about the first artist who got out of the Harlem community, who got a one-man show downtown. But before that, our minds didn't think past

110th Street. This was like a customs barrier back then. MR. LLOYD: What I'm after is having my little Black girl exposed to art. And if she wants to be a potter I don't want her to be in that one-to-three ratio. There may be just three Black potters here in New York. I want to improve on that. Like a whole lot.

MR. WILLIAMS: It seems to me that you haven't really touched on one of the points Mr. Gilliam brought up—the quality of that pottery or the quality of that sculpture or the quality . . .

MR. LLOYD: What do you mean, "quality"! They have to be exposed. What makes you think that the quality is going to be any less because they're Black?

MR. WILLIAMS: I don't think I'm implying that. I think what I'm trying to say is that the nationalism you're talking about is a very dangerous thing.

MR. GILLIAM: I would say that before I looked all over New York for Black potters and could find only three—and before I kept somebody from making pots and being turned on by it—is that I'd find me a potter first. I don't think I'd worry about his color; I think I'd worry more about the quality of the experience.

MR. LLOYD: Look, I'm worried about the quality too, but I am worried about the fact that there's only three Black potters here in New York. That has a lot of implications, and I don't think you're facing up to them.

MR. HUNT: Well, you know, you could do something else. You could hire a white potter while you looked for another Black potter, and then fire the white potter and hire the Black. Then you would show your people something about you.

MR. LLOYD: Perhaps it would, and perhaps that might have been like an idea I had. But I'm more interested in young Black kids having an opportunity just to be a potter.

MR. GILLIAM: What you may be running into is the same difficulty they had in one of the summer programs in Washington, looking for a Black sculptor. You can name a number of them, but they'd already be doing something beside practicing sculpture. I think whenever you look for Black potters, Black painters, Black artists, they'll already be doing something else.

MR. LLOYD: At the same time there are a lot of programs here in New York, and even if you're a professional, capable Black artist you can't even get a job in the program. Because, number one, most of the cultural programs aren't run by Black people. I think that's very important. I think Black people and Black communities should control Black programs. They're the only people that can really, really relate to Black people.

MR. WILLIAMS: We're getting involved in sociology again, aren't we?

MR. LLOYD: Well, so what?

MR. GILLIAM: I think it's pretty hard to keep the whole question away from sociology.

MR. BEARDEN: Let me sum up. Tom feels that a lot of the professional problems of the Black artist have to do with his relation to the community. And he feels that his, and a number of Black artists', work should be directed to making the Black community more art-conscious. He feels, also, by the mere fact of his being a Black artist working in the Black community, he could refer to his work – or work done by anyone of a similar mind – as Black art. Now Mr. Williams has challenged that. He feels that the Black artist shouldn't limit his horizon to just one particular community, but should try to expose his work to a greater audience. I think we all have come to the conclusion, however, that there are dire economic and professional problems hindering the Black artist in the full expression of his potential. These problems stem from social conditions, from the fact that the Black artist is not completely involved in the mainstream. He doesn't go to East Hampton, and he's not around the rest of the artists. It was brought out that the few people who buy don't always consider him, and he has not been able to get his work up to higher monetary levels.

Unless someone has anything to add to this discussion of economic and professional questions, I think we can go on to our third point – the aesthetic problem. I think some of the things that you were talking about, Tom, also involved questions of craft and identity. I throw the discussion open.

MR. WOODRUFF: This is one of the most important and probably one of the most difficult to solve. I think we should clarify what we mean by aesthetic problems, and problems of self-image or identity in terms of the topic we are working with – “Black art.” We've been told that a recognizably Black uniqueness in the art product is not necessarily essential. There is such a thing as a “Black Anglo-Saxon,” and then there are those who champion the notion of the Black heritage – who think that the Negroes' aesthetic image should come from his Black African ancestry. I don't think there's anything wrong with this, because we who are taking the traditional forms of Western art as a starting point are doing the same thing – we are beginning with a form from which we may create a form. There is also the idea of substantially good art – and this is what Sam has been talking about – coming from the soil. But the soil of the Black community must not only be productive and rich in its

resources, but those who till that soil and try to raise a harvest – and that is the artist – must come in there with some real artistic insights. I don't believe that the subject matter, the hot-headed art of the moment, is of any consequence: the fact that the artists get a kind of frustration or anger off their chest is fine. But the creation of art is something else again. And we may be quite prone to accept anything that is enjoyed, in any kind of sense, regardless of its qualities, as Black art. But it is not. As I see it, you start with a concept, a thematic idea. And out of that you've got to create a form. And I believe the form must embody and convey that idea visually, physically. Above all, the sensibility of the artist, his beliefs and his convictions and his aspirations, must come through and control it. This is how any art is produced, be it black, white, green, or blue. If there is to be a *Black art* – not just something made by a Black artist – there must be certain outer manifestations so it can be identified, as you can identify Oriental art or pre-Columbian art or Eskimo art. (But I don't mean in any sense a primitive art: right here I reject the term “primitive” in referring to African art or any such ethnic form.)

More important to the work of art are the energies, the efforts, and the deep insights that come from the artist as he works through what he has experienced in life.

In the musical world there is Leontyne Price, who sings like a bird. And this has nothing to do with her color. There are others, like Mahalia Jackson – whose singing you would call Black singing. I do think there is a something found in the works of the Black artist that is absent in the art of other people. Langston Hughes used to define this as coming from the folkways, from the special quality that we as Black people have. But I think that, in the final analysis, you've got to create art – art of the highest possible aesthetic level, in which your means are what your goals are. They are very highly personal.

We have a young man here, Richard Hunt, who I think is a great sculptor. This man is an artist. It has nothing to do with race; it is that real spark, unfathomable, and unidentifiable, that is deeply felt. The power of his sculpture is unassailable. Is this Negro art? Is it done by a Negro? It may very well be. Who knows? It's powerful, convincing, compelling art. And this is what I mean. It isn't black, white, green, or blue, but it's great art.

I think the Black artist is faced with the problem of almost working from scratch. If he doesn't resort to the traditional sources that are available, he's got to start from scratch. And this is tough. If he wants to produce a unique art form, he's got to ignore every other art form

that has been used as a springboard for other art forms. This is a tough job.

I haven't answered any questions. My question has never been solved throughout my life and never will be. It's a continuous and ongoing search. But the search must be qualified by this constant and ongoing emphasis on quality, of the highest possible level that you can achieve. MR. BEARDEN: They say that abstract expressionism – action painting – is the first indigenous American art exported, and imitated by artists all around the world. No critic that I have read has ever aligned this spark with jazz music. But that's the feeling you get from it: involvement, personality, improvisation, rhythm, color. What I'm trying to point out is that Black culture is involved far more into the whole fabric of American life than we realize. But it is up to us to find out the contribution that we have made to the whole cultural fabric of American life. No one else is going to do it. I look at baseball a lot; I see a man hit a home run – he comes in and slaps the hand of the other fellow who's waiting at the plate. This started with Negro ballplayers, and everybody does it now.

MR. WOODRUFF: I've had lots of arguments on the parallel aesthetics of music and of art. I asked one of my friends, "Just what is so Negroid about this Black, so-called Negro music?" And he said that it's the little dissonant note at the end of each piece that makes the uniqueness of Negro music. When a band winds up a piece, they always wind up on a minor note, even if they're playing in a major key. They leave you there. That sustained, suspended moment is in the musical style, in the literary style, it's in the drama certainly – their timing in dramatic action is just terrific. This is a quality that is almost unexplainable, but it's always identifiable. It's not something that a critic can point out – "That's it, right there." It's the total – the total sensation that you get.

MR. LLOYD: The thing that worries me, Mr. Woodruff, is that you seem to single out individuals. You talk about a few Black artists who have made it and so I get the idea that they're some sort of Abraham Lincolns. Perhaps they are. But I don't think that's anything to point with any great pride about. I still maintain that Black art should be separate. I feel like this is the only way for us to make it.

We were talking before about institutions, and someone mentioned this institution. I feel that the Metropolitan is an institution for white people, not for Black people. So therefore, if we're going to be equal with the white artist, where are we going to show? Where have

we shown? What kind of facilities are open to us? What galleries will accept us? There are none that will and none that have. Don't mention one or two people – I'm not interested in one or two people. I'm interested in the millions of Black people who want to be artists. Therefore I maintain that there has to be a Black art. This is what we need, if it would pull us out of this thing here. We haven't got it from the white cultural power structure. They haven't given it to us.

MR. WOODRUFF: Well, when I mention a man like Richard Hunt it's not to put him on a pedestal . . .

MR. LLOYD: We don't want a pedestal. He's one man.

MR. WOODRUFF: I'm a visual man, not a verbal person, and when I mentioned Hunt's sculpture I wanted to suggest a visual image, to make my task a little easier because I cannot explain in words that which I always see.

MR. LLOYD: What I want to know is if there are two hundred Richard Hunts, where are they going to show their work?

MR. LAWRENCE: Well, I'll go halfway with you, Tom. I will say that I'd like to have the opportunity for a person with talent to make himself into an artist as successful as Richard Hunt. But I don't think you'll ever have two hundred Richard Hunts or two hundred Thomas Lloyds, because everyone is just not that talented.

MR. LLOYD: No, I mean to equate them with the two hundred white artists who have the opportunity.

MR. WOODRUFF: That I'll buy.

MR. GILLIAM: We're necessarily speaking of a job for the future. We've been few in number; the injustice of the whole social situation has made it so that we are few in number.

We need not only to develop Black craftsmen, but also Black historians, Black critics. We need more Black-owned art galleries: let's talk about moving into business – art is a business. This is a thing that concerns us. If we're looking for ways art – or Black art – can be developed within a community, then let's talk about all the things that are really necessary to develop it. Why is it that there aren't Black historians or Black aestheticians, aside from people like Hale who have had to double to do the job? Why aren't these professions being encouraged at Black colleges? Why can't places like that make their special responsibility taking care of the Black heritage? They should investigate exactly what the facts are: what we have accomplished, and whether or not we're going forward from where we are now.

