

Décor-racial: Defining and Understanding Street Art as it Relates to Racial Justice in Baltimore, Maryland

Introduction and Background

Street Art

Street art takes place outdoors, in public. Distinctions between other types of art like graffiti, public art, murals, and community art are blurred. Though street art is hard to define, characteristics are messages of political and social justice and careful community planning. Banksy, well-known street artist, is an example.



Discrimination and Black Lives Matter

There is a history of racism in Baltimore. The city enacted one of the first housing segregation acts ...“no blacks...could move into blocks that were half white” (Boone et al. 2009, 779). “Redlining” perpetuated racial inequity and made it difficult for black families to be get loans (Boliard 2009). In Spring 2014, Freddie Gray, a young black man, was killed while in police custody. This event quickly became associated with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement with activists and protestors rioting in the city.



Purpose and Research Questions

1. How is street art being defined and promoted in Baltimore neighborhoods?
2. How is street art used in Baltimore neighborhoods to resist oppression?
3. By extension, how has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced street art in Baltimore?

Methods

I used grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies to conduct this research.

1. Six Semi-structured, in-depth interviews
2. Twenty newspaper articles
3. Qualitative Coding

Key Players

Maryland Institute College of Art-
Community Arts Program



Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts



Creative Alliance- nonprofit organization in
Highlandtown

Jubilee Arts-nonprofit organization in
Sandtown



Open Walls Baltimore- street art festival



Important Themes



What defines street art?
Baltimore is unique



Social justice and activism

Community connections

Legality?

Promotion of street art:



Economic Development vs.
Gentrification

Hidden power relations

Controversy over intentions



Street art can resist racial oppression:

Empowering youth,
residents

Tool for self-expression

Beautification



Building community

Representing people in
neighborhoods

Important Themes (cont.)



Street art and Black Lives Matter:
Surge of street art projects after the uprising

Healing and memory

Celebration of black role models

Significance

This study is relevant to political and socio-cultural wars that have highlighted racism and xenophobia in the U.S. President Trump's statements about race and class have called attention to deep seeded prejudices. Many feel that the administration does not represent them and that it will perpetuate inequality.

In Baltimore, lack of resources is challenging for many. Expression and beautification through street art helps encourage communication and positive social relationships. Viewing street art in Baltimore might present ways to address problems in other places. Public art should be examined in conjunction with equality and social justice among citizens. Baltimore has not been studied very widely in terms of urban public art, economic development, and community building. There is a lack of academic research on the Black Lives Matter movement and its impact on American communities.