Engaging Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts and the African American Community

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## List of Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>Art Institute of Chicago</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASNLH</td>
<td>Association for the Study of Negro Life and History</td>
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<td>BECC</td>
<td>Black Emergency Cultural Committee</td>
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<td>BMA</td>
<td>Baltimore Museum of Art</td>
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<td>DIA</td>
<td>Detroit Institute of Arts</td>
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<td>DMA</td>
<td>Detroit Museum of Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAAAAA</td>
<td>Friends of African and African American Art</td>
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<td>FHA</td>
<td>Federal Housing Authority</td>
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<td>GMCAAA</td>
<td>General Motors Center of African American Art</td>
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<td>ROM</td>
<td>Royal Ontario Museum</td>
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List of Definitions

**African American** is used to reference citizens of the United States of African descent that trace their ethnicity and heritage to institutional slavery.

**Black** is a socially based racial classification related to those who have a family history stemming from institutionalized slavery. Black is not necessarily an indicator of ethnicity or skin tone, but an oppressed minority group. While Black is often used interchangeably with African American, it is used here to refer to members of the African diaspora subject to corporeal violence. Black is capitalized because in APA format it is considered a proper name and requires capitalization.

**White** is a person of European descent. White is capitalized because in APA format it is considered a proper name and requires capitalization.

**Black aesthetic** is a form of artistic expression that formed out of a desire for African American self-determination and an embracing of people of the African diaspora. It often possesses signifiers of a lived experience.

**White aesthetic** is a form of artistic expression that possesses signifiers of a White lived experience, one that is removed of racial signifiers.
Summary

This study analyzes the Detroit Institute of Arts’ (DIA) exhibition and interpretive labeling strategies that attempt to create a more inclusive institution for the predominantly African American population of Detroit. This study presents a brief overview of Detroit’s demographic change, racial tension between the city and its suburbs, the museum’s reliance on city funds, and its desire to become a more inclusive educational institution for its growing African American population.

During its 2007 renovation process, the DIA formed the General Motors Center for African American Art, a curatorial department and gallery spaces specifically for African American art. This study examines a history of segregating the work of African American artists from that of their White peers. The study also seeks to understand the African American engagement built in the museum’s presentation of the exhibition Through African Eyes: The European in African Art, 1500 – Present, which provides a view of colonialism from African artists. This study explores a conflation of African and African diaspora as African American representation, and examines how visitors responded to this exhibition.

A fifteen question online survey was conducted to understand the community’s feelings towards the African American galleries. Sixty-three Detroit metro-area residents of multiple ethnicities participated. While the responses towards the DIA and the African American galleries were mostly positive, many expressed a level of neutrality when it came to the importance of the African American galleries. This study concludes that the Detroit community feels a need for galleries devoted to African American Art, but that the museum must work harder to counter the segregating practices of the all-Black exhibition.
Introduction

While visiting the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) a group of older college students were on a tour, the majority of them being African Americans with several White students as well. The docent walked them through the various galleries discussing famous works, helping them interpret the significance of the work by asking leading questions. She gave much consideration to several Renaissance paintings and a few famous works in the Contemporary galleries. When she reached the African American Art galleries she introduced the gallery, directed the students to the three other rooms to see, and told them to ask if they had any questions. She then proceeded to answer a phone call and completely lose interest in her tour even as the group's excitement and interest grew. One man commented enthusiastically on how beautiful the work was and in a very condescending tone, the tour guide responded, “Yes, it is beautiful isn’t it?”, and returned her attention to her phone. In a museum with a seemingly diverse visitor demographic, this interaction raises questions about the Detroit Institute of Arts’ commitment to minority visitor engagement.

In 2000, General Motors donated $5,000,000 to the DIA to create the General Motors Center for African American Art (GMCAAA), which culminated in a five-room gallery space devoted to the work of African American artists. The funds also established a curatorial department with the mission of acquiring and exhibiting art produced by African Americans. The DIA is the only major fine art museum in the country to create space such as this. While this gives exclusive recognition to the work of artists who have been overlooked by many institutions and the art world in general, the separation is problematic. African Americans fought for over a century to gain a place within the conversation and history of American art. The work of African
American artists has historically been diminished or tokenized, meaning they gain inclusion as a single symbolic gesture of minority representation. African American art, when legitimized, was exhibited in the lesser areas of art museums such as an entrance foyer, a temporary gallery meant for engaging with children, or segregated into all-Black exhibitions.

The DIA offers an interesting case study when discussing minority inclusion specifically because of the demographics of the city of Detroit. Detroit boasts a resident population of 82.7% African American, 10.6% Caucasian, 6.8% Hispanic, 1.1% Asian, and 1% Other, according to the 2010 United States census. Over half a century after the Packard automotive plant closed, an exodus of the White middle class population due to the growth of the city suburbs and the housing discrimination practices of redlining\(^1\), Detroit still feels the pain of extreme segregation. The affect of this segregation has created dividing lines, in some cases literal concrete walls, between the city of Detroit and many of its suburbs. With diminishing wealth and the reduction of the auto-industry, the once booming city has been considered since the 1960s an eyesore, blight, and the black sheep of the proud Michigan family.

The importance of the DIA’s relationship with the African American community rests on the current dialogue surrounding museums and their ability to appeal to multiple publics. A museum’s responsibility to its surrounding community is constantly up for debate. How does an institution create a more inclusive environment and cultivate a diverse demographic, yet remain an institution of high culture? Andrew McClellan discusses the ideals of the art museum as an institution of learning and a cultural ordainer in *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*. McClellan describes Neil MacGregor’s, the director of the British Museum, view of museums today as having a responsibility to “embrace a vision of civic humanism in which the knowledge

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\(^1\) The GI Bill offered funding to veterans for higher education and inexpensive housing, which spurred the growth of the suburbs across the country. African Americans found it hard to purchase homes; due to redlining and segregation
they generate ‘is to have a civic outcome’” (McClellan, 2008, p. 13). McClellan continues to state that, “… museum priorities are not fixed in stone like their monolithic facades but subject to debate and modification as social needs change” (McClellan, 2008, p. 13).

Elaine Gurian, in *Museum as Soup Kitchen*, posits the dilemma of a museum institution offering direct services to the community. She argues that during these hard economic times it is more important for museums to engage a diverse community, not only to create an increased and diverse stream of visitors, but also to maintain their appeal in the eyes of funding powers. She argues that museums should make an extreme change in their inclusion practices, which places the art museum in an interesting position of being able to engage multiple publics through art appreciation. Yet, many art museums still lack the ability to engage minorities. According to the 2010 study conducted by Reach Advisors, currently 89% of United States museum goers identify as White, 3% as Black, 6% as Asian, 5% as Hispanic or Latino, 2% as American Indian, and 4% of museum goers identify as two or more races (Reach Advisors and Friends, 2010). Why would increased representation gain a larger minority audience? According to a 2005 report released by the Commission on African and Asian Heritage in London, when a person’s culture or community is overlooked or denied adequate recognition within a museum “the outcome can be debilitating, leading to disaffection and disillusionment, a sense of disenfranchisement and contributing to socio-economic decline,” for the minority (The Mayor’s Commission on African and Asian Heritage, 2005). A lack of visual representation and structural inclusion could project a patronizing, disqualifying glance onto an underrepresented community. Minorities face systemic oppression within the history of America, and African Americans, specifically, were invisible within American art institutions until the 1960s and into the 1980s.
In *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (2011), Bridget Cooks explores and seeks to understand the curatorial strategies, challenges, and reception of African American-centered art exhibitions in major American art museums, citing the many layers of racism and segregation of African American artists. During the 1930s, the all-Black exhibition was a way for African Americans to create a space to exhibit their work, moving into the 1960s and 1970s this form of exhibition became a way for institutions to continue segregation between African American artists and their White contemporaries. Cooks concludes by questioning if “there [is] a future for the all-Black show in the mainstream American art museum? Has the racial thinking within American art museum administration changed enough for the institution to reflect the contribution of African Americans in American art” (Cooks B. R., 2011, p. 158)? She calls for the end to the discriminatory practice of all-Black exhibitions, in hope that the American art museum would then be forced to acknowledge the influence of African American art on mainstream art history. Does the DIA’s designation of a permanent exhibition space for African American art instigate a deeper awareness of the contributions of African American artists or does it continue the segregating practices of the all-Black exhibition?

Artist Ann Hamilton proclaimed to curator Mary Jane Jacob, “You give permission,” when discussing the new role of today's curator as patron — the traditional funding source of the artist. In *Making Space for Art* (2006), Jacob discusses the distance between the art museum and the non-art public, and argues for creating space within an exhibition for the public to breathe and interpret the art on their own. For Jacob, when she allowed community participation in her curatorial practice she realized that as a curator she was no longer the authority, but rather a “conduit for the ideas of others, translated and transformed by the artist” (Jacob, 2006, p. 140).
Jacob needed to listen to the community and understand how they wanted to be engaged with an exhibition, rather than using the elitist condescending scholarly tone art museum’s are known for. She concludes that what needs to be curated are “the conditions for the audience’s own creativity and deep engagement” (Jacob, 2006, p. 141). The DIA’s current mission is to create “experiences that help each visitor find personal meaning in art” (Detroit Institute of Arts). Does the GMCAA offer this space of engagement and meaning for Detroit?

In this study the terms inclusion, representation, and engagement are used as a baseline of analysis of the DIA and the city of Detroit’s relationship. In an effort to define the use of these concepts it is important to think of the very formation of the Eurocentric museum as a space of exclusion to lower classes. While the initial conception of the museum institution was to create a space for education through art objects and pillaged Colonial artifacts, the museum of the nineteenth century took on the role of a “civilizing instrument of the state” and maintained an elitist reputation of dismissively overlooking the lower class (Sandell, 2003). This form of “social exclusion” in a museum, as described by Richard Sandell, is a “process of social disintegration, an erosion of the bonds between the individual, society and the state” (Sandell, 2003). This means the less representative space offered to the visitor the further apart they feel from the institution. Within the museum, this practice of exclusion is mainly seen in artwork exhibited, collecting preferences, and the language used to address the public in labels. One of the struggles of the minority artist is a fight to gain recognition within a global art historical conversation, a desire for their work to be measured along the same axis as their White-male peers and predecessors. This struggle to create a level playing field is an important and often overlooked area of museum work. It is one that must extend beyond a day of representation and temporary exhibitions for Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Dia de Los Muertos,
et cetera. To properly engage — meaning to achieve a wider set of learning outcomes that maintain the attention and enthusiasm from an audience — museums must change in many arenas, which includes staffing, exhibition strategies, public program practices, and education programs. To create a space of representation, for the purposes of this study, means to offer cultural iconography, recognition, and communication through exhibition and collecting practices, as well as public programs. The combination of these two forces — representation and engagement — creates an inclusive institution. While museums may pride themselves on being experts of cultural objects, the visitor is the expert in their lived experience. It is the museum's complex job to create a learning environment for its visitors, but with an understanding of what their visitor is interested in learning about themselves and others.