MR. LLOYD: I think that sort of program would be very important. I mentioned an organization called Black Visual Environments, and part of the thing we want to do

is to bring Black art – and I mean *Black art* – into the public schools, for these young Black kids to talk to the Black artists, to try to form some sort of dialogue, to be there and be seen, to show that he's Black. This is important to the young Black kids. It's never happened before and I think that it's important that it does happen. These Black artists should be paid for it. I'd also like to see Black art shows traveling to the South, to Black colleges, to make these people aware of what's happening in Black art today – okay, I'll say art today.

MR. GILLIAM: I'd equally like to see some of those Black colleges having an artist-in-residence program. This kind of program would be terrifically important, because often a person suffers because his experiences and information are locked into his regional environment.

We're really talking about an uplifting, about providing us with a base of freedom in general. We can take care of business. The impact of our times makes it individually important that we don't go back an inch, a centimeter, but that we move on. These are the kinds of things that should be part of our experiences, and that should indicate the paths we should take.

MR. BEARDEN: I understand there's going to be a big show of Black artists opening in Minneapolis. William, if you went to this show, could you look at the paintings and the sculpture and find something that identified the artists as Black?

MR. WILLIAMS: I've never seen a piece that I could say that about positively. I've seen a great many pieces I think are commendable by Black artists, but I didn't attach that special title or special category to them, and I don't think I ever will.

It seems to me that it would be fine if an art form or a thing could be created that was so uniquely Black that it wasn't necessary to have Tom's picture in front of it. But it hasn't been done. You talk about the need for a Black male image: what you're really talking about is this sociological thing. The Black male image is one thing, but I wonder what happens to his work – or any work – ten, fifteen, years from now when the Black male images aren't standing in front of it and giving a whole rundown about what it's about, why I'm doing it, why I'm participating in the community. If we're going to build a cultural basis that is relevant to the Black community, it should be a cultural basis that's relevant when Tom is gone, when we're all gone, something that's so embedded in quality that it not only stands in Harlem but stands anywhere. That's a goal to shoot for.

One of the things that Tom's addressing himself to is the necessity, in terms of the social strife that we're in

now, to assert a lot of Black things. I can agree with that on one level, but on another I must talk about quality as Mr. Gilliam has, and what the level of the experience of "Black art" will be, and what exposure to it will do ten or fifteen years from now. If I expose five hundred or six hundred kids to Black art now, my hope is that the Black art will be of such a level that I will be instilling some type of aesthetic or values within those kids that they can draw on years from now.

MR. LLOYD: That's good, but you see it hasn't happened. If we're going to accelerate that kind of thing we have to do it now.

Being separate and making Black art might possibly be the answer. I'm not saying for sure it is, but I believe it is. All I know is that nothing has happened in the past. It's a change that has got to happen.

MR. BEARDEN: I can't agree with your argument that nothing has happened in the past, Tom. Two years ago I went to the Grand Central Galleries because I had heard so much about the works of this man Henry O. Tanner. I looked at his pictures and I must conclude he is one of the three or four great painters of America, the only religious painter who in my judgment compares with Rouault. This museum had two of his pictures, but they sold them.

The reason you can have a place like the Metropolitan is that you can bring art into this country duty free. It was a Black woman, Edmonia Lewis, who went to Congress with W. W. Story and a few other artists, to have the law changed so art works could come in without duty.

I could go on and tell you the things that Black artists have done; so don't say nothing's happened – it's just been obscured.

MR. LLOYD: The fact about this Black woman is fine, but this is still a white museum, Black people still don't come here. Don't mention individuals, like Tanner. I'd like to know more about him, but I haven't had the opportunity to learn about him. I'm not alone in this. Don't tell me progress has been made because of Tanner. Sure, there has been some progress, but I want to know about twenty Tanners. We're a whole race of people, and you know, when you talk about one, I know there's something wrong.

MR. WOODRUFF: Tom, why don't Black people come to this museum?

MR. LLOYD: They haven't been exposed to art. That's the number one thing: they haven't been exposed to art. They don't know about Black art, and if they did know about it, people in the streets would know that Black artists are showing here or at any other museum. That's

our fault, and part of society's fault.

MR. LAWRENCE: You know, there's something I can't understand here, and it keeps bothering me. It's a term that's been used over and over again, "Black art." I don't understand that. I think we may as well cut out the sentimental slush. "Black art" means maybe something like "Black art of Africa" or something produced in some of the earlier days of America, in some of the ironworks throughout the South or things like that, which came out of the experience of a cultural group of people who happen to have been Africans. Here it would be more correct for us to say "art by Black people," but not "Black art."

MR. LLOYD: When I say "Black art" I mean the Black experience on a total scale: being Black, our heritage, Africa, living in the Black community.

MR. GILLIAM: It *is* a total experience. We've been talking about the visual arts because we're painters and sculptors, but we must realize that there are other forms of art – theater and music – that are much more capable of having a definite "Black" personality. We have to recognize that it's his total experience that influences what a person does. And it may not affect only him, but some other person regardless of skin color: think of the influence of African art on Picasso, for instance, or on Modigliani.

We artists should discuss art, and not leave it to the civil rights workers or politicians. We have a feeling for it, and we don't belittle it.

MR. LLOYD: Well, being Black . . .

MR. GILLIAM: Is great.

MR. LLOYD: I can't imagine an artist – a Black artist – functioning without knowing he's Black, without being concerned about what's happening to us, without being concerned about our very lives. We're Black. No matter what kind of work you do, you're influenced by all these things.

MR. LAWRENCE: Is this always evident looking at the person's work?

MR. LLOYD: Maybe not. I never said it's evident looking at someone's work. I'm just saying it's Black art.

MR. WOODRUFF: I can't agree with that.

MR. BEARDEN: He's calling "Black art" anything done by Black artists.

MR. LAWRENCE: I just can't see how something is "Black art." What you find are shows that deal with some philosophy of art – minimal art or this art or that art – and the artists in each of those shows will belong to many ethnic groups, Black artists among them.

MR. GILLIAM: By giving a show a kind of sociological title, you know, or a political theme, you can make it

a community expression. Look at the *Sixty-six Signs of Neon*, a show brought from Watts, done by people in Watts. Even there the reigning influence was someone like Ed Kienholz, because this is something that's part of the Los Angeles scene. I think that in certain areas you can say that art can coexist with the social problems.

MR. LLOYD: Has it? I mean, what's happened in the past?

MR. GILLIAM: I think the past is perhaps much more important than what is going on now. Number one is the fact that every Black artist that painted has been involved with my situation in America – me and what's happening and concern for the Negro. This was the overriding consideration: what the artist was concerned with, and what I looked for as a kid, and what I dealt with when I was painting figuratively. But later on, you're a mature artist, maybe a great one, if you can personalize yourself, move from identification with something outside yourself to your own thing.

MR. BEARDEN: A lot of this experience is knit with identity, isn't it? For instance, you were saying in the prospectus for your show that the artist that turns you on is Agostini. Every artist that you mentioned was a white artist. Now if you are this concerned, why didn't you say that Jake Lawrence turned you on?

MR. LLOYD: But Jake Lawrence didn't turn me on . . . he didn't turn me off either.

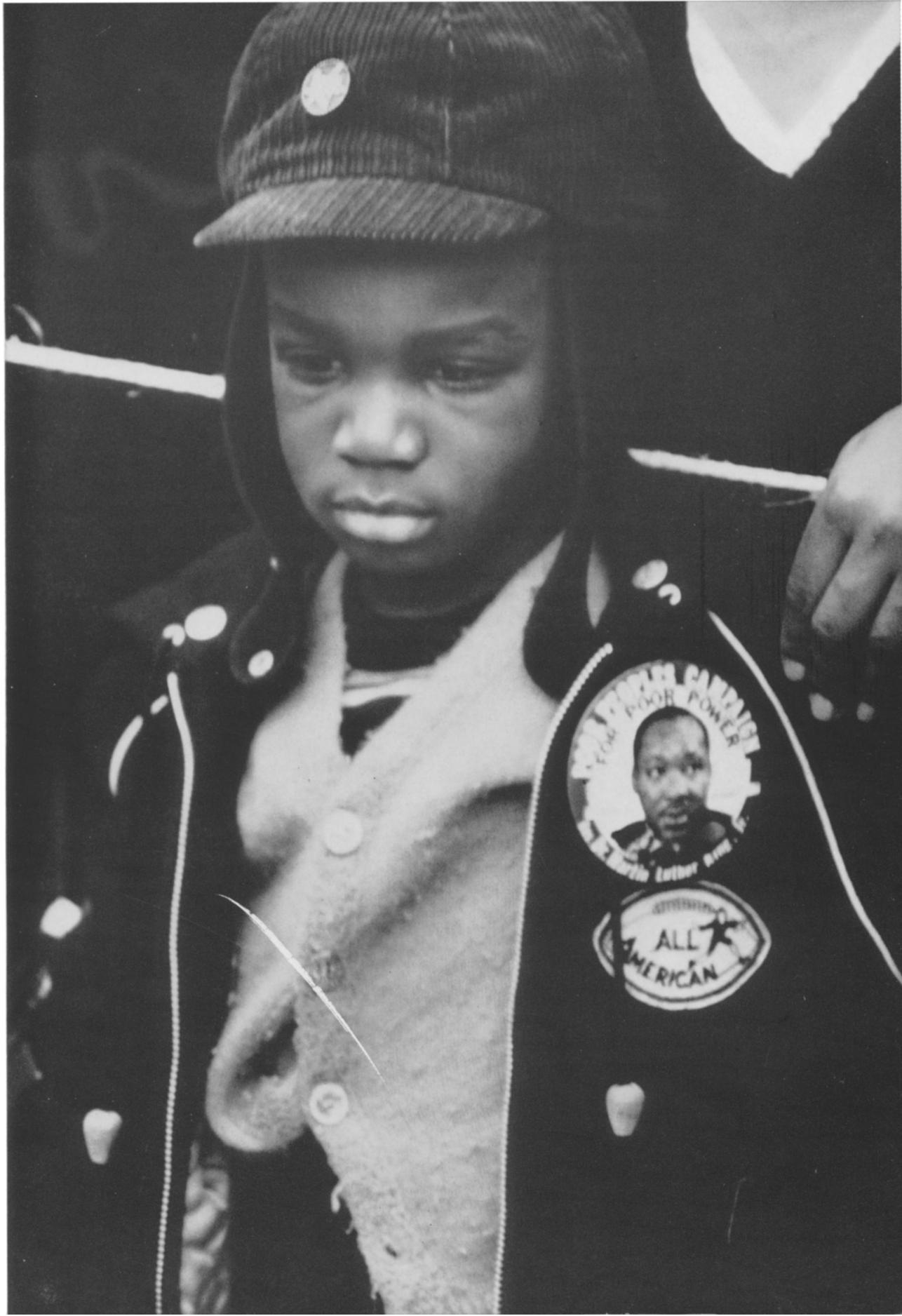
MR. BEARDEN: No, I'm not saying that. I would expect that when the young kid who worked with you has an exhibit, say four or five years from now, if you've done your work right, he's going to say that the thing that turned him on was the experience he had working with Tom Lloyd. This is different from the stand you take now, because everyone you studied with, the people who turned you on, are all white.

