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Black Arts Movement:  
Another Step Forward in Creating African Culture in America

During the mid 1960's through the mid 1970's, the Black Arts Movement (BAM) became a large focus for many African Americans. This movement was to preserve present, past and future of African American works of art for the next generation. There were two main reasons why the Black Arts Movement came about creating an African American culture in the United States, and the economy that create works for the black community.

Before the Black Arts Movement, African Americans were unable to really write and create their own styles to be shared with their black communities, as well as Latin, Chinese, and Japanese communities. The limits that were placed on the African Americans were not being able to have the freedom to express themselves. The movement broke from the immediate past of protest and petition (civil rights) literature and dashed forward to the unthinkable and unobtainable: Black Power (Black Arts Movement 1). Both movements were within the Black Arts movement and even through it went from peaceful to sometimes the violent, they both fought for African American's rights and the rights of the oppressed. The Black Arts Movement began to delight and inspire the social literary movement in America's history and continues to engage more writers to follow ones dream to write. This influenced protesters, writers, artists, and many African Americans alike to fight what they believed in by using the first amendment giving the right to freedom of speech. A few individuals who made a name for themselves through this amendment are Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X whose messages touch individual's lives through their words.

With Malcolm X, giving speeches on the importance of the black community uniting, he tried to make a more unified black society. These speeches were the voices of the oppression that the black communities felt. Following the 21<sup>st</sup> of February assassination of Malcolm X, the town of Harlem got together, making a symbolic birth in which the Black Arts Movement began (Baraka 1). The devastation of Malcolm X's death was you could say the last straw that broke the camel's back.

Many well-known black writers came together to show the importance of having more programs and institutions for the Black Arts. Some of the institutions that were formed were the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School, Black House, Muntu Group, New Lafayette Theatre, Spirit House, Sun People's Theatre and the Umbra Poetry Group (Baraka 1). These institutions allowed African Americans to perform and share their works. Unfortunately, some of these institutions do not exist anymore. The most well known institutions were the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BART/S) and New Lafayette Theatre (NLT) that gave the writers like Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins the opportunity to bring more interest to the Black Arts in their communities and world.

Magazines such as *Negro Digest* and *Black World* began publishing a range of poetry, fiction, criticism drama, reviews, reportage, and theatrical articles that allowed writers and artists to inform readers of the African American intellectual thinkers. This also ignited a name change of the widespread rejection of “Negro,” then with the adoption of “black,” which refers to Africa. Which lead to the acceptance to the title presently used; which is “African” that is a name for the people of African decent want to be identified (Black Arts Movement 6). This change lead to individuals becoming more significantly important in BAM (Black Arts Movement), and they were Amiri Baraka (formally known as LeRoi Jones and also known as Imamu Amiri Baraka), Gwendolyn Brooks, Ed Bullins, Harold Cruse, Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, and many other (Those Involves in BAM 1). These individuals not only opened the doors for more African American Artists and writers, it continued the support for the Black Arts in the society that was once unknown by African Americans.

With the Black Arts Movement becoming increasingly nationwide there were two individuals that contributed with the power of words to demonstrate the importance of BAM in the American Society. These two individuals are Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal who wrote the importance of BAM in hopes to advance literary social engagement in the United States. Amiri Baraka has been known to be a key factor in the civil rights movement and is said to be the most respected African American writers in his generation (Black Arts Movement 2). Baraka not only fought for African Americans rights, but he co-founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS), and was the individual who came up with the term Black Arts, which is known as the literary movement that brought about a better appreciation for African Americans and their works. Another key contributor, Larry Neal, who opened up the concept of black power into the Black Arts Movement by writing his 1968 essay, *The Black Arts Movement*. Neal stated that Black Arts are aesthetic and spiritual that related in these points to Black Power (Black Arts Movement 1). Neal believed that if one cannot make his or her point in peaceful then violence was the next option for action. These individual can be considered pioneers in the expansion in African American Culture in the United States. This is a giant leap for the society in the United States and continues to push forward into the future.

The creating of a new style of a culture that has been incorporated in the America’s society has been a corner stone in America’s history. Like rights for the citizen and opportunity to follow, ones dream. All of these aspects have been bumpy at times and are still being fought for, but the point is the fight for them has led to better choices and opportunity for the citizens. The Black Arts Movement was a corner stone that needed to be reached for years and even thought we still have a bumpy road ahead, the progress that has been made is ray a light that we as a community can bring more appreciation for different cultures.

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