In the sections to come, this study analyzes the Detroit Institute of Arts' exhibition and interpretive labeling strategies vis-à-vis attempts to create a more inclusive institution for the predominantly African American city of Detroit. In the section titled *A Brief History of the Detroit Institute of Arts and Detroit’s Relationship*, I discuss the formation of the Detroit Institute of Arts and its reliance on taxpayer funds for daily operations as well as acquisitions. The museum’s reliance on city funds is extremely important because in order to justify this financial dependency the museum pursued a transformation into an institution concerned with catering to the. This section also introduces the racial tension that formed within the city of Detroit as the surge of African American migrant workers that flocked to the auto factories from 1940s to the 1960s created extreme White-flight². This history is important because it lays the groundwork for understanding the museum's impetus to create gallery and collecting space for the African American community.

² “White-flight” is defined as the move of White city-dwellers to the suburbs to escape the influx of minorities (Merriam-Webster).
In the next section titled *Segregating African American Art* the formation of the General Motors Center for African American Art, and response of museum staff to the public’s desire for an artistic representational space are discussed. To complicate this creation of artistic representational space, this section presents moments during a fight against the all-Black exhibition waged by African American artists in the 1960s and 1970s and current issues within this practice. During its renovation process, the DIA created a new visitor-centered strategy of engaging the public. This section explores the successful and unsuccessful practices of this strategy by analyzing extended wall labels, opportunities in visitor engagement lost and gained, and by understanding the educational advantages and disadvantages of creating a separate area just for African American art.

In an interview with the DIA’s Exhibition Manager, Amy Foley, she cited the 2009 exhibition *Through African Eyes: European in African Art, 1500 – Present* as one of the most successful exhibitions for bringing in members of the African American community (Foley, 2014, personal communication). This exhibition sought to provide an alternate understanding of colonialism from the view of African artists, a view that is rarely seen because of the privilege afforded to the colonialist view of Africa in our society. While this exhibition gave a complicated view of the colonized African experience, to highlight it as a success of museum engagement with African American community partners references a historic conflation of African and African diaspora as a means of representing African Americans. The section titled *Examining Through African Eyes* explores the exhibition and visitor responses, and the early work of the DIA and the Friends of African and African American Art auxiliary group to create a space for the African American community through African art.
For this paper’s study of the DIA’s relationship with the city of Detroit, an online survey was conducted containing fifteen questions regarding the participants overall experience with the museum, their knowledge of art, the various ways in which the museum sought to engage their specific community, and their opinion on the five galleries dedicated to African American Art (see Appendix A). Sixty-three residents of the Metro-Detroit area responded to the survey; twenty-four participants identified as Black/African American, twenty-one identified as White/Caucasian, ten as Latino/Hispanic, two as Multiracial, one participant identified as both Black/African American and as Native American, one as both White/Caucasian and Middle Eastern, one as White/Caucasian and Latino/Hispanic, and two participants declined to indicated their ethnicity. Identifying a participant’s ethnicity was important to the study because it helped to recreate a microcosm of Detroit demographic percentages; although this goal was unfortunately not achieved. The participant’s zip code was also important as it helped to identify Detroiter, which were forty-nine percent of the participants, and non-Detroiter. While most, if not all, of the feedback was positive towards the DIA and the African American galleries, fifty percent of the respondents felt neutrality about the galleries. This is interesting because the African American galleries ranked second highest in the top seven favorite galleries as indicated by the respondents (listed in ranking order from high to low): Rivera Court, African American, Special Exhibitions, African, Native American, and tied for sixth place are both the Modern and Egyptian galleries.
A Brief History of the Detroit Institute of Arts and Detroit’s Relationship

In 1885, the Detroit Museum of Art (DMA) opened its doors to the public. It was a small privately funded museum that survived for less than a decade on the support of its Board of Trustees. In 1893, the Board of Trustees petitioned Detroit’s City Council to help fund the institution, citing it as an important educational source for schools and the city’s and state’s residents (Abt, 2001, p. 63). By 1897 the City was the museum’s only source of operating support, the Board of Trustees focused their efforts on raising funds for the expansion of the DMA’s collection. The DMA’s first director Armand Griffith (1891-1913) sought to increase the museum’s visitor attendance in order to justify the rise in municipal funding and began to host a Sunday lecture series in which he would discuss topics of interest, often having little to do with art. Griffith’s lecture series helped boost attendance to the museum from 5,000 visitors in 1891 to approximately 100,000 by 1896 (Abt, 2009, p. 15). Unfortunately, although Griffith had a knack for drawing a crowd, he possessed little focus when it came to acquisitions of art and often took in natural history specimens that had little to do with the DMA’s collecting policy and mission, such as those gifted to the museum by the Detroit Scientific Association. Clyde Burroughs, a Michigan native and teacher, replaced Griffith after Griffith was relieved of his position in 1913.

Burroughs began to refocus the DMA’s mission back to art, and sought to create a stronger partnership with Detroit through both government agencies and city residents. The Board of Trustees was in a long negotiation with city officials to have the DMA acquired by the city as a department, much like the Detroit Public Library. The trustees succeeded in this endeavor in 1919 and the Detroit Museum of Art became the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), now
the property of the city of Detroit. The DMA Board of Trustees reorganized as the Founders Society and the DIA became an entity of Detroit’s Arts Commission, which was formed in 1919. It is important to emphasize this name change from a museum, which is a building that houses cultural objects, to an institute, which is a space of higher learning and education. The city made the commitment to fund new acquisitions and a new building on Woodward Ave (completed in 1927), and brought on French-born architect Phillipe Cret and German-born art historian Wilhelm Valentiner as consultants for this process. The City quickly hired on Valentiner (1927-1945) as the new director (Burroughs stayed on as assistant director).

Valentiner began an ambitious reorganization of the DIA’s exhibition display and collecting practices, narrowing the scope of the museum to only include fine art. He firmly believed that the museum’s collection was the strongest resource it could offer the public, and that the effective use of these objects could nurture the educational, recreational and spiritual needs of the citizens of Detroit (Abt, 2009, p. 21). It was during this time that the museum acquired major works of art with municipal funding, including a Bellini *Madonna and Child* (1508) and a Van Gogh *Self Portrait* (1887). Valentiner began to revolutionize the exhibition practices of American art museums by doing away with the visually cluttered salon-style gallery displays and clustering of work based on medium. He instead curated the art objects with an educational mission, integrating historical works of art — paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts — into “period rooms,” which were historic architectural rooms removed from their original settings and reworked into the permanent structure of certain galleries. Works of art were grouped according to region and historical time period, creating a coherent chronology of art history (Abt, 2001, pp. 103-121). The DIA’s new floor plan provided a tour of world culture for visitors, emphasizing western European and American art (Abt, 2001, p. 128). The DIA opened
its new building with great success and began to receive substantial donations of art from Detroit’s wealthy. But, the museum was still dependent on taxpayer funding and subject to the economic fluctuation of Detroit.

Many times throughout the DIA’s history its acquisition funds and operating budget have been subject to budget cuts by the mayor, very notably seen during the years of the Great Depression from 1929-1941. The DIA remained in a constant threat of closure, relying heavily on volunteers and reduced hours; in addition, the Founders Society took over funding much of the museum’s operating costs. In February of 1931, Valentiner argued publicly that, “In any time of stress, whether it be financial or war, when the public emotions suffer depression or elation then, as history proves, the people in every walk of life turn to art for consolation and inspiration” (Abt, 2001, p. 133). He was pleading for the mayor not to cut the DIA's acquisition budget, to keep the museum open, and for the residents of Detroit to care about what happens to their museum. Valentiner further stated that the people needed to see the value of the museum's collection, because when the city falls into peril, it will be the value of its collection that saves Detroit — figuratively and monetarily.

An editorial response to Valentiner’s plea made it clear that some of the rumbling circles within the city did not agree with his “ambitious art programme” (Abt, 2001, p. 134). A respondent stated that while they agree with Valentiner about the ability of art to console the public during times of economic stress, it did not fit the daily concerns of the citizens.

At the moment, art is not the most important thing in our lives. Getting a living is…. We believe money wisely invested in cultural development to be money well spent; but we do not believe that, at the present time, this city would be wise to devote money that is
needed for more pressing things to doing any more for the art institute than is necessary to keep it operating on a conservative basis (Abt, 2001, pp. 133-134).

Despite other pressures Valentiner saw opportunities to purchase various treasures of European art during the height of World War II, and worked closely with the Founders Society and donors to acquire revered works of European art.

During the 1940s, Detroit saw significant economic growth. The boom of the auto industry brought many African American migrants from the South in search of factory work and the city experienced a large population boost. The segregation practices that had become deeply embedded in the city forced African American Detroiter, whose population had reached approximately two hundred thousand, into a sixty-square block ghetto on the east side called Paradise Valley. On June 20, 1943, racial tensions in the city had grown and a race riot began on Belle Isle, a public amusement park. This was not the City’s first racial riot; one occurred in 1863, and again in 1941. This riot, however, lasted three days. Incited by a series of rumors of White and African American hate violence, two hundred African Americans and Whites began to fight on the Belle Isle Bridge, and soon five thousand White Detroiter gathered at the bridge’s main entrance to attack any African American leaving the island. The understaffed police force was unable to stop the violence. It was not until after a full day of pleas from the African American community and after White mobs stormed Paradise Valley that Mayor Edward Jeffries requested Army troops from the governor. The troops occupied Detroit for six months after the riots, until President Roosevelt felt it was safe to remove them (American Experience, 2013). Twenty-five African Americans and seventeen Whites died. Property damage was calculated at two million dollars.
Detroit’s population began to decline in the 1950s with the closing of the Packard auto-plant on the South West side. Other auto-companies, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler, began to expand and move their factories outside of the city-limits (Hulett, 2012). Newer and cheaper housing became available in the suburbs and with the GI Bill, which offered funding to veterans for higher education and housing, many White Detroit residents could afford to move with the factory jobs (Hulett, 2012). For the growing African American population, redlining and segregation practices of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) made it difficult to purchase homes, confining African Americans further to designated African American neighborhoods, making suburban-life inaccessible to them. Many developers attempted to build just over the border of Detroit city-limits, but the Federal Housing Authority prevented them from building too close to African American neighborhoods. One developer in particular built concrete walls to separate a White Oakland County suburban neighborhood from an African American Detroit neighborhood, in an attempt to work around the FHA’s stipulations (Hulett, 2012). The combination of redlining and GI Bill discrimination practices created one of the U.S.’ s starkest examples of White-flight.

The city was becoming increasingly more African American, drastically changing the demographics. Within a twenty-year span the population of Detroit went from 9% African American in 1940, to 16% in 1950, doubling again in 1960 to 33% (The Detroit News, 2007). Meanwhile the DIA expanded its reach to become a more regionally viable institution. By the 1960s the DIA offered public programming and services to seventeen suburban communities, in an attempt to follow its constituency.

Seizing an opportunity to expand its African art collection, the DIA, along with two prominent members of the African American community, Arthur D. Coar and Marc Crawford,
formed the African Art Gallery Fund Committee in 1962. The group began their fundraising campaign during the exhibition opening of *The Art of Africa: Traditional Arts of the African Negro*, on September 24, 1963. The group’s fundraising efforts allowed the museum to expand gallery space and acquire exquisite forms of African art. This auxiliary group was instrumental in the further development of the DIA’s African art collection. The group’s by-laws stated that their objectives were to assist the Founders Society in “1) perpetuating interest in the African Art Gallery, 2) developing understanding and appreciation of African Art through the community, 3) encouraging support of the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts in the acquisition of traditional and classical African Art, 4) encouraging and giving incentive to talented qualified Afro-American artists through participation in exhibitions and purchases of works of art for the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts” (Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, 2012). The auxiliary group successfully raised $125,000 and the African art gallery opened in 1966.