MR. LLOYD: Yes, that's just the point – that's the thing that bothers me: that there weren't any Black Agostinis around. Part of my function is concern for my people, not just getting in a little corner and painting a little picture.

MR. BEARDEN: That's what we are saying, but we've moved back into the question of identity. It all has to do with the artist.

MR. LLOYD: Yes, Black identity, Black art. That's why I say "Black art."

MR. GILLIAM: The Frederick Douglass Art Institute in Washington, which started out as the Museum of African Art, puts African sculpture side by side with German expressionist paintings, prints by Modigliani and Picasso, and things like that, and brings out a sense of identity



very strongly. I want to know how Tom feels about this kind of thing.

MR. LLOYD: That's fine with me.

You know, so much needs to be done. There has to be such a tremendous effort on the part of the Black artist, on the part of the cultural power structure. I'm not too sure, Mr. Lawrence, that the government is going to get involved with the Black artist; the government isn't going to give you something when you're going to turn around and hurt them with what we create.

MR. WOODRUFF: I think the real thing that's bugging Tom is very evident. We want these doors open so that the Negro, the Black man, can move in and share and share alike. But the topic we're discussing is the aesthetic problems that the Black artist faces.

MR. LAWRENCE: I think we need a definition of aesthetics. Are we talking about space, line, form, or something much more broad and abstract—"experience" or something like that?

MR. WOODRUFF: Well, I used the term because the phrase "Black art" seems to suggest something that is different in its structure and its formal manifestation. We've been making differentiations in terms of economics, social impact, gallery facilities, museums being closed to Black art, and so forth, and I think this should be considered in terms of whether the art really does have some particular, special form.

MR. HUNT: Well, "the aesthetics of Black art" is a problem I really don't address myself to, in either my work or my thinking. The problem of the Negro in terms of the contemporary situation in art—showing in museums and galleries and all those things—seems to be more or less tied up with the prevailing currents in art itself. For instance, an artist who's working with kinetic, light, or minimal things might have a better chance of breaking into the scene than somebody who's painting figuratively. All these things don't really seem that much different from the problems that white artists or any other kinds of artists have. There are certain kinds of social biases on the part of some of the establishment people that you mentioned that might influence things, but you know, I really don't think those things are all that important. I don't really like to go into definitions, but in terms of my feeling about my relationship to my art I sort of separate it from my life as a Black man in America. Given I'm a Black man in America, I live from day to day and take things as they come. In terms of my work, I have a certain kind of ideal that I want to attain and I find myself being able to do that as a Black man in America and living in a Black community.

As Hale was talking about things that characterize Black art, and art growing out of the soil, it came to my mind that I'm kind of regionalist. I come from Chicago and I like living there. Listening to Tom's description of life here, I feel lucky that I was born in Chicago and haven't had to contend with the sort of problems that exist here. I come from a rural background: my father's from the rural South, my mother's from the rural Midwest. I remember the thing that impressed me about visiting my father's relatives in Georgia, one time when I was a kid, was that they had some land that they cleared, and they took the logs to the sawmill and built their house out of them. It's kind of nice thinking about how my uncle could do all that stuff; I think about things like that—and maybe this is what Tom is talking about, being able to identify with positive male images. It's like the things you read about pioneers doing. Of course they were living in Georgia, segregated and all, but at the same time they could exercise this ability to make things. I see myself as a sculptor as being a person making things. I may not make as good a sculpture as I want to make, but those are my limitations, nothing ever comes out exactly the way you want it. At the same time I feel like I can do anything I want to do. That has to do with family experiences and school experiences. I had Negro art teachers—Mr. Johnson, Mrs. Currin—who encouraged me and urged me to go on to the Chicago Art Institute. Then I had other instructors who were white and they encouraged me too.

It's a combination of things. I don't see how a Negro in America, even with segregated situations, can escape having influences that come from his family, from his background in the ghetto or wherever he happens to be, from his formal education, from his exposure to the arts. The thing gets pretty much mixed up, and the idea of separating out these experiences, good or bad, Black or not, seems sometimes rather useless and sometimes rather tiresome.

MR. LLOYD: Well, I don't think so. You know what I think, Mr. Hunt, is that you are a conditioned Black man. I think you are oblivious to what's happening.

MR. GILLIAM: Tom, I think *you're* acting more for the conditions . . .

MR. LLOYD: That may be so, but I've got to say what I think.

MR. HUNT: That's perfectly all right.

MR. LLOYD: To me you don't seem like a man concerned with Black people, with Black kids, with Black culture. I don't think that enters into your feelings. And that bothers me, that bothers the hell out of me. You

know, when I think of an artist, I think of a Black artist, not a Black white artist or someone who has given in to this kind of conditioning that the white people have put us in. I have children and I want the best for them, and if they want to be artists, I want them to have the same kind of exposure any other kid has. They don't have it now, so I'm going to make sure mine do. I care, I care about my people and I think this is what every Black artist has got to do.

MR. GILLIAM: It's erroneous to presuppose that a person who doesn't follow a certain philosophy all the way doesn't care about his race or his kids. We're all badgered by these things . . .

MR. LLOYD: But this is the time for us to jump in and bring changes about, make things happen. And have some identity with our own doggone people.

MR. WILLIAMS: It's also the time to distinguish rhetoric from real facts.

MR. LLOYD: I know what real facts are, I know what's happened in two hundred years.

MR. WILLIAMS: I think that we're all too sophisticated to accept easily everything you're saying, but I assume those faults are your own, your own way of going about what you're doing.

I assume that's the way he—Mr. Hunt—should go about it, and that it's worked very well—he's created a thing that is uniquely beautiful. But in my own case, I find it very hard indeed to think of myself in terms of doing Black art, because it becomes such an anonymous thing. I find that I'm more hung up in my own frustrations and my own ego than anything else. When I'm doing my own thing, I kind of go about doing what I'm doing, and hopefully I can separate my daily frustrations on the surface level from what I'm doing. Obviously you're doing it, Tom, or else you wouldn't be working with lights. What I'm trying to say is that there are two levels that any man thinks on, whether black, green, or otherwise. If an artist—a sculptor, musician, or whatever—if an artist gets so hung up in social conditions and in what's happening to him, he winds up in something I call rhetoric.

MR. LLOYD: That's nonsense.

MR. WILLIAMS: Rhetoric to me is a point where one gets so involved that he's not going forward, he's standing still. I'm not condemning what you're doing; I'm saying that we're at a very dangerous point. It seems to me that the work of the artist at this point is to distinguish what's rhetoric and what's progress and what's fact.

Art by nature is an aristocratic thing . . .

MR. LLOYD: What?

MR. WILLIAMS: Art has been historically—historically in the Western sense—aristocratic.

MR. LLOYD: That's been the trouble with our culture.

MR. WILLIAMS: If you're talking about bringing in an Eastern kind of philosophy of art, then it does become kind of an anonymous thing. But I don't think any of us are willing to do that. We're still dealing with art in a Western sense; we're not willing to give it up and go into a special thing. So I think you have to keep that in mind when you condemn someone.

MR. LLOYD: I'm condemning a whole lot of people.

MR. BEARDEN: I want to sum this up. Tom, what I think you're saying is that you feel the entire tradition of Western art is kind of empty now; you think we must develop a certain cultural philosophy for the Black artist. Things, as they exist now, must be attacked on different levels—economic, social, perhaps even political. Now, in this struggle, in the civil rights movement, very little attention has been given to the cultural needs of the people. So now let's consider how the Black artist relates to the civil rights movement. How does he, or his work, or his philosophy, relate to these pressing problems of the Black people in this country?

MR. LAWRENCE: Well, I think you can relate in any number of ways, and the individual artist has to solve it in his own way. He may participate through the content of his work, or by donating a piece that has no specifically relevant content. I know that we all relate to the civil rights movement, and we all make contributions. We give because we want to give. It's an obvious way of helping, not a spiritual one, but it's a way that has an immediate, definite benefit.

MR. WOODRUFF: Let me say that I've always felt that one of the things that we lack in the Black world generally, not only in the visual arts, is critical scholarship. That could do so much for the situation Tom is talking about. Clement Greenberg, for instance, just about made Jackson Pollock, and there are many other such instances. We need a writer to make us known. We have no one who can use the written word except yourself, Romie, and you're a painter basically. Scholarship from our college men and others has gone into the social movement and civil rights. Look at your jazz critics, they're white, and most of your drama critics are white. Even your writers, like Baldwin and so on, aren't concerned with us. Some years ago these Black writers were in Paris and the Paris press went to them and said, "Now, we know about your writers; what is the Negro artist doing?" And those fellows couldn't say anything—"I don't know any Negro artists"—and they couldn't answer the question.

I believe that we need someone to critically and knowledgeably assess our combined artistic efforts. There are few Negroes who do this, but that scholarship is what we need.

And I do think there should be a communal feeling among the Black artists, whether or not we paint or think alike, or whether we sit down and beef like we're doing today. Whether we meet regularly or whether we just bump into each other in a bar, I think this is necessary, in order to present what I would call a kind of united front. When we try to fight this battle singlehandedly we're lost, we're not even up to bat. You know, you need a team to win a ball game; you can't do it with sandlot techniques.

This has to do in a very oblique way with the so-called cultural movement, because until the Negro in Harlem finally gets a decent place to live and food in his belly, maybe he'll have no time to go look at our pictures. So therefore the whole revolution is intertwined.

But what I sense is the great need is to have a man who points out to galleries and museums that this artist is a good one and you should have his work.

MR. WILLIAMS: After that, I don't know if there's anything I can say. I totally agree with the idea of uniting efforts with other artists, which is really, really necessary. I don't know about other cities, but in New York I feel an enormous separation between the writers and the poets and the painters—people are kind of isolated in their own corners.

As for the civil rights struggle, it's very hard to distinguish what you, on a personal level, can do. My feeling is "different strokes for different folks." I kind of take it as it comes and hope that I'm doing the proper thing at the proper time.

MR. GILLIAM: Of course there are "different strokes for different folks"—some are revolutionists, some are social changers, some are politicians. I would say that what we should help develop is an awareness of history and a broad cultural exchange, and set up the kind of institutions that would provide the kind of educational experiences that would visually orient people and make us aware of our total role.

MR. HUNT: I can only second that.

MR. WILLIAMS: Can we add, also, that there should be some intercultural communication as well.

MR. LLOYD: I'm just a little shocked because I think our role as Black artists is right up there in the front line and we haven't been there, we haven't even been heard of.

MR. LAWRENCE: Now, you speak for yourself, not for me—I've been there thirty years, you know.

MR. LLOYD: I'm talking about unity, I'm not talking about one artist going that way and doing his thing. I think we should be marching, I think we should do anything. This is part of our life; this civil rights thing is a struggle that has a lot to do with us, and we haven't participated in it at all. I think that's shameful. We're not interested in the political life in the city, the civil rights struggle. We're just dead and you know we're not moving.

MR. LAWRENCE: Maybe *you're* not moving.

MR. LLOYD: Well, I'm glad you're moving.

MR. BEARDEN: I feel that the artist has to serve a movement the best way he can do it. Now we have a man here, oldest among us; I don't think anyone has done more than he and he's done it with his work. I'm not saying this is the only way you can do it, but his works inspired me as a kid. This was a contribution, and all of us around this table hope we are making a contribution. Maybe we can't all go out and make posters, but we can develop our talents in the best way we can.

MR. LLOYD: I just say get out and be concerned, and we're not concerned. If we are, we haven't let our concern be known.

MR. BEARDEN: Let's sum this up. Jacob indicated that in the civil rights movement the artist should do all he could, in his way, to assist the development and liberation of the people. Hale indicated criticism and scholarship, to further what the Black artist was trying to do, was something which had been lacking. I think both Sam and William felt that each artist had a commitment to the struggle, but this was something he had to do in the best way he could. I think Richard agreed to that too. Tom felt that the struggle for Black liberation was all-embracing and that we all had to get in there and pitch, do whatever was necessary to advance the struggle.

In the discussion we've had today we've covered many problems. We've posed problems. Only time and history will offer a solution. I think we have made a valuable contribution here. It's something that more artists everywhere need to do.



# The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Cultural Power in a Time of Crisis

BARRY N. SCHWARTZ

*Mr. Schwartz is a member of the faculty of the School of Humanities and Social Science at Pratt Institute, and has served for two years as the Director of Educational Planning of the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College, a free school for Bedford-Stuyvesant residents. His essay offers some suggestions as one approach toward new relationships between the Museum and the communities it serves*

IT IS ESTIMATED that by 1975, six years from now, half of the entire population of New York City will be non-white. Presently half of the children attending New York City's public schools are Puerto Rican or Afro-American. Yet only recently has The Metropolitan Museum of Art begun to appraise its relationship, or lack of one, with the surrounding communities it says it hopes to serve.

If The Metropolitan Museum of Art is to prove relevant to Black and Spanish-speaking citizens it must alter its traditional conceptions of itself in response to the cultural needs of ghetto residents. (1) Continuing and viable relationships between the Museum and Black and Spanish communities will have to be established. (2) The Museum will have to enlarge its concepts of how to exhibit. (3) New criteria will have to be applied in the judgment of what to exhibit. (4) The Museum will have to expand its services into many new areas.

## **Involvement in the Community, or Community Involvement?**

The typical involvement of institutions in the ghetto is characterized by an enthusiasm-frustration-hostility syndrome, and the Metropolitan Museum would do well to avoid the mistakes of others. One cannot work successfully in a ghetto by implementing a preconceived program whose justification is only the best of intentions. The response to this approach is unvarying: one is met with resentment based on what the community interprets as imposition, and is ultimately driven away by overt hostility. If the Metropolitan Museum wishes to extend its public impact to all the citizens of the city it must approach communities by asking what they want and by putting the Museum's resources, enthusiasm, and expertise at the disposal of the community. The community best knows what it needs, and the Museum must

have the participation of the community if these needs are to be satisfied.

To this end the Museum should set up community advisory boards in ghetto areas, composed of genuine community leaders, practicing artists and craftsmen who reside within the area, and members of various neighborhood organizations. It would be their job to articulate ways the Museum can serve citizens who do not normally derive benefit from the Museum's efforts, to work with the Museum in creating ideas for needed and meaningful programs, and to serve as a feedback mechanism for the evaluation of programs conducted within the community. The advisory boards should be involved in all Museum activities in their communities from inception to completion as planners who suggest the content and form of Museum functions, and not as consultants to help insure the success of what the Museum wants to do. The Museum, through its advisory boards, could become a *community* institution.

## **To Exhibit Is a Verb**

The Metropolitan Museum of Art must begin to think of itself as an activity, not only as a structure. Ghetto residents travel less than those in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, and what happens for a ghetto resident tends to be limited to the activities that take place within his community. Since this is the case, if the Museum believes in community involvement it must travel into the community.

An identifying feature of every ghetto is the vacant lot. They are numerous, filthy, rat-infested spaces where children and garbage interact. The community can do nothing about them, as they are private property; the city responds with futile "no dumping" signs.

The Museum could turn these neighborhood scars into micro-museums. Temporary use of these lots for Mu-

seum exhibitions could be arranged, and perhaps the Department of Sanitation would cooperate in clearing the land. Here residents would have access to exhibitions displaying indigenous art, exhibitions specifically designed for this audience, educational programs reinforcing positive self-images, exhibits showing the accomplishment of Black and Spanish artists, and parts of exhibits currently offered at the Museum's main building.

The merits of such an undertaking are many: micro-museums would physically enhance the neighborhoods, provide cultural and educational enrichment, dramatically inform residents of the activities and services of the Museum, stimulate an appreciation of art within the community, bring artists who reside within the community to its attention, and make concrete the discrepancy between environmental ugliness and beauty.

The mechanics of such an activity need not be complex. For example, the Museum could – as the Brooklyn Public Library System has done – utilize a fleet of mobile units, walk-through museums, that might park in these lots. Domes, Quonset huts, or simple prefabricated units could be used. On the other hand, not all Museum involvement needs structures. An art show can be presented on a wall surface through the use of a slide projector; but to be really effective such a show must be conducted by a man who knows his subject and can sustain discussion with the audience. Mobile slide shows in the ghetto would be an especially simple way of reaching large numbers of people.

However successful temporary or traveling exhibits are, it is the permanent and continuing cultural activities in ghetto communities that will have lasting impact. The Museum should begin thinking in terms of annexes, and should support or cooperate with cultural institutions that have naturally arisen in the communities. If the Museum feels that the construction of buildings or their maintenance is outside its domain because of financial considerations, there are still many ways it can support the efforts of others.

One important way would be to expand its loan service to make more of its stored objects available to cultural centers throughout the city. For example, in Bedford-Stuyvesant there are at least two houses that have been converted into centers for the expression of Black culture. These have no institutional affiliation yet, and they represent only the efforts of committed individuals who reside in the community. Access to traveling exhibits, art objects, and parts of special exhibits from the Museum would do much to encourage, support, and maintain cultural activities arising in the community itself.

A point to be remembered is that the people in a

ghetto do not experience their art passively: they want objects that they can touch and play with – an argument for using art replicas (anathema to many museum people) in exhibits, or giving or lending them to cultural institutions within the ghetto.