In July 1967, in the midst of national unrest, a police-raid on an African American after-hours bar, known as a blind pig³, instigated a five-day rebellion. The clash between the community and the heavily segregated police force grew out of years of extreme class disparity, police brutality, and the overall degradation of the city’s population. The Great Rebellion, which is still one of the largest and most violent rebellions in U.S. History, caught the attention of government officials, from the Governor’s Mansion all the way to the Oval Office, and Governor Romney sent the National Guard and Army to end the looting. The 1967 rebellion not only brought into the spotlight the extreme class inequality and dissatisfaction of Detroiters, but also caused a surge in the ongoing White-flight. Many businesses feared further civil unrest and relocated to the various Detroit suburbs. While the riot caused $40-$80 million in damages for

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³ Blind pigs are places that illegally sell liquor without a license.
the city of Detroit, the DIA was not immediately affected fiscally. The museum’s budget was cut a few years later due to the City’s loss of residents and taxpayer income.

In *Museum on the Verge: A Socioeconomic History of the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1882 – 2000*, Jeffrey Abt quotes a 1968 letter sent to the mayor and the DIA director from a Ferndale high school teacher regarding her recent interactions with the museum during a high school class field trip of forty-five Black students, five White students, and four White teachers. She explained that her students behaved satisfactorily, the way one would expect any high school student to behave, and were only shushed once during their visit to the Detroit Historical Museum across Woodward Ave from the DIA, earlier that afternoon. She stated:

> The atmosphere in the Art Museum was quite different… As soon as we came into the building guards converged on us and in a rather unobtrusive way escorted us through. The group’s behavior was the same as before — in the judgment of four adult experienced teachers, satisfactory, considering the situation and people involved. This was the atmosphere when the kids trooped past a small nude statue. Its apparent virility inspired a ribald comment by one of the boys and … the chief guard, descended upon us and ordered our departure. His claim, ‘The group was boisterous, not under control, and disrespectful of the art’ (Abt, 2001, p. 174).

She goes on to identify that her group was not the only group being uninvited from the museum, a small group of African Americans were herded out at the same time, despite protesting their innocence. This account of discrimination is telling of the racial tension that occurred before, during, and after the Great Rebellion in Detroit. The museum’s increased suburban outreach and unwelcoming attitude towards its African American visitors demonstrated that the DIA remained
more concerned with catering to its White suburban constituency rather than the increasingly African American city.

In 1974, Coleman A. Young, the first African American mayor of Detroit, was elected and the economically unstable city began to lose much of its state financial support. Many White-owned businesses turned their backs on the city forcing Young and the now 43.7% African American population of Detroit to adopt a *go-it-alone* philosophy, strengthening the solidarity between the mayor and the African American community, as well as further dividing the city and its suburbs (Abt, 2001). During this time the new DIA director Frederick J. Cummings began a battle with mayor Young over funding and the City’s control of the museum; Detroit found itself in another fiscal tumble and Young was planning to cut DIA funds. Cummings did not understand the historical connection between the DIA and Detroit’s fiscal responsibilities and consistently fought with Young for control of the museum. In 1975, the state of Michigan stepped in to offset the DIA’s budget as Detroit sunk deeper into its economic crisis, one so bad that it forced the lay-off of many city employees, including policemen, firemen and DIA staff, as well as the closing of the museum for three weeks (Abt, 2009, p. 24). The Founder's Society eventually asked Cummings to resign due to mismanagement of museum funds. Over the next ten years Michigan replaced the city of Detroit as the museum’s principal funding source, allocating over sixteen million dollars per year towards the museum’s operating and acquisition budget. But the city of Detroit maintained control over the museum’s daily operations (Abt, 2009, p. 24).

In 1985, newly appointed DIA director Samuel Sachs sought to bring the museum’s spending under control. He found a lot of unnecessary expenditures and duplications within staffing, and made it his mission to achieve three major goals. The first goal was to wrest control
of the DIA’s operations away from the city and back to the Founders Society in order to reduce city interference and overspending, as well as to assure suburban donors of the museum’s distance from Detroit government. The second goal was a capital campaign to increase the museum’s operating endowment. The third was a regional property millage\(^4\), which would bring in an estimated four million dollars per year for the DIA (Abt, 2009, p. 26). The museum successfully achieved the first two of its three goals and underwent a twenty-year contract with the city, keeping the ownership of the museum with the city, but shifting the operating power to the Founders Society. The ten-year capital campaign raised enough funds to support the museum’s expansion and renovation efforts, but the property-tax millage failed to pass through the electoral process. It was defeated in 2000, resubmitted in 2002 and voted-down again, with no hopes of being revived until 2012.

In 2001 the DIA began its six-year endeavor to renovate its facilities and rethink the ways in which the museum engaged the public. Director Graham W. J. Beal (1999-present) began an initiative to create a visitor-centered museum. Professionals within the art world criticized the DIA for “dumbing down the art” because they decided to do away with the canonical practices of major art museums and create an entry point for the general public through the language used in extended wall labels (Postrel, 2013). The DIA’s new interpretive labels answered the questions that were assumed common among a non-art-savvy public, allowing for many more of the museum’s visitors to feel included. With its renovation, the DIA took the opportunity to shed the shroud of an exclusive institution, one only worried about funds for its collection and catering to the art elite. Instead, the museum sought a stronger bond with the surrounding city, especially the now majority African American community, as a result deciding to allot a $5,000,000 donation.

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\(^4\) A millage is a rate of taxation measured in mills per dollar (Merriam-Webster).
from General Motors to create a center or department dedicated to African American art. Beal hired Valerie Mercer, a curator from the Studio Museum in Harlem (a historic African American museum of art), to head the formation of the General Motors Center for African American Art (GMCAAA), gallery space dedicated to the work of African American artists, as well as the creation of a curatorial department focused on acquiring and exhibiting art produced by African Americans. This made the DIA the nation’s first major art museum to dedicate a department solely to African American art (Mercer, 2007). Currently, for most museums, African American art is collected throughout the various American art departments — prints and drawings, contemporary, modern, photography, etc. — which often allows African American art to remain hidden within an institution’s collection, demonstrating a lack of desire or knowledge to highlight African American art.

The $158,000,000 renovation included one hundred forty new galleries for the DIA, including the five galleries devoted to African American art. For thirty-two consecutive hours the DIA opened its doors for its grand re-opening on November 23, 2007, and the museum buzzed with old members, new members, and people who had never visited before. The grand re-opening marked a turning point for the DIA and its constituency. Under the glow of the Euro-centric, the Afro-centric, the Ancient and the Contemporary art, Detroiter came together — old, young, Black, White, Latino, and Asian — to celebrate their new museum.

This celebration, however, was in the midst of the failures of two of the three largest Detroit-based American automakers, Chrysler LLC and General Motors Corporation, and the sub-prime home mortgage foreclosure crisis of the 2008 - 2009 Great Recession. Chrysler and General Motors received a bailout from the government, to offset their debts. Despite efforts to restructure their operations, both companies had to file for bankruptcy in 2009. Although the
sub-prime mortgage crisis affected many families across the nation, Detroit residents were hit the hardest with the highest foreclosure rate in the country. A loss of property-tax revenue and ongoing population decline caused the city’s finances to plummet.

In 2013, the news of Detroit’s bankruptcy reverberated across the country. Detroit, a great and historically important American City, was in free fall and America was writing it off. The poor were becoming poorer and the rich were becoming richer. Developers were purchasing entire sections of the city — one for only one dollar — with promises of new property developments (Guillen & Reindl, 2014). The state appointed Emergency Manager, Kevyn Orr, sought to sell off portions of the municipally owned art collection of the DIA to pay back some of the City’s privately owned debt. Unaware of the impact of this plan, Orr demanded a list of the museum’s collection. Director Beal sent a sixteen hundred forty page report — single spaced in ten point font — listing the portion of the museum’s collection acquired with municipal funding, forcing Orr to rethink the weight of his proposed solution. The conflict put the DIA and the city of Detroit in the national and international spotlight. Younger museums and collectors salivated over the prospects of purchasing the prized antiquities considered for the chopping block, while arts advocates argued the absurdity of the notion. A bill was later passed by the Detroit City Council to retain the municipally funded portions of the DIA’s collection as the property of the city’s residents and, thus, off the auction block.

As the world focused on and argued about the importance of the DIA’s collection, businesses invested in the growth of the city started a fund to save the museum’s collection. But during the DIA debates Detroit residents were fighting against school closures and
charterizations, unlawful water shutoffs, the privatization of the city’s Water Department, and disenfranchisement through the appointment of the emergency manager. Many community members saw the potential sale of the collection as a way to further strip the city of its educational resources, culture, and to keep its residents subjugated. Some activists spoke out saying in essence, “Who cares if they sell off the art collection? No one was up in arms when they were stripping us of our rights. Why should we care about the art? That is their museum.” This difference between theirs’ and ours’, a manifestation of a class struggle deeply rooted in race, further demonstrated the deep dividing line between the African American city and its surrounding White suburbs. Although purchased with taxpayer money, the collection has not always been considered the people’s art because much of the community experienced a form of alienation through a lack of inclusion and engagement through the years.

In the collection debate many art professionals argued that the DIA was a failing institution because of its low visitor attendance. In 2012 a Tri-county property millage passed, allotting funds to the DIA that allowed the institution to offer free admission to residents of Wayne County, Macomb County, and Oakland County. To help gain support for the millage the museum created a large advertising campaign, “Art is for Everyone,” which was also an attempt to expand its audience reach into Southeastern Michigan (Fruge, 2012). The DIA’s change in admission structure and exhibition strategies made the museum appear more accessible to all levels of socio-economic class. But, many were drawn to the institution because of controversy over the collection and the DIA’s Art for Everyone campaign. A surge of visitors from the surrounding counties resulted in a twenty-seven percent increase in visitors from fewer than

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5 I use the word “charterization” to mean the act of turning a public school into a charter school — privately run schools that receive municipal funding.

6 In November 2014, a federal court judge ruled that a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Michigan’s emergency manager law could proceed on grounds of the disproportionate use of the law against cities with a larger African American population (Livengood & Ferretti, 2014).
489,000 in 2012 to 621,000 people in 2013 (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2013). In 2013, twenty-nine percent of its visitors hailed from Wayne County, which includes the city of Detroit (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2013). Many of the residents outside of Detroit often hesitated to venture into the city even to visit an invaluable institution such as the DIA. That hesitation to support the city of Detroit results from the city’s history of segregation and criminalization which has fed perceptions of Detroit as a city riddled with violence due to cutbacks in the police force and its high crime rate. But the passing of the millage marked a turning point in the city-suburb relationship, demonstrating that Michiganders were beginning to understand that Detroit and the DIA are too important to let fail.
Segregating African American Art

Before the Detroit Institute of Arts’ (DIA) renovation and reinstallation in 2007, artworks in the collection by African American artists were interspersed throughout the American, Contemporary, and Modern Art galleries, with no more than sixteen works on view at one time. One of the many complaints from Detroit's African American community was that the artists on view were unidentifiable because of a lack of knowledge within the community about African American art (Mercer 2007). In planning its renovation the DIA identified an opportunity to create a space devoted to African American art and, so, formed the General Motors Center for African American Art (GMCAAA), a curatorial department that aims to further the recognition of the artistic accomplishments of African Americans through curatorial strategies and public programming by discussing the scholarship, artistic movements, and African American art history that is rooted in the work on display. In expanding its exhibition space the museum permanently installed approximately eighty works of African American art in the five galleries designated for the GMCAAA, and installed further African American artwork throughout the various American and Contemporary Art galleries.

In a 2003 interview, GMCAAA department head and curator, Valerie Mercer, discussed the issue of race in Detroit; she described how everything is very Black versus White and in comparison to the East Coast, from which she moved to Detroit, she found fewer opportunities for multiculturalism in Detroit. While other races exist in Detroit, the stark reality is that the majority African American population is surrounded by a predominantly White populated state. The issue of race was deeply embedded in the fabric of the African American community, due to
years of segregation and city-suburb tension, so deep that Beal and Mercer believed a separate gallery space was necessary to give special recognition to the African American community. Mercer stated:

Having a gallery devoted to African American art helps with funding and attracting collectors. … At this point, the Detroit community calls for this kind of situation. … You have to be sensitive and aware of the particular community. … There’s a great deal of knowledge needed in Detroit about African American art. Black and White people here, I feel, have very limited knowledge of African American art (Metro Times, 2003).

Mercer’s initial intention was to integrate African American artworks throughout the larger collection, but in the end she decided that an African American gallery would offer a stronger opportunity to teach (Metro Times, 2003).

In Mercer’s 2007 essay, In The Care of the Colossus: African American Collections within Major Museums, she argues that discussing the significance of African American art in a larger art historical context only satisfies art historians, artists, and museum professionals. For the general public the placement of African American art becomes lost, and for the museum fewer African American artists are displayed. This push to expand the museum's African American art collection had ties to the DIA's turn from an institution that tells the public what they want to know to an institution that listens to the public's needs.

This desire among African Americans to find visibility inside the art museum has a long and difficult history. In their 2006 study, Our Stories, Our Selves: A Study of African American Young Adult Arts Participation, The African American Arts Project (A3P) of Pittsburgh sought to understand the lack of African American engagement they were witnessing in their arts programming and tried to understand what barriers African American young adults in face the
arts. The authors convened several focus groups and developed quantitative and qualitative analysis of A3P programs in order to determine the key factors in successful African American audience engagement. They found that creating a link to heritage, history, and lived experiences built a stronger pull for African American students to attend an event. One African American student explained the importance of art in African American culture:

"Art is an avenue for African Americans to become connected with and better understand themselves, their experiences, their past, and ancestors; and that artists fill in the empty spaces of knowledge missing from African American history because they have the imagination to do so (Williams & Clippinger, 2006, pp. 11-12)."

This concept of an artist’s ability to act as a cultural connector for the disembodied and ignored minority seemed profound to the A3P investigators. Williams and Clippinger found African American students more inclined to attend events that they felt represented in, meaning that the event related to their lived experience as an African American. It was not enough to have an African American panelist included because students were still less likely to attend an art event alone for fear of being the only African American person in the crowd, causing them to feel as if they did not belong. The study concludes that changes in interaction must be made from the inside out; including staffing, relationships with partnering organizations, and a structural change to the overall discourse of engagement. The creation of the GMCAA was the DIA’s attempt to change the museum’s overall discourse around African American art and engagement.

The benefits of cultural representation in the museum are not only measured for the general population but for the artistic community as well. Offering African American artists space within the museum collection and galleries should be understood as important. In the transcript from a
1969 symposium on the Black artist in America, artist Hale Woodruff discussed the lack of funding and career access provided for African American artists:

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 (Bearden 1969, 246).

An art museum’s job as an institution is to ordain art and to give the artist and the public permission to make, see, and understand.

That the DIA historically failed to integrate African American artists into the general collection is tied to a history of overlooking African American contributions to art history and tied to the all-Black exhibition. Bridget Cooks discusses major instances of the invisibility, exclusion, and diminishment of African American artists in the twentieth century in *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (2011). One of the exhibitions she examines is the first major art museum exhibition of African American art in 1927, *The Negro in Art Week: Exhibition of Primitive African Sculpture, Modern Paintings, Sculpture, Drawings, Applied Art, and Books*, held at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). While the exhibition displayed two hundred five artworks — one hundred sixteen African sculptures and eighty-nine works by African American artists — it was split between two locations, one half shown in a section of AIC dedicated to children in the lower level of the museum and the other housed at the Chicago Women’s Club. The display of this exhibition in the AIC children’s gallery was degrading, giving the perception that the work was not viable enough to find space in a special exhibition gallery or to be included within the main level of the museum. Further demeaning the
work of artists in this exhibition, AIC curators required exhibiting African American artists to conform to the standards of a Euro-centric aesthetic, removing any recognizable form of a Black aesthetic. This requirement for African American artists to mimic the formal and subjective qualities of their White contemporaries was practiced consistently throughout the years in the few museum exhibitions that included African American.

In 1939 the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) opened its exhibition *Contemporary Negro Art*, which presented art by African Americans as relevant to the modern ideals of America. For the BMA the purpose of this exhibition was to highlight the institution’s interest in serving the general public rather than mainly catering to the elite patron class (Cooks 2011, 35). In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue philosopher and writer Alain Locke⁷, described this exhibition as an opportunity to formally establish a Black aesthetic in order to combat years of African American artists being forced to adhere to Euro-centric visual aesthetics. Locke envisioned the success of African American art to include signifiers of an African American lived experience; as Cooks explains, “Negro art depicts visual evidence of Negro life and ancestry” (Cooks 2011, 37-38). In his eyes, African American artists would then escape the criticism that they were mimicking their White peers and their aesthetic would exist in a category of its own. Locke, in general, sought racial parity.

This demand for African American art to contain specific signifiers of lived experience was crucial at this moment in Black art history. With much of the exhibited African American art being forced to conform to a White aesthetic displaying a Black aesthetic became a milestone for the African American arts movement. But as Cooks points out, this preference for and expectation of African American artists to represent African American life has obstinately been

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⁷ The BMA adopted a democratic exhibition curating policy in which a committee instead of a single curator chose the artworks (Cooks B. R., 2011).
maintained as a theme of the all-Black exhibition. In the 1930s the segregation of the all-Black exhibition was an attempt to give African American artists exposure, but as African Americans moved into the 1960s and 1970s this segregation became a way to keep African American artists separate from their White peers.

As Kellie Jones explains the rise of a Black aesthetic and Black radicalism within the art museum, in It’s Not Enough to Say “Black is Beautiful”: Abstraction at the Whitney, 1969-1974 (2011), she states,

There was a reevaluation of culture as a fundamental component of the black quest for self–determination. What should a radical black aesthetic look like, how should it function? Segregation, a liability, a ‘Negro problem,’ became a potent focal point, but how was this difference translated into cultural practice? Was there something called ‘black art’ (Jones, 2011, p. 408)?

The late 1960s and 1970s offered an energetic breaking moment for African American artists when the Whitney Museum of American Art, in its commitment to abstract art, began to showcase the work of African American abstractionists between 1969 and 1975. This was a direct result of the demands made by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), a group that formed in opposition to the controversial 1969 exhibition Harlem on My Mind. The BECC provided the Whitney with a list of demands for the inclusion of African Americans, which included: increased representation of African American artists in Whitney Annuals, a major group exhibition of African American artists curated by an African American scholar, five solo exhibitions for emerging African American artists a year, the hiring of African American curatorial staff, and the purchase of more African American art (Jones, 2011, p. 399). The museum and the BECC found the demand to hire African American curators a main site of
contention, the Whitney refusing to give in to this demand, although many museums across the country were beginning to employ African American scholars and curators. This is important to relate back to A3P’s study Our Stories, Our Selves to recognize a need to not only display African American art, but to also employ African Americans as scholars to create a greater connection to the community. This change must be embedded into the structure of the museum, and the DIA’s formation of the GMCAAA was an attempt to instantiate this change.

This conversation is still relevant to contemporary African American artists. In an effort to correct the historic invisibility of African Americans the all-Black exhibition is now seen as a highlight of their accomplishments; but for many artists they are ready to move past this form of recognition. In October 2013, Adrian Piper — best known for her work in challenging the social constructs of racism, ostracism, and otherness — withdrew video documentation of her performance, Mythic Being, from an exhibition at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery titled Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art. The gallery turned off the monitor and posted a letter Piper wrote to the exhibition’s curator Valerie Cassel Oliver that read:

I appreciate your intentions. Perhaps a more effective way to ‘celebrate [me], [my] work and [my] contributions to not only the art world at large, but also a generation of black artists working in performance,’ might be to curate multi-ethnic exhibitions that give American audiences the rare opportunity to measure directly the groundbreaking achievements of African American artists against those of their peers in ‘the art world at large’ (Cembalest, 2013).

Piper’s action demonstrates the frustration of many African American artists with the all-Black exhibition and their inability to fully breakdown the barriers of a hegemonic White art history. In
a moment of artists rejecting all-Black exhibition practices, how does the DIA counteract recreating an act of segregation with their African American galleries?

For works in the Modern and Contemporary galleries, in addition to a tombstone label on the wall the museum offers further scholarship on selected pieces of art, specifically ones that are thought of as note-worthy, on a free-standing rotating triangular extended label. For example, in the Contemporary gallery, before reaching the entrance to the African American gallery, visitors come across *Maple Red* (1963) by Edward Clark. The label attempts to make a formal analysis of the painting while leaving the viewer’s interpretation with the work open-ended. The label reads: “Contemporary African American artist Edward Clark created this expressive painting using wide, bold brushstrokes and evocative colors, suggesting a sense of spontaneity. Like most abstract art, this painting invites viewers to develop their own thoughts and interpretations” (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014). This overly simplistic explanation of Clark’s work offers an entry point for the novice art-enthused public, but leaves the art connoisseur wanting more. As the label turns there are three statements from Detroit-based scholars of various backgrounds about Clark and his work; one from poet Melba Joyce Boyd, Reverend Nicholas Hood III, and artist Allie McGhee. The inclusion of Detroit scholars and artists offers a point of connection for local visitors, and creates a stronger tie to scholars and members of the art community. But, the museum fails to give any hint as to what Clark contributed to art history or why his work is important to highlight, other than the fact that he is an African American.

In considering the issues African American artists encountered while exhibiting at the Whitney Museum of Art during the early 1970s, one of which was the scarcity of critical analysis of their exhibitions and artwork, Kellie Jones remarks that critics lacked a common language for the aesthetic of Black art because scholarship was almost nonexistent in mainstream
art criticism. Critics, writers, and historians refused to discuss the work of African American artists, often giving a bad review and diminishing the quality of the work. When their work was discussed, it was to assert its weakness and “with the opinion that such artists were not creating anything ‘black’ since they possessed no backgrounds in tribal art” (Jones, 2011). So, while the DIA is attempting to allow space for the viewer’s own interpretation of Clark’s work by not making too pointed of an analysis; it is also harmful to the presentation of the artwork and the discussion of its significance, leaving the viewers still uneducated. Is it truly necessary to separate the work of African American artists in order to educate the public about the contributions of these artists? Would their work not gain recognition with specific label language that drew attention to the artist’s ethnicity and/or diasporic themes?