## The Content of Exhibitions

Perhaps the community advisory boards' major contributions would be to help the Museum perceive the kinds of art to which ghetto residents respond. If the Metropolitan Museum can enlarge its ideas of what constitutes a valuable offering, it will be able to serve many more people. For instance, an exhibition about drums would have immediate appeal for ghetto residents. The drum is of great historical importance in African cultures, and a show depicting the variation of the drum around the world would be very exciting. Also pertinent would be an exhibit of the arts of the Caribbean; another on the many gods of man, stressing the diverse depictions of deity; an exhibit of costumes of various cultures; and perhaps something as specialized as the influence of African art on twentieth-century Western art might be more germane to the interests of the people in the ghetto than many of the Museum's present offerings. Ideally, communication is a two-way street, and the Museum might bring into its main galleries art created by practicing artists in the ghetto, for the benefit of its visiting public.

The cultural origins of the Black and Spanish-speaking citizens of New York City are not in the West, and this is a fact that should be appreciated by the Museum and all of its visitors. There is no reason why the mobile units mentioned above could not, when they feature art pertaining particularly to the Afro-American or Puerto Rican, travel throughout the entire city. Certainly our white population has to become more aware of the positive contributions of its non-white neighbors.

To this end the Museum might also conduct as a regular program an ethnically varying "festival of the streets." A Spanish festival, a Caribbean carnival, an African ceremony could be presented within ghetto areas, and in the Museum's main building as well. Indeed, at the time of the Chinese New Year, for example, the Museum might mount a complementary exhibit in its halls and equip its mobile units to present this festival to other segments of the population. These shows would have the value of involving all of New York in the cultural celebrations of some of our "other-cultured" citizens. The festival would be specifically designed to highlight ethnic diversity as a positive contribution to the cultural enrichment of all New Yorkers.

## New Services

One of the most important ways the Museum can prove practically relevant to the ghetto resident is through the expansion and increased availability of existing services.

The Museum should create the position of cultural field worker, a person who would act as a cultural agitator. Through discussions with residents, block associations, local community organizations, and artisan cooperatives he would seek to initiate ways to enhance culturally the community in which he lives and works. He would implement ideas offered by the advisory boards, make known to all interested parties the resources of the Museum, initiate and carry out projects such as community block improvement, mural painting, local art shows, the creation of community cultural centers, and coordination of art events among the various neighborhood schools. He would help artists' groups in their search for financial support. He might be able to encourage the Sanitation Department to clean up vacant lots, and the Buildings Department to remove abandoned buildings, and he might organize "paint-ins" to render those deserted buildings still privately owned (and therefore unremovable) more aesthetically pleasing. The Museum might make application to VISTA for VISTA workers to assume the strenuous and demanding responsibilities of cultural field workers at no extra cost to the Museum. The cultural field worker would represent the Museum through creative action and serve the community by assisting in its projects.

The Museum is about to create a Department of Architecture, a department that could play a vital role in easing the plight of those who live in ghettos. The ghetto resident is more often the victim than the beneficiary of architectural planning because there is no one to represent the great numbers of people who are built around, moved out, and manipulated in neighborhoods with the worst living conditions in the city. The Department of Architecture might function as an educational and consulting arm of the Museum by informing people of their rights, by acting in their behalf as sponsor for community-initiated redesign of ghetto areas, by offering architectural assistance to local groups involved in renovation, by developing plans alternative to those requiring extensive dislocation of residents, by serving as an information center for people seeking community housing improvement, and possibly by using whatever influence it may have to persuade city agencies to act in the community's interests.

The Museum has an excellent Exhibition Design De-

partment, and its services should be extended to advising and assisting community organizations that are trying to create cultural centers, art shows, and exhibition techniques. Since in most cases economics determine the nature of an exhibition, the Design Department could prepare a manual describing the latest sophisticated techniques at the lowest price.

The Personnel Office of the Museum is a vast clearing house for talent, although at present its only concern is finding qualified individuals to fill positions on the Museum's staff. This department could expand its function by directing applicants to community employment opportunities as they are made known to the Personnel Office. Community organizations might thus be able to find many talented people to work in the ghetto, people whom they may otherwise have no contact with. The Museum should also continue its apprentice training programs of actively seeking Black and Puerto Rican apprentices, thus opening up numerous career opportunities for many young people. The Personnel Office might also do well to search out qualified Puerto Rican and Black professionals to fill employment openings at the Museum.

Exhibition space should be made available to worthy groups who need space for specialized shows. Although Museum space is at a premium, the Metropolitan should have some system for assisting in finding other locations. Surely there are many organizations in the city that would be glad to exhibit art: think of the space available in banks, or in office reception rooms and lobbies, or in church parish halls. The Museum could act as a central point for pairing requests with offers of space.

All these ideas are not meant to replace what The Metropolitan Museum of Art has traditionally done, but to indicate a redirection of some of its effort toward the areas of greatest need today. The obligations of the Metropolitan Museum transcend allegiance to any particular cultural history or artistic bias, but as one major institution in a divided community it must help promote social equity and cohesion. The Museum operates in the area of values, helping people to form what are considered informed and intelligent judgments about the worth of art in their lives and ultimately about each other. The appreciation of and involvement with art has a fundamentally moral function, standing on the side of creation in a world fraught with conflict and tension. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, by affirming the value of all cultures and ethnic groups in this city, could do much to create mutual respect, without which there will be only chaos.

# Poor Peoples' Plan

PRISCILLA TUCKER *Freelance writer*

We are concerned with changing the architect's role. We envision a change from the architect representing the rich patron to the architect representing the poor, representing them as individuals and as an interest group. This implies, we feel, studying cities from a different point of view. Not whether or not the architect dislikes cars, but whether or not people actually use cars and want cars; finding out what ideas people have about modern technology, about a good kitchen, about a good street, about a desirable way to live, about the use of a window – whether it's just for ventilation and light, as Le Corbusier said, or whether it's in fact a place where people make contact with the street. A bridge to the community.

So what we are trying to capture is not Brasilia but that shantytown next to Brasilia; not Tema (Ghana's new city), but Ashiaman, the shantytown next to it. They are shantytowns only because they do not have the public services and facilities that Brasilia or Tema have, but they do possess the spirit and life of an urban place that Brasilia or Tema lack. They are in fact the people's creation, full of the vibrancy and color that go with life.

*Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem, 1968*

WHAT ARCH, the Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem, is working toward in its plans for the future of Harlem is not city building but city living. Soul architecture. And what they expect to produce is not a revolutionary master plan but a city village, reflecting a different balance between local, neighborhood needs and metropolitan priorities. "The real issue," says Max Bond, executive director of ARCH, "is not taste or technology. The real issue is the intent of the society. If you have the will, technology will follow. We have good design, good architects, but we do not have good cities because our goals are not good."

What is revolutionary about Black city planning today is its goals. First, that there should be more important functions for precious city land than making money. Second, that the ghetto architect should be a representative of the poor people, responding to their wishes, rather than an advocate of the white middle class imposing its compartmentalizing values and gridiron street plan upon Black and Spanish-speaking people who have quite other social ideals. And third, that it's worth seeing whether they might be able to come up with a better environment for city living than traditional city planners have been able to achieve.

“In considering what a ‘people-planned’ city would be,” Bond writes, “I think we have to relate to the current fad among architects for studying Greek towns, anything built by the people. In every case we find not only a coherent expression, but one full of individual variety, full of richness, full of life. Architects seek this and write monographs about it but never do it. And we’re trying to find a way to do it.”

ARCH, a small, nonprofit group of young Black architects, city planners, and lawyers, funded partly by the Office of Economic Opportunity, partly by private grants, and partly by commissions, was founded in 1964 to provide planning and urban design services to low-income communities that otherwise would lack them. ARCH fosters community involvement, helps obtain federal funds for low-cost housing, interprets rent and housing laws, helps develop community-supervised urban renewal plans, and tries to save land for Black people.

This last has turned out to be crucial. For with the soaring land values and severe apartment clutch, one group that definitely has Harlem on its mind is New York’s real estate men. As the center of New York moves uptown, visions dance through their heads of lucrative apartment towers looking down the length of Central Park from 110th Street to their high-rent counterparts on Central Park South. And of 125th Street made over into Sixth Avenue stoneland. Down with the Apollo and Daddy Grace; up with maximum-land-utilization office blockbusters.

The line is being held by community brushfires of resentment and resistance in a number of areas: the East Harlem triangle, West Harlem/Morningside, the piers, 110th Street, 125th Street, the St. Nicholas area, and that most famous brushfire to date, the world-publicized scene by Columbia students over putting the university’s gym in Morningside Park.

Agitation does pay off. “Since the riots, white real estate developers have been more willing to negotiate and there have been more groups within the community willing to sponsor protest.”

Unfair as many of the developers’ projects sound, they come into focus when looked at from the angle of the stereotyped white picture of Harlem: filthy, falling-down hallways complete with tattered children and rats. Needed: white money and white knowhow to reclaim the hideous slum.

In fact, Black people live in some of the best real estate in the city. “Physically, Harlem is terrific,” is the way Max Bond puts it.

While emphasizing the need to eliminate the rotting tenements, he points to Harlem’s human scale, to the fact that Harlem was well and spaciouly laid out for the middle class (unlike the Lower East Side, which was built cramped for immigrants).

Instead of harping on seedy alleys that breed crime, he talks about Harlem’s great hillsides and slopes, about its broad boulevards and potentially well-defined streets.

Instead of focusing on the honky-tonk façade of 125th Street, he notes its superior location, quickly accessible to both Kennedy and La Guardia airports, an express stop on every major subway line.

And while recognizing that dilapidated, overcrowded housing does force many of Harlem’s activities to take place in the streets, he praises the spirit and entertainment

of that street life. “The elements in the Black community that we would like to maintain as good, that we feel are good, have their origins in the street organization. You can send your children out to play and the neighborhood will take care of them, because the street is the living room. The streets are informal, they’re real. They’re the place where your friends are, but where the enemy (the police) is, too. Black people enjoy the streets; they like to go for walks. Everyone is at home outdoors. Many corners are symbolic places – 125th Street and Seventh Avenue where Malcolm X used to speak, Michaud’s bookshop used to be – in the struggle for equality, for liberation.”

So while real estate men would like to get tall office buildings lined up shoulder to shoulder and turn 125th Street into yet another traffic tunnel, ARCH aims at preserving 125th Street’s “main street quality.” “All the other crosstown streets are anonymous. What has happened to 8th Street is a good example of what we don’t want.”

*Drawing: ARCH*



Their plan has a lot of charm. A tree-lined mall, sidewalk cafés, stands, two kinds of buses – expresses for those intent on their destination, locals for those who ride the bus for fun. And the tall office buildings are scattered to the side or back of the block, and are serviced by low, garage-like unloading and parking buildings, to keep cars and trucks from taking over the street. The goal is not just charm: ARCH wants to demonstrate that Black people can plan for themselves, and wish to create their own environment.

Any Harlem street is a community place, a place for meeting and chatting. By the same token Black people are more public about their houses. They do a lot of entertaining. One ARCH suggestion for innovative Black housing is “rooms that float between apartments and could be used by a woman who wants to take in sewing, by the family who wants to take in a boarder, or by the family that has a relative coming up from the South.”

When ARCH planners talk about parks, they don’t stress a return to nature: they talk about maximum use. Their plan for Morningside Park does not send the Columbia playing field back to grass; it appropriates it for Harlem’s use. It does not fill in the blasted gym site; it turns it into a natural amphitheater for Motown rock groups, the “Last Poets,” the New Heritage Repertory Theater, and local performers. And it puts in a swimming pool/skating rink, a soul-food garden, play areas, a seating wall, meeting steps, sand pits, a fort, an outdoor exhibition area. And, they say, why not have bars? “People might come into the park and bring a part of their lives.”

In sum, Bond says: “I imagine that the Black city would be like a very rich fabric. It would not be a fabric with a superimposed pattern but one with multicolor threads running through it. A great mix of housing, social facilities, and working places, rather than a series of distinct zones, each separate, each pure, each Puritanical. A Lincoln Center, pompous and dull and completely aloof from the surrounding blocks, simply could not happen in a Black city. Art for art’s sake is not part of the Black world. Black art is always concerned with defining the Black experience.”

What would the ideal Black city look like? It is impossible to say, because “so far Black people have not had the chance to express their culture in built things.”

What would be such a Black city’s effect on the rest of America? At best the Black man’s spirit, outgoing life style, and demand for human scale and urban meeting places could have a vital, invigorating effect on cities, much as jazz and soul and slang have had on American music and language.

To those who are appalled by the idea of the poor having a say in an area traditionally the province of those with extensive professional training, Max Bond suggests: “There is no great danger in seeing whether other ways of determining architecture might work. The people cannot do a worse job than architects have done. How could the people possibly be more parochial and less sensitive to real human needs and concerns?”



*Photograph: Tyrone Georgiou*

# Salvation Art

FRANK CONROY *Author of "Stop Time"*

WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN, going to summer school to make up for certain failed courses, I met a kid named Duke who lived uptown. He was an easy-going boy, strong for his age, with light brown skin and enormous dark eyes. He played jazz guitar and fooled around on the piano – our friendship had started at the keyboard, in fact, both of us cutting class to play illicit four-hand blues on the Washington Irving High School grand. He lived in a housing project on upper Lexington Avenue, and I used to go up on those hot summer nights and hang out. I met his family, of course – his father who worked at the Post Office, elderly grandmother who talked about the old days in North Carolina, sister who went out with a sailor and kept trying to lose weight, and his mother who cooked, in her tiny kitchen, some of the best food I'd ever eaten – but most of the time Duke and I were out of the apartment, on the street. There were dances in the basement of the project, some fantastic stickball games in the dark, an occasional crap game, and once in a while a little drinking of wine, but the main activity was talk. We talked and talked the nights away, sitting up on the black iron rail of the project fence jiving the girls and shooting the breeze with the neighborhood studs.

Duke was an utterly straightforward kid. Very calm, gentle, and a good companion. I didn't realize at the time how rare his situation was – the family intact, father working, mother working half a day, the whole group, including Duke, up for church on Sunday mornings. He was well liked in the neighborhood, and the fact that I was his pal was all the cachet I needed. We shared a delight in the spoken word, and perhaps that was why, when the great jive artists came by, the master talkers, the magicians, they always stopped to say hello.

At first I didn't understand them, that is to say I didn't understand many of the words they used, nor the exact meaning of many of the idioms, but I got the drift. It seemed not to be necessary to know all the words, so much of the message was in the delivery itself, in the rhythms, silences, and dynamics of a language that is half words, half music. They were beautiful cats, each with his own voice, his own instrument, grooving themselves and everyone around them. Language was a feast.

As the summer passed I learned the words and the idioms. I talked myself the way I had always talked, but my ears missed nothing. I missed nothing Duke did not miss. And at precisely that point I began, without knowing why, to feel uncomfortable. The initial technical mysteries of the uptown vernacular had been cleared away only to reveal a deeper mystery. What were they talking about? I knew the words, I knew

the music, I relished every subtle change of dialect for comic or dramatic effect, and yet the essential *subject matter* of most of the talk was beyond my grasp. There was something strange about talk uptown. Rumors, hints, unspoken frames of reference, allusions and exaggerations filled every speech, as if the speaker were unable through some previous bond of honor to speak directly. There was a sense of urgency, as if each artist, in looking over his shoulder in the midst of an important phrase, expressed the fact that the roots of conversation were elsewhere. All of Harlem seemed to be covered by an immense oral network, a spider web of talk in which each strand trembled sympathetically to the movement at the center – a placeless, timeless center that no one had ever actually seen, and of which I would remain, ipso facto, forever ignorant.

When it began to get cold the street life ended and Duke and I went our separate ways. It wasn't until a year later, under entirely different circumstances, that I began to understand some of the mystery.

I was working at a hot-dog stand in the Union Square subway station, a three-week stint until I got something better, with two Puerto Rican kids who spoke no English. Not that communication would have been possible even if they had, since we worked in the midst of a continuous blast of noise sufficiently loud to drown out everything but a scream. The noise of the crowd, the roar of the trains, and the never-ending crash of the turnstiles were in themselves enough to overload the ears – additional explosions from the air hammers of two workmen tearing out an underground entrance to a bank no more than ten yards away seemed comically unnecessary. (They were still at it when I quit.) With so much noise the experience was more like silence than anything else. Deaf-mutes, the customers pointed to what they wanted and paid without speaking.

I worked, making the simple robot moves it was my duty to perform, with only my eyes alive. The Puerto Rican kids filled me with sadness. Eager, alert, and dedicated in their shit jobs, they rushed back and forth on our narrow slatted runway for no reason at all, as if they were somehow getting points for snappiness, as if someone were watching, when in fact had they died where they stood the crowd would not have noticed, would not have paused, but gone on, oblivious, intent on its brute impetus. Almost without being aware of it, I began watching the two old Negroes who ran a shoeshine stand in a sort of cul-de-sac behind some girders next to us. Their movements hypnotized me. Eventually, I spent every day watching their dance.

They had few customers. One or two an hour. Someone passing by would glimpse them through the girders, detach himself from the crowd, and go and climb on the stand. His shoes would be shined by a man who seemed not to notice the tools of his own trade or even the color of the leather. Whichever of the two old Negroes administered the shine, he seemed truly not to be there while he was doing it. If the customer broke the spell by moving his feet on the brass saddles, speaking, or in any other way forcing a response, old shoulders would move under the cheap gray jacket in such a way as to express irritation – as some diplomat waiting for the imminent arrival of an important personage might shrug away an annoying underling.

When they were not shining shoes they were moving, drifting, wandering around the two or three hundred square feet behind the girders. They did not rush, and yet

their moves were purposeful, they held the purposefulness of people waiting for an important message or contact. The crowd, awesome in numbers and weight, unquestionably strong, moved by – but the two old men seemed always to be looking past the crowd, above the crowd into the distance. (Of course in the subway there was no distance. Nor, since both of them were short, could they have been truly looking over the crowd. They were assuming the postures of men looking over and beyond it.) Their individual movements and their collective two-man movements were a dance expressing the fact that they were not simply shoeshine men, they were not in any way defined by the circumstances immediately surrounding them, but were men whose deepest interests lay elsewhere, beyond the visible.

And I believed them. There was not the slightest fraudulence in their dance. It *was* their life they danced. I believed utterly in them as two important men disguised as shoeshine boys. (To be sure, I also believed in myself as an important boy disguised as a hot-dog man.) They had the aura of powerful men, and without thinking about it I accepted them as such. I entered their drama, finding myself following their eyes out over the crowd, finding myself waiting, anticipating some mysterious occurrence. I existed behind them as their powerful, more knowledgeable spirits radiated outward, calling, contacting, exchanging messages with other powerful spirits beyond my ken.

And then one day I saw something in the face of one of them, a subtle, indescribable expression of stoicism tiring, of death approaching, and I knew that although there had been no fraud, rather only a philosophy to sustain themselves, there was no basis for their dance of hope, no one they were waiting for, no interests they held beyond the visible, and no more to them than what I could plainly see. It was a tremendous shock. Simultaneously I understood about the summer. The mysterious references, rumors, and allusions had been without foundation. What I had heard on the streets of Harlem, and what the two old men danced in the roaring subway was style – sheer style.

Fantasy weaves in and out through Black culture like gold thread in a tapestry. An entire people have responded to misery by creating fantasies as powerful as the pain they have endured.

# An Interview

WILSON BURCH grew up on 115th Street in Harlem. He went to George Washington High School and by the time he was sixteen was addicted to drugs. He was able to kick the habit about five years ago, and since then he has been in the Air Force and held a variety of jobs. Now, at twenty-four, he finds himself a freshman at Harvard. The following excerpts are from an interview held in Cambridge one autumn day with Jane Schwarz, a freelance writer.