For the DIA, the difference in segregating the African American artwork versus interspersing the works within their appropriate genre category is that it gives the museum a chance to discuss the issues of being Black in America. Four of the African American Art galleries, which are adjacent to the Contemporary Art galleries, are curated into five themes highlighting major movements within Black Art History: New Art for a New Self-Awareness, Awakening of a Black Consciousness, Examining Identities, Expressing a Political and Social Consciousness, and Contemporary African American Art. In Examining Identities the viewer is asked to think about where they fit in the conversation of this theme, “How do you define yourself? By your gender? Religion? Perhaps by your profession? As someone’s parent or child? Do you accept some of your identities and question others” (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014)? Through this label the DIA attempts to complicate the viewer’s understanding of identity as equivalent to ethnicity, by offering a common ground entry-point the viewer is forced to think about the multiplicity of self-identity.
In the gallery titled *New Self-Awareness* the museum created a small sitting area with art historical literature on African American art. Guests are invited to sit in the gallery and read about the art, artists, and theories physically surrounding them. The DIA also took this opportunity to educate the public about African American history and the role of the artist in the interruption of negative African American imagery.

*New Art for a New Self-Awareness*

In the years after the Civil War, African Americans made significant inroads in areas such as business, medicine, and the arts. At the same time, those who sought to undermine black achievements and support White privilege flooded American mass media with racist caricatures and imagery.

In the early 1900s, prominent African American intellectuals W.E.B. DuBois (pronounced do-BOYS) and Alain Locke urged black artists to create positive images of African Americans. They hoped that these depictions of African Americans would inspire black people to new levels of confidence. The art in this room challenged the ways African Americans were portrayed in mainstream American culture and countered racist imagery (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014).

With these interpretive labels and materials the DIA attempts to educate visitors on the histories and themes of African American art, addressing an absence of art historical knowledge expressed by the community.

Why didn’t the DIA expand their Contemporary art galleries by adding four more rooms of exhibition space and sixty-four more pieces of African American art? To put the work in conversation with each other, outside of ethnicity, helps to break down these barriers. Many African American artists no longer seek the all-Black exhibition, but still find a need to create
their own exhibition space. However, for those seeking a space to learn about a Black art history, the gallery is a much-needed change. It allows the visitor a specific place to learn about and explore African American art history.

One fear for the African American galleries is that non-African Americans could be inclined to disengage because the space is interpreted as being for African Americans only, and it is not *their* art history. In a survey this writer conducted, a participant, who identified as Latino/Hispanic, when asked their opinion on the galleries devoted to African American art, replied, "I enjoy seeing and finding [out] about African American art, but I'm not African American” (Appendix A). They also rated their satisfaction on a rating scale of one to five as neutral. This apathy for African American art is problematic when thinking about catering to multiple publics. This segregation of culture further stunts the growth of understanding an all-inclusive American art history.

It is evident that the DIA found it easier to create connections in the American art galleries to African American history through labeling. The American galleries exhibit work created during the 1700s and 1800s, a time in America where there was little art by free Blacks documented or even supported; but the museum took every opportunity, as sparse as they may be, to discuss the issues of slavery, race, and the historical dehumanization of African Americans. When a visitor first enters the American gallery they are immediately met with two of John Singleton Copley’s paintings, *Head of a Negro* (1777-78), a portrait of a man of African descent and *Watson and the Shark* (1777), a rescue scene where nine men in a row-boat attempt to save Brook Watson from a shark attack. The label linking the two images together states:

*Common Men as Heroes*
In the painting at right, Brook Watson reaches from the water as his crewmates work earnestly to save him from a shark attack. The scene is based on a true story that made the local newspapers. But Copley painted it with the drama other artists of his time used to depict famous historical events.

The painting at left is the artist's study for the head of one of the heroic men. Copley chose to place this man of African descent at the top of the triangle formed by the group of determined crewmates. (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014)

There is an issue with this label; it does not actually offer the viewer anything informative about the significance of the man of African descent being portrayed at the top of the triangle. The viewer is, instead, expected to make an intuitive leap to the fact that during this period of neoclassic painting the main subject of a heroic portrait scene was normally portrayed as the head of a triangle, missing the opportunity to discuss the tension of painting a Black figure in a heroic fashion during this time period. This could have also been a moment for the museum to link artworks across genres by directing the visitor to Kehinde Wiley’s *Officer of the Hussars* (2007), which is an appropriation of French artist Théodore Gericault’s *Officer of the Hussars* (1812). Instead of a French officer on a horse with his sword drawn for battle, Wiley places a young contemporary Black man in the same heroic pose. Two hundred thirty years apart Copley and Wiley challenge the conventions of mainstream art history’s portrayal of Black men.

Throughout the American galleries the museum does not miss an opportunity to point out visual representations of African Americans, whether good or bad. In an introductory wall label titled *Depicting Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Gender* the museum addresses stereotypes of African Americans, Native Americans, and women:
“Native Americans represented as ‘noble savages’ — promoting the belief that ‘history’ had doomed them to extinction. African Americans given animal-like features — expressing racist assumptions used to justify slavery. Women portrayed as mothers — reinforcing cultural expectations that kept women from full participation in society” (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014).

Highlighting these opportunities for increased knowledge around marginalized histories is a successful strategy in subtly engaging the viewer in expanded thought on discrimination in America. In the African American gallery, the fifth space curated by the GMCAAA, the work of Robert Scott Duncanson and Henry Ossawa Tanner, two of the first African American artists to gain national and international recognition, are featured. The gallery label immediately addresses the absence of any visual recognition of an African American lived experience in the works of Duncanson and Ossawa Tanner. After affirming that indeed the artists were African American the label explains, “It does not look distinct from other American art of the time because black artists were following styles favored by American patrons.” The label continues to mention institutionalized racism and the barring of African American fine artists from access to formal art training, therefore many artists self taught by copying European and American paintings.

In a 2015 survey conducted for this study, sixty-three Metro-Detroit residents were asked fifteen questions to gauge their relationship and engagement with the DIA and the African American galleries. While twenty-five of the respondents were African American, the survey was able to yield a diverse response from White, Latino, Native American and Middle Eastern residents. The majority of survey participants stated that they only visit the DIA for special events or very rarely, two people indicated that they visit the museum weekly, and twelve people visit monthly. Of the African American respondents, none visited monthly or weekly, and the
majority indicated that they rarely visit the museum. The five highest-ranking galleries amongst the African American participants were (in order of ranking), African American, African, Egyptian, American, and Contemporary; which differ only slightly from the rankings of the entire group: (in order of ranking) Rivera Court, African American, Special Exhibitions, African, Native American, Egyptian, and Modern galleries.

White respondents were reluctant to have an opinion on the African American galleries, with 45.5% of them indicating neutrality, the few that showed an understanding of the galleries importance stated, for example, “I think it’s appropriate that a city with an African American majority pay considerable attention to African American art and culture;” and another participant stated that the African American galleries “always [have] something to learn and [it is] a relaxing place to be” (Appendix A). But, one participant did state that they would rather see works of art curated along a timeline as opposed to by culture and genre, “…so you could see what was going on in all parts of the world at the same time” (Appendix A).

Responses from African American participants about the formation of the African American gallery were generally positive, but fifty percent of the participants were neutral in their feelings toward the gallery. One participant stated that, “the focus of each gallery is unique and necessary in covering the influences of African American art from the diaspora;” and another stated, “I prefer artwork to be centrally located as opposed to scattered throughout the building. It makes for easier access and is visually more appealing” (Appendix A). One African American participant was not convinced of the necessity of a gallery dedicated to African American art, and stated, “it’s not just about the African American art, [the] DIA is for all races and cultures. If someone wants to concentrate on the African art they should go to the African
museum⁸ (Appendix A). While this respondent may or may not have properly interpreted the question, *How do you feel about having five galleries within the museum dedicated to African American art*, many of these responses demonstrate the difficulties of language when discussing identity, culture, representation, and ethnicity. When asked to describe and exhibition or program that helped them to feel included in the DIA, one survey participant stated, “I don’t know how to answer this; what is my community? White female… ok. I mean I feel white men are predominantly the artists, but they have branched out to bridge those gaps especially in their exhibition spaces” (Appendix A). Several participants refused to identify their ethnicity and found it difficult to label their identity.

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⁸ It is possible that this participant mistakenly left out the American in “African American Art” and “African American museum”, especially because there is no African museum in Detroit; the phrasing and consistent drop of “American” seemed deliberate so the quote was left as is; as opposed to adding contextualizing brackets.
Examining Through African Eyes

The Detroit Institute of Arts’ (DIA) African Art collection initially formed during the years of the museum’s founding in 1885 through the 1930s due to donations from such collectors as Frederick Stearns\(^9\) and Robert Tannahill.\(^{10}\) Moving into the 1960s, the DIA received a boost in its collection from Eleanor Clay Ford (wife of Edsel Ford, and an extensive benefactor of the museum) and former Michigan Governor G. Mennen-Williams (who built much of his African Art collection while serving as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President John F. Kennedy). In 1962, Arthur D. Coar, President of the Detroit chapter of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), approached DIA Director Willis F. Woods about creating an “African Room” in the museum, in an effort to create a representative space for the African American community (Abt, 2001). Woods responded with great excitement and the two, along with Marc Crawford, formed a panel of community leaders that later became the African Art Gallery Fund Committee who changed in the late 1980s to the Friends of African Art. This committee was in charge of raising fifty thousand dollars for the purchase of “superb examples” of African Art and the creation of an African Art gallery (Abt, 2001).

To promote the African Art Gallery Committee’s campaign and the museum’s creation of a gallery “dedicated to the Classical Art of Africa,” Woods prepared a formal statement:

\(^9\) Frederick Stearns was a Detroit businessman who was a trustee of the Detroit Museum of Art.

\(^{10}\) Robert Tannahill was an avid art collector and DMA benefactor, as well as the nephew of Joseph Hudson and Eleanor Clay Ford.
The artistic, creative stature of the art of many tribes in Africa has only in this century been fully appreciated. With the emergence of independent African nations, added attention is being given to the cultural accomplishments of the tribal forebears of these nations. Once called primitive, these sculptures and decorative arts are now recognized as highly sophisticated lively artistic works. Many styles go far back in time. Much of this work has actually had a strong influence on the development of modern European and American art.... Nearly 30 percent of the population of the City of Detroit is Negro. More and more Negro citizens are recognizing the importance of continental Africa’s cultural heritage and want to help bring it into prominence commensurate with other cultures of past and present which have contributed to the richness and strength of our United States and which are well displayed in the Detroit Institute of Arts (Abt, 2001, pp. 163-164).

Woods’ statement demonstrates the museum’s recognition of a necessity to include the African American community in its collection.