*How old were you when you graduated from high school?*

Sixteen and a half.

*And on dope?*

Right.

*And then you did what?*

Hustled.

*Do you regret it?*

No. Why should I? I was doing exactly what I wanted to do.

*When did you decide that way of life wasn't so good?*

I didn't exactly decide it wasn't good—I just realized that I wanted other things.

*What made you realize that?*

Essentially I realized it all the time. I lived a pretty fast life. Since early childhood I've been exposed to rough, gut, Black reality. I just decided it was time for me to do something about it.

*What did you do?*

I saw that the only way to get some of the things I wanted was to give up dope. And I decided the only way to accomplish that was to remove myself from the whole scene, to go away where I could see other things, become interested in other things. So I went into the Air Force—I used the service to get rid of the habit.

*To get away from drugs?*

To get away from the environment. Drugs I can handle. But the idea of being subjected to the whole Black ghetto scene, to the very subtle humility, to counting yourself as a second-best entity, was something I couldn't tolerate.

*How did you like the Air Force?*

I didn't. But I began doing my own thing there.

*What do you mean?*

Well, in the Air Force I learned not to be ashamed to know myself. And I got an insight into how people react to everyday things, to see human reciprocity—how one guy depends on another guy. This leads to understanding the whole psychology of crowds and how they can be manipulated.

*Did you ever feel that you couldn't make it?*

Sure, at certain times I've felt that life's been insurmountable, but it's not a thing I've adhered to as a philosophy or else I would be dead. I just wouldn't have been able to make it this far, because there have been any number of dead ends in my life that I've had to cope with just in order to live.

My early life was very muddled because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was really trying not to identify with myself. But now the bag's different. I'm doing my thing.

*What has become of your friends?*

Mostly all dope addicts.

*Why did you come to Harvard?*

I had decided to go to school and I was influenced by someone who was a Harvard graduate, who brought me to talk to some of the admissions people.

*Have you given any thought to what you might major in?*

At this point I'm undecided. For all practical purposes my intended field of concentration is economics.

*What about philosophy?*

All the direction we have now is based on a bunch of



old, archaic principles – you know, Greek, Roman philosophy, hundreds and hundreds of years old. It doesn't approximate the realities of right now. There's no such thing as a modern-day philosophy and it's desperately needed.

*Are you doing anything in the Cambridge community?*

I'd like to use the manpower here – the students from Harvard and Radcliffe that want to teach – to develop a school system that would bring some of the benefits of the Harvard type of education to the poor kids of Cambridge and Roxbury, both Black and white. I think it's a necessity. The school systems are deplorable. I want to direct some of the militant energies of the university and community into education, to bringing the minds and

attitudes of the young up to where they should be in order to cope with the future.

*Do you think people in Harlem will resent your coming up here to Harvard?*

Why should they? I don't have any problem relating to them. When I go back I won't be a "boojie" – a bourgeois nigger – I'll still be the same guy; I'll be able to talk to the drug addicts, to the hustlers, to the people.

*You really feel this experience at Harvard isn't going to change you?*

I can't. My characteristics are pretty definite at this point. If I had come to Harvard when I was first out of high school, I would have changed.

*If you had to describe Harlem, how would you do it?*

First of all, it's home to me. It's a Negro ghetto, in New York City where all the Negroes who come from the rural areas in the South have settled. And it's a happy place. At the same time it is a very sad place, where drugs are very, very prevalent.

*What helped you most during your childhood in Harlem?*

I have to give a great deal of credit to my parents. I was really pushed by my father and mother; I don't think they really understood in what direction they were pushing me, but they did try to do what they could for me. It's the same attempt all parents make. That, added to the fact that I've always placed a lot of strength in my own convictions and what I thought I could do.

To some extent I was lucky, because there are many things that could have happened that didn't happen. I've taken a lot of chances, I've been confronted with death several times, and just the fact that I'm still here indicates to me that I have something to do.

*Do you know what this something is?*

Well, I sway people. When I talk with Black people it's a very spontaneous thing – ears open, eyes open, and they believe. I feel obligated to tell them what they need to know, to be very definite about what I believe in, to cause them to question my beliefs and the beliefs of others, and not to accept anything as truth without question. I feel as though it's my job to teach, it's my job to demonstrate, it's my job to love, and eventually it will be my job to die.

I've taken the wrong road a couple of times, but somehow I've always known that a great man lives his life knowing that he's responsible for the plight of other people and that he has the ability to do something.

*Do you expect to go back to Harlem after Harvard? Do you feel a responsibility to Harlem and other ghettos?*

I feel a responsibility to myself. I'm definitely going back to Harlem; to all the other ghettos all over the world.

*You feel that your life's work lies in helping the people of the ghettos?*

Wait a minute. I'm not an idealist or anything. It's just that because of my past I realize that the only way to help myself is through helping Black people. It's as simple as that. I don't care how it sounds. Every man has self-preservation in mind and everything else is secondary. It's always the self identified with a problem, but first the self. I'm not saying that to try to play down the fact that I sincerely want to help people and Black people. Basically I believe in human beings. To hate is wrong but it's a very necessary thing. A man who knows that he has a job to do has to understand the human emotions that cause people to act in certain ways. Hate is very useful – if you can get people to hate blindly, you can get them to forget about some of the things that really bother them. So leaders resort to it. Knowing that someday I'll lead people, I would hope to establish a precedent of not having to resort to it. Although I don't know.

*What do you feel that you yourself can do in Harlem?*

I'd like to get rid of the existing dope problem.

*How would you go about it?*

If you want to rid Harlem of dope, you need a total annihilation of the city's narcotics laws. You see, the city laws differ tremendously from the state laws and are designed to keep dope contained within Harlem. In New York City, for having a certain amount of drugs you'd probably get a suspended sentence. For the same amount of drugs in New York State you would probably be confined to jail for a year.

*You honestly feel there's a conscious effort to contain drugs within Harlem?*

It has to be conscious. First of all, no Black man brings dope into the country – he just doesn't have the facilities. It's brought in by the white man. Now, secondly, the markets for narcotics are all in certain places. All right, then if you look at the laws they are all designed to contain it within a certain area. It's reasonable to sell dope in New York City, because, number one, the laws are such that you are not going to get the maximum amount of time, and number two, it's profitable.

*Beyond changing the laws, what else should be done about the narcotics problem?*

You're going to have to deal with the junkie himself. It's been proven by statistics, if statistics prove anything, that the recidivism rate – the rate of return – is about eighty-five per cent. So you have two possibilities: either the institutions that rehabilitate drug addicts are wrong, or you have to accept the idea that you can't cure a drug addict. Okay, start off with the institutions. There are a lot of very, very bad things that are wrong with them. They act as if they don't realize that narcotic drug addiction is about eighty-five per cent psychological, about fifteen per cent physical. To rehabilitate a drug addict you have to analyze the reason why this man resorted to drugs. First of all, because they were available. Secondly, because there is some deep psychological problem that he's trying to run away from. In order for an institution to be effective it has to handle this problem; it has to reorient this man, it has to give the man a sense of values. In other words when he's cured he has to be able to come back into reality; cope with it as it is. They don't do that. You have to give him a means to earn a living. They don't do that. They give him some really bull job that he doesn't want to do, that he feels is beneath him.

In order to rectify all this you have to set up an institution that will consider dope a psychological problem, and attack it from that direction. You then have to accept the fact that you can't cure all dope addicts. So what do you do for the ones you can't cure? Either the



*Photograph: Virginia C. Myers*

federal government has to recognize dope as a sickness and handle it as a medical problem, or they must make it very unattractive for anyone to sell dope by giving it away free. Or stop letting it in the country.

*Is this feasible?*

Well, dope's going to get out of hand. It's going to tap the lily-white children in Scarsdale and all the other suburban areas. It's no longer a thing that's just going to contaminate the Black folks. It's going to take over everybody if they don't watch it. They realize this now. It's too bad they didn't realize it long before.

*What else do you want to do in Harlem?*

I'd like to teach for a while. I'd like to see the Black man educated, actually have him know what direction society's going in and why it is going that way. In other words have him know something about the basic psychology of the forces that control him. Teaching a really thorough course in Black history in school would be good. The Black man should learn the simple facts about things like slavery and religious suppression. If he can understand that these are things he created himself, it would render him free to do other things with his energy, to use untapped mental potential toward preservation of humanity and not spend all his time hating.

I'd like to see the Black man become more interested in his own identity and stop thinking about the white man. But don't get me wrong, I don't hate anybody because they're white. It's a dreary, drab, sick thing to hate. There's a lot of it in Harlem now and it is what is needed. There's no other way that people can begin to manifest their own sense of pride, their own sense of being. Hate is a tool that they're using right now. It's only when hate is carried to an extreme that it becomes really harmful. In small doses it can cause people to change and can be a useful tool.

*Where would you begin making these changes?*

With the children. Simply try to reorient the children; give them the self-pride, the identity that they need. That's how it works from generation to generation. You educate the children. Give them the proper images to emulate and then they themselves will rectify the existing chaotic conditions.

*What are these images?*

A Black man who's sufficiently strong, who can cope with reality; who's not going to run out and leave his family, who's going to be there; who's a fighter, who's not a quitter, because quitters never win. Just a man, period.

*How should the Black man go about changing his self-image?*

He must start educating his own children in an environment that they are comfortable in. Give them back their identity. Use the advertising and communications media to project to the people a sense of pride, a sense of being important. Essentially, being important lies within each individual, every human being on this planet is important.