For the DIA expanding the collection of African Art elevated the museum’s status, but for the African American community it was a prideful moment of inclusion. In her 1963 article, *Art Gallery Seen as Retribution to Negro’s Cause*, journalist Betty DeRamus wrote:

> Whenever an African art gallery is established in the new south wing of the Art Institute under completion… it will be, among other things, a form of compensation to Africa and to her displaced people here in the United States. Though Africa was the cradle of the arts and even, some feel, of civilization, its culture has been dissipated, lost, and stolen, through centuries of Colonial occupation and rule (Abt, 2001, p. 166).
The African Art Gallery Fund Committee successfully raised $125,000 through their campaign efforts, and the African Art gallery opened in June 1966 — three years after its initial goal date. Unfortunately, despite its efforts to include African Art History, the DIA continued to be seen as an exclusive institution devoted to appeasing its donors. In her 1966 article, *Parties or Rembrandt — Art Institute’s Time of Decision*, journalist Joy Hakanson argued that the DIA was an institution more concerned with fundraising and throwing parties for the elite, than offering art exhibitions for Detroit’s people (Abt, 2001, p. 171).

By 1987, the Friends of African Art created an endowment fund for the acquisition of both African and African American art. In 1992, the group changed its name once more in order to reflect the broadened scope of their mission and became the Friends of African and African American Art (FAAAA). The FAAAA, still active and instrumental in supporting the DIA, is dedicated to “raising public awareness and appreciation for the artistic legacy of indigenous Africans and peoples of the African Diaspora” (Detroit Institute of Arts).

In an interview the Exhibition Manager of the DIA pointed to the 2010 exhibition *Through African Eyes: Europeans in African Art, 1500 to Present* as a moment in which the museum worked diligently to further their outreach to the African American community (Foley, 2014). While it is problematic that four years after *Through African Eyes* was mounted it still stands out in the museum’s eyes as a recent success of African American outreach; this relationship of African exhibitions and African American inclusion and engagement is a complicated conflation. The initial formation of the African room at the DIA marked a point in African American representation that reflected the early studies of African diaspora, which is a study of the displacement of African people through the Transatlantic slave trade, where African Americans and Africans were synonymous.
Within the discipline of African diaspora studies, originally traditional African visual expression was highlighted as the root of African American aesthetics. In *A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States*, Krista Thompson traces the formation of the field of African diaspora art history and defines it as an exploration of “the role of art, visual culture, and visuality in African diasporic cultures” (Thompson K., 2011, p. 9). Much of the early diaspora scholarship focused on the African American relationship to Africa and a need to seek out those roots, instead of discussing a collective experience of people of African descent around the world. During the 1980s, Richard Price and Sally Price were essential in drawing attention to a broader sense of artistic influence in African diasporic art. Through their analysis, the central theme of Black awareness and art moved from being discussed as an African aesthetic to a discussion centralized around interpretations of “specific local, Colonial, and global sociopolitical contexts, conditions and markets” (Thompson K., 2011, p. 18). This discussion shift linked Black Art as a visual representation of a common lived experience of the global commodification of Black bodies and the systemic oppressions that have occupied modernity.\(^{11}\)

The DIA sought to present a view of colonialism from an indigenous Black African perspective in *Through African Eyes*, curated by Dr. Nii Quarcoopome, Head of the Africa, Oceania and Indigenous Americas Department. The exhibition provided a visual glimpse of African and European encounters along lines of social strife. Using these lines, the exhibition discussed the strong bonds that were made between some African nations and their European colonizers, and the ways in which indigenous Africans rejected European culture and kept their own, or integrated both to create something new. While a beautiful selection of artistic forms

\(^{11}\) This discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, please see Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, Fred Moten’s *In the Break*, and Krista Thompson’s article *A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States*. 
from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were on display, a majority of the works were from the
nineteenth century and on, giving the audience a sense of modern African visual expression. As
visitors walked through the exhibition space a series of nine themes emerged: *Europeans as
Spirits and Strangers, Europeans as Traders, Europeans as Foreign Settlers, Europeans and
Spirituality, Europeans and Knowledge, Europeans and Technology, Europeans as Colonizers,
Looking Back on European Rule, and The West and Beyond.*

*Europeans as Spirits and Strangers* displayed works of art portraying some of the first
interactions between indigenous African people and the European other. Their stark difference in
skin tone and Europeans emerging from the sea, lead many African tribes to believe that
Europeans were spirits. The Portuguese were the first recorded European contact and in the
exhibition this contact was illustrated through several figurines; one in particular from the
Yombe\(^{12}\) titled *Ancestor Figure* (19\(^{th}\) century), was a seated male figure with his legs crossed
wearing a European styled jacket. Although his skin was a white pigment, which is traditional
for a grave figurine such as this, he maintained the face of a Yombe man. This piece originally
honored an ancestor who passed and was a means of communicating with the dead (Detroit
Institute of Arts, 2009).

Next the exhibition moved into trade between Africans and Europeans focusing on the
impact European goods had on African cultures; this segment also included dealings with the
slave trade. One piece to note is the *Carved Tusk Depicting the Slave Trade* (19\(^{th}\) century), from
the Kongo culture (Vili). The initial purpose of carved ivory tusks were to serve as decorative
souvenirs commissioned by European traders; the imagery often only depicted transactions
between traders and tribal chiefs, normally favoring the European character as powerful. This

\(^{12}\) The Yombe are a subgroup of the Kongo people of Central Africa (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2009).
eighteen inch carved tusk on the other hand depicts the European participating in unsavory activities such as drunkenness, licentiousness, and brutalities related to the Transatlantic slave trade (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2009, p. 159).

From there the exhibition presented works of art that emerged during the European settlement of Africa. Africans living in proximity to Europeans observed them closely, developing a new aesthetic for representing their European colonizers, but these works also began to show signs of emulating the European. Quarcoopome remarked that the aesthetic quality of the African artistic forms took a turn at this moment when European settlers became colonizers (Quarcoopome, 2010). The Africans, made powerless, began to appropriate certain European symbols of power, such as the lion, to stake claim to what was taken from them (Quarcoopome, 2010).

Presented in the section titled *Europeans and Spirituality* was the effect of European religion on traditional African spirituality, notably portrayed in the representation of encounters with Christian and Catholic missionaries. The *Kifwebe Mask (Christ)* (early 20th century) of the Luba culture overtly displayed a Christian influence as it portrayed the face of Jesus Christ with the Crown of Thorns. The work’s extended label explained that missionaries trained young African artists to carve pieces reflecting Western canons (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2009). “It is not clear if this mask was used as a Christian icon, but it was danced as other Kifwebe masks and was seen as the representation of the spirit of white” (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2009, p. 204). This portion of the exhibition also discussed the ways Africans adopted, reinterpreted, and blended Christian imagery to serve their needs.

Willie Bester’s *Bantu Education* (1996/97) illustrated the conflict between European education formats and African systems of knowledge. The 1953 Bantu Education Act extended
apartheid into the autonomous missionary-run school system of South Africa. The new racist governmental school system disproportionately diminished the educational curriculum for African students to force them to occupy the lowest social position possible (Michigan State University). Bester’s mixed media sculptural installation made visible the structural violence the Bantu Act was enforcing; a shot gun pointed at eye height towards a school desk, a wagon of books on tracks that lead to nowhere, shrunken figures digested and discarded into an enamel wash basin, and at the helm sat a dentist chair with an emergency gas mask (Detroit Institute of Arts, 2009, p. 231). The exhibition culminated with The West and Beyond which exhibited a shift of what constitutes a European to include Americans, both Black and White, and Africans of the diaspora. While Through African Eyes discussed Africa’s Colonial struggle as a continent, the DIA tried to give the viewer an understanding of the different nation states and their nuanced relationships with European nations.

In comparison to Through African Eyes the 1990 exhibition Into the Heart of Africa at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), in Toronto Canada had a complicated formation, as told by Enid Schildkrout in Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists: Into the Heart of Africa and The Other Museum. The curator, Jeanne Cannizzo, sought to mount an exhibition that critiqued the institution for its Colonial collecting practices and highlighted issues of the museum’s ethics for the public. Instead, Cannizzo managed to offend numerous parties, missionaries, African Canadians, families of royal soldiers, etc. After the exhibition opened public protests began, letters were written to newspapers, and all four museums slated to take the exhibition after it closed backed out of their agreement. Schildkrout argues that the exhibition misunderstood the public. Additionally it lacked a central concept that tied all of the work together. The curator’s goal of critiquing the institution was not properly communicated to the public. The ROM
moreover, seemed unaware that institutional critique was the goal of the exhibition. The exhibition text was interpreted by the public as sarcastic and at times presented a false history as factual (Schildkrout, 2004). There were innuendos within the language of the exhibition text but no definitive remarks, as if Cannizzo was trying to not offend the ROM.

The exhibition was designed into five themes, The Imperial Connection, Military Hall, Missionary Room, “Ovimbundu” Compound and Africa Room. The first three rooms focused on European views of Africa, while the last two were a celebration of African art and life (Schildkrout 1991, 184). The curator never formed an African voice to critique the colonialism or collecting practices of the museum, and any possibility of an African response was shrouded by various anthropological, ethnographic, and art historical references. The ROM example highlights exactly why Through African Eyes was a groundbreaking exhibition — it challenged the understanding of the European and African relationship often presented by museums.

A 2007 front-end evaluation of DIA visitors found that many people did not know much more about Africa and Europe’s relationship beyond slavery, and even then the researchers found it to be a limited knowledge (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2010, p. v). The museum mounted Through African Eyes to help expand the public’s knowledge of Africa outside of the Transatlantic slave trade. The DIA found this exhibition successful in engaging many of its visitors, but depending on their education level and the visitor’s commitment to viewing and reading, the big idea and various nuances of the exhibition were not understood by some. In a summative evaluation conducted by Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., the researchers found that by the end of the exhibition, two-thirds of the interviewees understood that the relationship between Europeans and Africans was complex. Three-quarters of them also understood that the

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13 The front-end evaluation was a study conducted to gauge the knowledge of visitors before mounting the Through African Eyes exhibition.
presentation of the exhibition was from a unique perspective, but many visitors discussed Africa as one culture or nation as opposed to referencing the experiences of particular cultural groups. The evaluators remarked that, “the perspective taken by [the] exhibition was a new way of thinking for most visitors, thus it is not surprising that they did not grasp specific details and intricacies” (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2010, p. v).

The exhibition contained multi-sensory modes of interpretation, such as audio, video, pullout panels, first person quotations and two-sided cards. These allowed the visitor to have an enhanced learning experience by having the freedom to choose their preferred method of obtaining knowledge. From the beginning the museum encouraged public input by using audience research at critical moments during the exhibition design process of Through African Eyes. The success of the exhibition was measured in the personal connection many of the visitors experienced. The researchers stated that interviewees often digressed in excitement when asked to describe what they gained from their visit.