*Isn't it difficult to convince yourself that you are important if you don't have a job and your kids are hungry?*

If we just analyze the thing from a logical standpoint we'd find that the reason why people in Harlem don't have jobs, and why there is poor housing, is society. Society has really made it very hard for the Black man. He is not allowed the opportunity to educate himself, and knowledge is power. They say the whole system is based on education but it's not. The system is based on knowing, knowing how to take the things that you know and make them useful. The traditional system has made it impossible for the Negro to get anywhere. Not only doesn't he have the knowledge to acquire certain jobs, but there have been occasions where Negroes have had the knowledge and been denied the job for one reason or another.

*How, specifically, will self-knowledge help the Black man?*

It will show him that he has no problem in society. That he's a man. That he can compete. Take my father: he's made money, but he's not a happy man. He hasn't been able to see that in this society the fact that he was able to acquire it means that he's able to compete. All the time he's sort of been suffering from this psychosis, thinking that he wasn't as good as he is. He's not a quitter, so in a sense he's won.

*This self-pride will have to come from within the race?*

Right. There's nothing that the power structure can do for the Black man except just leave him alone.

*So there's nothing that outsiders can do for Harlem?*

Well, there are a lot of whites in Harlem now who are doing a good job. Their intentions are sincere, but I think their job is to handle the white folks.

*In Harlem?*

Not in Harlem, just handle the white folks, period. White society is educated in the rudiments but not in the realities and that's where these people can help. The average white man comes into a ghetto like Harlem. He experiences for the first time in his life the gut feeling of what

prejudice actually is: the personal, spontaneous emotion that comes from within when you know the people around you don't like you. They don't know whether you're evil or good, they dislike you simply because you represent something that's foreign. Now the white man finds he's afraid, because now he's got to deal with people he knows nothing about – people that know all about him just by reading books that reflect his image. So how does he handle these people? He has to do one of two things: he has to give them something to cope with, something to fear, something to not understand. But he realizes even now that is very difficult to do because the sleeping tiger has woken up. So, if this won't work . . . in comes the Urban League, the American Christian in Africa.

*Well-intentioned groups, you mean?*

Well-intentioned, but here's the thing: some of my best friends, people like you, are in Harlem, and they have a place. But they don't control; they don't pay the piper so they don't call the tune. They can be used; their efforts are misrepresented.

*How so?*

Well, the Urban League and groups like that come in and educate the Black man and give him money. But he doesn't make the money. He still is placed within a society that he has absolutely no control over. So what good is it? You're telling people that the only way to get ahead is to get money, "become educated so you can get more of this, so that you can get the money that I have."

Giving them money is not the answer. Making money available so that schools can be built, so that we'll have the proper recreation facilities so Black people can divert some of the energies and intentions that they have toward useful, meaningful things – that's a good thing. But just the money? What good is it?

This is something that really bugs me. The idea that a certain amount of money can do something is not going to work. There are already enough institutions. There has been this gross approach to the problem. How do we in fact help a million people at one time? You can't do it. What has to happen now is to begin to deal with the individual needs of Mr. So-and-So. That doesn't apply only to Harlem but all over the world.

The Black man has been in slavery for six thousand years: he's not going to suddenly evolve one afternoon and be a free man and be able to do what he wants to do any place he goes. It will take time for him to get what he thinks he wants, for him to get any sort of power, for

him to begin to create a destiny for himself. It's not going to happen all of a sudden.

*What about the suburban groups that recently came in and painted houses in Harlem?*

I don't see anything wrong with that. Essentially it's not the fact that they come in and paint, it's the fact that they realize that there has been injustice perpetrated on the part of those in control. These people that represent the middle class, they're not the ones that count. Their position is really no different than the position of the people in Harlem. The only thing they have is a little more security, but they don't have free will, they don't control the government. The power in the government is controlled by about ten per cent of the population of this country. They sit back entombed in their houses someplace on some mountain and they own the media, they determine.

These groups who come to Harlem from White Plains are just human beings reacting to a very human situation. They see something wrong and they react as any other human beings would or should.

There is nothing wrong with them trying to help. The fact that they help will for a lot of them relieve their consciences about different beliefs that they have. You don't think everyone who comes is a do-gooder, do you? It's certainly not the truth. They aren't all there because they are in love with Black people. Some of them come to Harlem to help Black people because they hate Black people; they come because they feel that somehow their hates can either be justified or disproven.

*What about the people within Harlem, what can they do?*

Essentially what you're saying is what can the Black man do for himself. What he can do is change as the times change. In his heart he knows that things are getting better. But I don't think that just because of this he's going to become complacent. He knows that in order to change anything he's going to have to actively partake.

The answer to the Black man's problem does not lie in Harlem, it lies in the Black man. It lies in his awareness that he's not in this world by himself, that he's in this world with millions and millions of other Black people who are being controlled by a very small minority. The answer to his problem will come through intensified communication, through becoming autonomous, through economic manipulation. The Black man must somehow learn to use the economic potential for power that he has. He must create his own economic system.

*What sort of economic system?*

A system based on me and every other Black man. Now

we have a subsistence level – we do in fact acquire some of the gross national product. But we could combine all our individual incomes into a force that would be very effective in a capitalist society, like boycott. We comprise such a percentage of the blue-collar labor force that if we all stopped working all through the country at one time, it would have quite an effect. These are workable mechanics that the power structure uses itself. These are workable mechanics that the Black man has in his grasp.

*Should the government be doing more? Is the government aware of the situation?*

Don't ask me that. You know the government's aware. They study labor statistics, they have economic projections, they know what being poor is about, they create the conditions that exist in this country.

*You feel the government created the problem?*

Not the problem, the *problems*, all over the country. I mean, do you think for one minute that the government doesn't know? I admit that there are people there who have altruistic motives, who really don't know what's going on and would really like to do something. But there are a lot of people there that really know. They know.

*What about politics in Harlem?*

Well, politics is *the game* in this economy. In a democratic society, the power is in the political structure. Years ago it used to be – well, at one point it was force, then wealth. Now it's changed a bit. You don't necessarily have to be wealthy to be powerful in this country, all you have to do is have political strength. And political strength is essentially people – it's people having control of people. Hitler wasn't a rich man, he just could sway people. He was a dynamic personality and that's what the real power is. That's what television is all about: selling and indoctrination and exploitation.

*What could someone like me do to change existing conditions?*

Believe and care and be sincere. If you believe that what's going on is wrong, then let your beliefs guide you to do whatever you think is necessary in order to change the wrong. If your beliefs are strong enough to keep you from faltering or being misled, you are going to change the conditions that you do not believe in.

There's no one thing you can do: it's a very complex problem. You do your little thing and I'll do mine and through all these little changes you're going to have a very big change. It's possible that all these little things

will make a revolution necessary. Becoming frustrated because you can't do your little thing because the system won't allow it, might make it obvious to people that it's necessary to have another system to do their thing in.

There is going to be power politics between the Black man. There are two different mentalities existing right now: the so-called Black mentality and the so-called Negro mentality. Both factions are going to acquire some power and some wealth. The ideologies are not going to be the same and you are going to have war.

*Then how can you say that Harlem's getting better?*

Out of this upheaval something will evolve, something that is going to be good. Harlem and the Black people have to go through a whole series of changes.

*What changes?*

Well, first of all, after they find their identity, after they know who they are, then they've got to decide what to do and how to do it. They've got to start thinking about the Black man's position in fifty or sixty years, how he relates to humanity.

In fifty years there will definitely be political turmoil. You can see it happening now with the death of Malcolm X. I think that was the first cleavage in the whole cycle; it's definitely a thing that you're going to see happening more and more. As people acquire power, along come the necessary evils that one acquires with power. It's not going to be a happy time. That's why I don't like to think of it in fifty years' time; I'd rather think of it in a hundred years' time.

*What would you hope for the future of Harlem?*

In the future Harlem will be a community handled by Black men who will be a new breed of men with a new social awareness. The Negro in this country will still be in the minority as far as numbers go, but there will be a different situation. Harlem will be the melting pot, or stopping-off place, for a huge symposium of Black people from all over the world, because of the intensified communications now going on between the African factions and some of the factions within Harlem. So the people who are in power in Harlem will become very significant Black people throughout the world. You'll have internal struggles with some sort of underground type of thing finding its roots in Harlem. It will probably be the place – and I'm sure everyone knows it – where the revolution starts in this country, if one starts. The brainpower will come from a place like Harlem and so will the money.

*What steps would you take to insure a better childhood for your own child than you had yourself?*

Well, when I have a child – this is going to sound sort of conceited – all he's got to do is just be like his dad and he's going to make it because his dad's a winner. Never been a quitter all his life.

I'd instill in him a sense of pride and free will. I'd also like to give him a set of values that he can live by and pass on.

*But you are an exception to the rule.*

Not exactly an exception because there are a lot of exceptions. There are a lot of people in Harlem that have got what it takes to make it but they have the wrong values. That's what had me really in bad for a while: trying to understand what's worth having and what isn't. This society is based on money and what money can do for an individual, not on the abstract sort of things that mean more than money: ideas, desires, ambition.

For a long time I was a cheat. I used the power I had to persuade people to do what I wanted them to do for my own benefit. I've had money, but I wasn't happy, and that really made me begin to see that it wasn't in money. I found out that my values were nowhere; that they weren't going to get me what I wanted. They weren't even going to get me what I thought I wanted. I didn't want the same things then that I want now.

At this point I'm glad my life was the way it has been. Primarily because I understand life a lot better than most people and I'm not stymied by reality. If I had had some of the things I wanted – what I thought I wanted: the best of everything – I don't think I would be the type of person that I am today and I don't think the possibilities that I have now would be open to me. I've never been as happy as I am right now.



*Photograph: Gordon Parks,  
LIFE Magazine*

# HARLEM

## A Cultural History

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JEAN BLACKWELL HUTSON

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James Baldwin,  
 Photograph: Steve Schapiro, from  
*Black Star*

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