The Summative Evaluation of the exhibition reported participants as either African/African American or non-African/African American which made it obvious that one of the museum’s major goals was to draw in the African American community of Detroit. It is, however, problematic that the separation of different ethnicities when charting survey responses in the report was unimportant to the evaluators; a meaningful understanding of a diverse interest in African art was lost during this process. Furthermore, this information could have provided opportunities for stronger outreach to other minority groups that remain unengaged in the museum, such as the Latino, Asian, and Middle-Eastern communities. Out of fifty interview groups, with a total of sixty-seven individual participants, more than one-third of them were African/African American, the other two-thirds were briefly stated to self-identify as other
ethnicities including White/Caucasian, Asian, and Native American, but by not recognizing the extent of the museum’s ability to engage a diverse audience this evaluation severs the connection of African art to other communities of color (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2010, p. 5). One-quarter of the interview participants were members of the DIA and the other three-quarters were repeat visitors to the museum. The evaluators also found that only three interview groups brought children under eighteen years of age to the exhibition, and that the median age was fifty-three. The evaluation unfortunately does not disclose how many tickets were sold for this exhibition, which cost the visitor an extra twelve dollars for adults and six for children, except on Fridays when the exhibition was free with admission. The fact is, in 2010, general admission was a barrier for much of the community with thirty-nine percent of the city living below the poverty line (United States Census Bureau, 2010). With 86.7% of the city’s population being African American this fee structure limited a large portion of the community’s ability to view and engage with Through African Eyes, stunting the goal of the DIA’s initial outreach efforts. General admission at the time cost a household of two adults and two children twenty-four dollars, making it difficult for a lower-class family with children to attend the exhibition and the DIA in general. The DIA’s current free admission structure combats these instances of income and class disparities barring access. It was also not made clear what organizations and partnerships the DIA has cultivated within the African American community for general program invitations.
Conclusion

Minority engagement is important to the field of museum studies because of the disproportionate visitor demographics in American art museums, eighty-nine percent of visitors identify as White and only eleven percent identifying as other ethnicities (Reach Advisors and Friends, 2010). One could postulate that disparities in minority engagement at art museums is a result of the majority of these museums having a predominately White local population. But, this would not be an accurate assumption, in fact Detroit’s African American population rate, the highest in the country, can help to demonstrate the falsity of this type of assumption. With a traditionally minority population as the majority, the museum still faced challenges in engaging their African American visitors. The devotion of specific galleries to African American Art demonstrates the DIA’s recognition of its difficulties in engaging the African American community.

Research for this study was conducted through formal analysis of the African American, American, Modern, and Contemporary galleries, and the 2010 summative evaluation and catalogue for Through African Eyes. I sought to understand the community’s feelings toward the DIA through interviews with members of the art community and an online survey that was distributed to members of the community at large. I found interviewees reluctant to say anything critical about the DIA, and consistently baffled at what advantage their input could provide this research. Several interview participants demonstrated a frustration with the separation of African American Art from the various galleries, but with a sigh they stated that it was what the city needed, that people don’t know about African American Art and devoting galleries to these works was a way to educate the average visitor. Survey participants also displayed neutrality towards the African American galleries, several were even unaware of the galleries’ existence,
but few openly disliked them, and many understood a need for heightened recognition of African American Art.

On a positive note the African American galleries give the museum an opportunity to educate the visitor and address various movements in African American art history. The galleries also offer a central location for those seeking an experience in African American art, as opposed to the works being interspersed throughout the museum’s collection. The downside of the galleries is that they further segregate the work of African Americans from being understood as a vital component in American art history. As Adrian Piper poignantly stated, perhaps the curation of a multi-ethnic permanent exhibition would indeed be a more effective way to celebrate the contributions of African American and Black artists, providing a “rare opportunity to measure directly [their] groundbreaking achievements … against those of their peers in ‘the art world at large’” (Cembalest, 2013). The DIA attempts to counteract a negative notion of the all-Black exhibition by placing African American artworks throughout the Modern and Contemporary galleries, as well. But, this attempt has failed to link the African American works to their White peers. Furthermore, to highlight the influence of Black artists on their Art World contemporaries could be achieved by having a non-African American artist discuss the influence of Edward Clarke on the extended display label, or discussing an African American artist’s influence on the work of a famous White male artist. Instead, the museum perpetuates a for-us-by-us stereotype that surrounds African American Art by separating it and only having interpretive comments by other African Americans.

The DIA used the exhibition Through African Eyes as a moment to heavily engage the African American community extending their outreach to community partners that were outside of their normal scope; even in the summative evaluation respondents were referred to as either
African/African American or Non-African/African American. The exhibition was beautifully curated to give a rare view of African Art created in response to Colonial encounters. Many of the survey participants in general walked away with a new understanding of colonialism. In a positive way, the exhibition challenged their knowledge of the African experience and countered the perception of Africa as primitive, but for poverty-stricken members of the community the admission price structure, at the time, limited access to the DIA.

Future areas of research surrounding the DIA could focus on the museum’s attempts to engage the other underrepresented in Detroit. This study lacks analysis between the DIA and other contemporary art museums of the same stature. Also needed is a conversation around the museum’s forms of public engagement, such as, films shown for the museum’s Detroit Film Theater (D|F|T) series, and the Inside|Out program which offers an interesting form of engagement. Through Inside|Out the museum reproduces works in its collection and displays them outside in various communities in the city and the suburbs. The passage of the property-tax millage has been attributed to the success of Inside|Out’s ability to engage communities outside of Detroit. Suburban residents began to see the museum as viable and important, they also developed a sense of ownership over the artwork on display. Although it is an innovative program, the museum lacks partnerships with communities within Detroit, which is a lost opportunity for connecting with the African American, Latino, Middle-Eastern and Asian communities, and the impoverished areas of the city.

The residents of Detroit understand the need for a museum of high-art, and understand the significance of the GMCAAA, just as they understood the importance of building and keeping the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History (Wright Museum) even though the attendance is low and it is consistently a struggling institution. When asked if Detroit
needs a museum dedicated to African American History, the majority of residents will say “yes,” even if they never visit the museum. The DIA has a different mission and engagement with the city than an institution such as the Wright Museum. As stated by many survey participants the DIA is for “all races,” and the museum’s efforts to become a more inclusive institution have not gone unnoticed. Since its 2007 renovation the museum has worked to create an entry point for the average visitor through the children’s object seeking game of “Eye Spy” throughout the galleries of the museum, and by simplifying the language of extended walls labels and answering the intuitive questions people want to know. But, the DIA’s label language is over-simplified and underestimates its audience. This causes the museum to miss opportunities for a deeper experience for their audience.

While Detroit has a long history of racial segregation and degradation, the current conversation among the citizens seems less about race and more about economics, class, and state oppression. Unfortunately, race is impossible to completely remove from these systems of degradation. Even today, a lawsuit has been waged against Michigan’s emergency manager law on the grounds that it disproportionately affects African American communities. The plaintiffs argued that, in 2013, fifty-two percent of African Americans and two percent of White Michiganders were living in cities under emergency management (Livengood & Ferretti, 2014).

I am arguing here for the importance of recognizing the overall exclusion of people of color from America’s art history, and for too long we have looked to the Eurocentric canon for the proper standards of aesthetics. Even within the focus of this study non-African American marginalized communities remain on the back burner in the conversation of museum inclusion.

The DIA is important to this conversation because it has the potential to be an all-encompassing institution. Art is for everyone, and art offers an opportunity to teach about and
heal race relations between the city and the suburbs. I present this study as a critique of the DIA’s strategies for testing boundaries and pushing past the limit. For now, the DIA has brought pride to a downtrodden city and stands as a beacon of hope.
Appendix A

Online Survey Results

1. Please identify your ethnicity. (Select all that apply)

2. Please specify your zipcode:
(Median household income was identified by pulling 2013 statistics for each zipcode provided by the US Census.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$55,003</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$28,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen Park</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
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<td>Lincoln Park</td>
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<td>3.2%</td>
<td>$42,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belleville</td>
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<td>3.2%</td>
<td>$50,135</td>
<td>Mount Clemens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$37,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomfield Hills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$105,320</td>
<td>Novi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton Township</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$53,352</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$48,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$46,739</td>
<td>Riverview</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$48,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$43,001</td>
<td>Roseville</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$41,171</td>
</tr>
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<td>Detroit</td>
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<td>Royal Oak</td>
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<td>3.2%</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
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<td>1.6%</td>
<td>$46,758</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A (Continued)

3. Are you a member of the Detroit Institute of Arts?

4. How often do you visit the Detroit Institute of Arts?

5. Has your visitation to the Detroit Institute of Arts increased since free admission has been provided for Macomb, Oakland and Wayne County residents?
Appendix A (Continued)

6. If you answered "no", please explain briefly: ** select responses shown
   • Don't have the time
   • I am familiar with most of the holdings so basically only attend special exhibits.
   • I don't care about the cost of admission. It's worth it in any case.
   • I had been a member for years before the millage. I don't go any more now than I did before.
   • I have always been a member and have always gone frequently.
   • I only visit on special occasions
   • I would go no matter what.
   • Just recently found this information out and don't have time to visit.
   • Not really interested in art
   • The price has nothing to do with going to see something that I would truly be interested in.
   • There is no reason for me to go.
   • We have always gone and will continue no matter cost
   • take grandkids
   • I kind of take the DIA for granted having grown up in Detroit and having lots of exposure to the museum over the years....I try to attend all special events
   • I've always visited the DIA. Free admission did/does not affect my decisions to visit/attend the DIA.
   • I visited much more often (1-2 per month) when I was a student and spent time in that area of the city.
   • Having toured the museum, I really don't have a reason to go or found anything else that interests me.
   • I am former member and previously visited on a regular basis. Recently time has been an issue for me and I have not been able to visit.

8. What is your general engagement with art?
Appendix A (Continued)

9. Do you feel culturally represented in the Detroit Institute of Arts’ collection?

10. Please explain further:
   - Diego Rivera is ALWAYS the "go to" artist to represent Latinos. Aren't there others?
   - I am a person, and it represents many kinds of people from many different eras.
   - I believe our culture could be expanded upon for review.
   - I feel for myself they offer a variety of different works by men/women from multiple cultures.
   - I feel the DIA is diverse and encompasses all races and cultures.
   - I feel there is a great cross section of art and music.
   - I identify most with the Rivera murals.
   - I love the art, the layout, and feeling of being welcomed.
   - I see some of myself in some of the art.
   - I simply do not see myself or my concerns reflected in the contemporary arts sections.
   - I think it represents so many cultures.
   - I'm a fiber artist. Whole other issue.
   - If you want to say as a Caucasian woman, I guess so, but HOW, is the thing.
   - Mexican is fine (Rivera Court is so present) but Mexican American would be even better.
   - More can be done
   - Not every exhibit is meant to represent me
   - Rivera Court is very dear to me.
   - The institution supports the notion of European priority and then "others".
   - There's much that I see that I like. I love this museum.
   - They don't really have any of the Aztec or other Central American Indian artwork
   - the Rivera court represents my culture amd as a worker
   - there is little: Asian; Latin /Latino; Black/African American Art.
Appendix A (Continued)

- Very small Latin American room and Rivera Murals are greatly appreciated, but the DIA has been absent to the Latin American community until they started working on the Diego and Frida exhibit and will charge $24 per person, that will make it difficult for a family to attend.
- I don't pigeon hole myself to one specific culture or continent. I feel that I am a child of humanity, and have a sense of belonging to all people and cultures.
- All of the art speaks to me because it's self expression. I see a little of myself and my culture through a variety of art. That is what is engaging.
- I don't believe I have ever thought about that question. If I was looking for representation, I'd go to the African American Museum over by the Science center.
- All of my cultures are represented. But I cannot think of one display that represents them all at once. Perhaps somewhat represented or represented would have been a better answer.
- I feel like the DIA is making a good effort to broaden both audience and collection to reflect American mix. Could be better, but I see real growth in both areas.
- I think more folk art as a regular exhibit would be a good attraction since there are many good artists in the city who are largely unknown and deep within our various neighborhoods.
- It's been a while since I've actually toured, what I can remember the DIA had very informative information on black history and paintings.
- There is a decent amount of ancient artifacts from Latin countries but more so than modern art. Not much of a Latino presence in modern curation.
- I am especially impressed by the prominence the museum gives to works by African American artists, and the way it has integrated the work of those artists into the museum space as a whole. I am further impressed with the way the curators have enhanced explanatory materials in the museum's public spaces.
- The collections representing African American art and special events relevant to African American culture are fairly well represented.
- There are sufficient special programs which in bring people re: my cultural heritage and the regular exhibits do an adequate job.

11. Do you feel as though the Detroit Institute of Arts has included your community through its exhibitions and/or public programs?
Appendix A (Continued)

12. Please describe an exhibition or program that helped you feel included in the Detroit Institute of Arts: **select responses shown**
   - A 1970s era exhibition of Arabic art
   - Detroit Film Theatre, Friday Night Live performances, Kresge Court.
   - Contemporary art exhibits
   - Ofrendas 2014
   - Rivera Court, American art, Native and African art
   - Drawing in the galleries
   - Faberge Exhibit, I'm bilingual in Russian
   - Friday nights in Rivera Court
   - Greek Art (being Greek) and Diego Rivera for the working class.
   - I am an artist and I love looking at all art
   - Magdalena Abakanowicz one person show in the 1970s.
   - Music series, special Friday night performances, African/Afr Amer films included in DFT series.
   - Was part of the focus group for the upcoming Frida Kahlo exhibit.
   - The Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera programming that is currently being held.
   - The Friday Night Jazz and other musical events, the Film Festivals and Noel Night
   - The ability to come for free.
   - They occasionally have lectures on Islamic art and artifacts
   - program that serve DPS students: comes to classroom with field trip(s) to DIA with workshop/gallery tours. photo exhibits. Rivera Frescos. Impressionist
   - I've curated a number of programs for the Fridays Live series when the DIA has reached out to me as a member of the literary arts community and have set them up with writers to perform at these events.
   - This answer sort of falls in with the previous one. Representation wasn't what i looked for at DIA. That's not to say I'd hate having it...but I don't care if it isn't there, either. It's like looking for high fashion in a discount store. Even if the item's not there, i won't notice because I'm not searching for that.
   - As a child I had a drawing displayed in the DIA as part of a public school student exhibit. I still have the drawing and will always remember that
Appendix A (Continued)

- I don't know how to answer this; what is my community? White female . . . ok. I mean I feel White men are predominantly the artists, but they have branched out to bridge those gaps especially in their exhibition spaces.
- The black film "Cinetopia Film Festival" a documentary on Grace Lee Boggs and the documentary "Packard Plant: The Last Shift" were among 2014 films at the DIA that made me feel included.

13. How do you feel about having five galleries within the museum dedicated to African American art?

14. Please explain further: **select responses shown**
- 5 is better than 1.
- Always something to learn and a relaxing place to be. I
- Fascinating items; important part of the city's culture.
- I actually never realized the amount of AA galleries
- I am somewhat ignorant about art especially of other cultures
- I don't remember them
- I enjoy seeing and finding it about African American art but I'm not African American
- I neither care nor noticed, to be honest.
- I want more, but love what is there.
- I want my cultural exchange to be just as important as any other cultures.
- If having five galleries added for African Art brings more interest to the museum I'm for it.
- Quality should outweigh ethnicity.
- Sounds like enough to me
- There is a presence of African American modern artists, but still not comparable to European.
- if there is enough space why not
Appendix A (Continued)

- no special attention to AA art
- The focus of each gallery is unique and necessary in covering the influences of African American art from the diaspora.
- I think it's a wonderful idea because African American history is very extensive and may not be able to just be shown in one area. Having more than one area allows for more representations to be shown.
- It's not just about the African American art, DIA is for all races and cultures. If someone wants to concentrate on the African Art then go to the African Museum.
- It's wonderful there are five galleries dedicated to African American art, but not ONE to Latino community other than Rivera? Really?
- Detroit is an African American city and the museum should represent that. I love African American folk art and believe it is very important to the residents of Detroit.
- I'm not sure how many displays you have all art. I don't know if I was excessive or not enough in comparison to how much of the other aren't you have. The truth is I don't know.
- I enjoy what is there but wish more local, folk art was exhibited so that folks will get a sense that the institute belongs to the "poor" or regular folks of the city....we are all aware of the great wealth of unacknowledged talent in this city....
- I prefer the art work being centrally located as opposed to scattered throughout the building. It makes for easier access and is visually more appealing
- I'd rather see all the work mixed together in a timeline sort of way so you could see what was going on in all parts of the world at the same time. I realize this would make for some installation and maintenance problems, but it would also open a window in how history really occurs!
- I think it's appropriate that a city with an African American majority pay considerable attention to African American art and culture.
- As long as the galleries contain engaging, thought-provoking and/or compelling art I do not care about its origins.
- I don't know what percentage that would be, whether it reflect AA population in US or the 80% in Detroit. What is the criteria?
- No other museum in the United States does this. It is an extremely important move, as it helps create a more accurate picture of our nation's art history.
- Why wouldn't there be? There should be. I only wish there was one dedicated to females sometimes, but it is important that African American artists are well represented in our museums all over the US particularly with the history of Detroit and our art scene
- Not aware that there are 5 galleries with this dedication. Will have to visit to respond to this question.

15. What would you like to see done differently at the Detroit Institute of Arts? Or what do you love about the DIA?
- Beauty. Well organized. Welcoming staff
- Engagement with other cultures.
Appendix A (Continued)

- Friday nights I love
- Haven't been there in a while so it is hard to judge
- I especially love the Rivera court.
- I grew up, in part in the museum. I cannot think of what to do differently.
- I have no issues or problems with current situation.
- I just love going to the DIA. I feel culturally satisfied when I leave.
- I like the movies shown there and also authors who speak
- I like the new gallery organization and I love the DFT.
- I like the speed ill exhibits that they bring in.
- I love art, even If I don't get there very often.
- I would like to see more art from South America and the Caribbean
- I would like to see more people of color there.
- I'd like to see even more outreach to the Detroit Metro Region area public schools
- It is a world class art museum.
- It's cultural and its available for everyone to enjoy.
- More contemporary Detroit artist representation
- More guided tours for school age children.
- Neutral, but don't sell collections, more engagement of locals.
- Simply the arts from the African American culture
- The museum is fantastic
- bring in those connected to the AA community and educated in pre & post civil war items
- have other exhibits beyond diego & khalo
- outreach to outstate; Rivera Court and the quality of their general exhibits.
- I would like more lectures about art and the artwork in the collection. Sometime the lectures seem cerebral or too specific to be of interest to me
- With the city coming of bankruptcy and the DIA art being saved from sale, the timing for seeing things done differently may have to wait. However the DIA Director Graham Beal stepping down, that may a time to engage the new director.
- Maybe offer some art classes to the community such as painting or molding. I would definitely go about that. I would also like to be personally notified about events. If I received more notification, I would go to more events and functions.
- A more modern and innovative approach to reaching potential attendees. Their commercial is getting very, very old.
- Continuation of cultural representation and focus groups to assess community reaction to exhibitions.
- I love the tangible items that I can freely go explore (visually, at least) that have such a wonderful sense of history and beauty. Just being in the museum is relaxing and I find something I can see from a different perspective on nearly every visit.
- I love the DIA, but I hate that it has become political. The Latino political scene in Detroit is ugly and mean. The DIA used to do a great job reaching out to Latinos--and not just on El Dia de los Muertos. Now it is political and meaningless. I love the DIA, but it is a strange place for me as a Latina and as a Detroiter. The DIA needs to do a better job
Appendix A (Continued)

of reaching out to all Detroiters—and get rid of the politics and STOP using local politicians for their biding. I love the artwork in the DIA and I go to MOMA in New York quite a bit. The artwork in the DIA is important to all Detroiters. It is a beauty and it is a gem.

• I've very dissatisfied since the renovation. I used to go frequently, but have only gone for special exhibits. The galleries are all cut up and random. The museum seems a lot smaller.

• I'd love to see more people use it, but I think they have done a great job of getting out the word and inviting all to come and see the museums. They are fighting against the burbs and reputation of Detroit sometimes which is truly unfair

• I feel it is a beautiful space and I enjoy visiting. I will make a concerted effort to visit more often this year and renew my membership

• An ongoing community advisory committee reflecting community and ethnic/racial diversity of the area.

• Though my perception is that the programming and exhibitions are tailored to Caucasian culture, I appreciate the presentations and artwork that are of interest to me.

• I love Rivera Court. I wish that the DIA hadn't loaned Graham Beal money to buy his house. Maybe he can give part of his pension to the city workers so the art isn't "vulnerable".

• They should keep the Detroit Public School exhibition at the DIA. It draws a lot of families from the city that don't otherwise come into the museum even with the free admission. They want to move it out of the museum after hosting it for decades.

• I enjoy the architecture of the building, spending time in Kresge Court, lunch in the cafe, most of all the magnificent collection, one of the finest in the country.

• I love the breadth of the collection, and that I am able to self-curate a very different experience each time I go. Sometimes I just dig into one area, era, or theme. I also really like the different experiential strategies to experience the collection: audio, flip books, hands-on, guided tours, interesting text on the walls, support video. I think the DIA is a leader in this area.
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Vita

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Education
M.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, Museum and Exhibition Studies 2015
B.F.A, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Sculpture and Metal Working 2006

Related Experience
Visual Arts Intern, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago, IL 2014 - Present
Program Assistant, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Chicago, IL 2013 - Present
Gallery Intern, Threewalls, Chicago, IL 2014
Gallery Coordinator, Contemporary Arts Center, Las Vegas, NV 2012 - 2013
Gallery Assistant, MCQ Fine Art Advisory, Las Vegas, NV 2011 - 2012
Framer and Office Manager, Creative Arts and Frames, Detroit, MI 2000 - 2004

Curatorial Experience
Co-Curator, Off the Strip: New Genres Festival, Contemporary Arts Center, Las Vegas, NV Sept 1 – 2, 2012
Curator, Aili Schmeltz: Floating Precariously, BigArtistNow.com Apr. – May 2012
Curator, Jw Caldwell: Don’t Hate the Game, BigArtistNow.com Feb. – Mar. 2012
Curator, Erik Beehn: Presently Absent, BigArtistNow.com Sept. – Oct. 2011

Teaching Experience
Teaching Assistant, “Lost Wax Casting”, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL 2004 - 2006
Other Work Experience
Sales Professional, *David Yurman*, Las Vegas, NV 2010 - 2011
Assistant, *Diamond Center Inc.*, Los Angeles, CA 2008 - 2010
Assistant Manager, *Movado Boutique*, Los Angeles, CA 2006 - 2008

Presentations
Co-Presenter, “Negotiating Power: Sexuality and the Black Female Form”, *African American Cultural Center*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL Feb. 12, 2014
Guest Lecturer, “Artistic Book-making”, *Undergraduate Creative Writing Seminar*, University of Michigan, Detroit, MI Jan. 27, 2009

Affiliations/Memberships
The American Alliance of Museums Present
The International Council of Museums Present
UIC Graduate Employees Organization Present