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Sticks and Stones: Analyzing The Museum of Modern Art's Values Through Language

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Sticks and Stones: Analyzing The Museum of Modern Art's Values Through Language

by

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Dedication

To Jamie. For his unwavering support, patience, and love during the biggest endeavor in my life so far. Thank you for your encouragement and believing in my potential before I found it in myself.

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Abstract

Sticks and Stones: Analyzing The Museum of Modern Art's Values Through Language

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This historical study investigated portrayals of non-Western objects, culture, and people in two museum catalogs. Performing content analysis on The Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) exhibition catalogs from *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984), the researcher found a presence of Western bias and racist language directed toward African makers and their art. The language used in the *African Negro Art* (1935) catalog isolates Africa from Western culture and art by describing African objects and culture as being of less value and different from traditional art in the West. Analysis of language seen in *African Negro Art* (1935) revealed a trend of utilizing language that belittled African objects, people, and culture. Through a consideration of language used in the *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) catalog, the researcher found examples of embedded racist and oppressive language. Yet, a comparison of these two

catalogs from MoMA revealed less evidence of derogatory words and terminology in the more recent publication than seen in the exhibition catalog from fifty years earlier. In analyzing the changes seen in language evident in these two museum catalogs, the researcher explored civil rights events that took place in and around New York City which may have influenced the writer of the latter MoMA catalog. Historical research uncovered actions such as anti-discrimination protests, which helped to alter the cultural climate of New York City between 1935 and 1984. It is argued here that these historical events and changes that occurred in New York City's cultural arts society may have affected the shift seen in MoMA's use of language to discuss African objects, culture, and people. The researcher concludes that museum generated texts may likely impact how visitors perceive non-Western cultures, and thus strongly encourages museum personnel to be thoughtfully aware of how language is used in their publications.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study focused on changes that occurred in the language New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) employed in discussions concerning African objects[1]. I was curious about the power of language and what values are apparent from the words MoMA used in their discussions about African objects. Language helps to shape our perceptions. Viewpoints and values are readable through language, and MoMA is a powerful institution with a respected position in society. Unfortunately, the primary view in museums like MoMA is often administered from the position of those who are white[2] and affluent (Association of Art Museum Directors, 2015). While investigating museum catalogs from The Museum of Modern Art that contain information about African objects and culture from two specific times (1935 and 1984), I noticed a stark change in the language employed in these publications. I was curious to know why these changes in language may have occurred. In order to investigate this, I analyzed the language from two African objects exhibition catalogs from MoMA, and investigated events during the post-World War II African American Civil Rights Movement that may have been significant in and around New York City during the period between when these catalogs were published. While the Civil Rights Movement is typically framed within the 1950s and '60s, my research revealed events that took place in the 1930s and '40s that were a catalyst for future civil rights events

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[1] For the purposes of this study African collections will be referred to as "objects" and not "art" because the term "art" was used by Westerners to classify African objects through a Eurocentric paradigm.

[2] "White" is not capitalized in this study because, historically, it is a signifier of social power and privilege, not an indicator of ethic or national origin (Biondi, 2003).

in subsequence decades. I argue that these events during the post-World War II civil rights movement may well have played a part in influencing the conditions of African Americans in the United States, and the change in language seen in MoMA's catalogs between 1935 and 1984. This examination was undertaken to learn how language reflects change in society, and also stresses the need for increased examination of the language we, as art educators, use in the museum today.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research question directed and motivated this research: A critical analysis of written text and visual images included in The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition catalogs *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) reveals a decided difference in how African objects and culture are depicted in these two publications. Exploring these differences in MoMA's depictions of African objects, what social and political events occurred in and around the city of New York and MoMA between 1935 and 1984 that may have contributed to this change in the verbal depiction of African objects and culture identified in these museum catalogs?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

My research investigated the language MoMA used in two museum catalogs, *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984). The catalogs I examined were written by the curators of MoMA. Curators hold a significant amount of power in the museum, and their values may easily translate into their writings. Curators' writings are then used by educators, such as museum docents, in their training materials. In 1932, MoMA created their first "formal docent program" (MoMA.org, 2009), three

years before the 1935 catalog was produced. The catalogs for *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) may have been used by docents as a reference, and if so, then the values of the curators may well have been translated from catalog, to docent, and ultimately to the general public. MoMA did not inaugurate a formal education department until 1939 (Farrelly, 2007), but the museum offered several educational practices in the 1930s such as gallery talks, lectures, teacher workshops, and programs designed for high school students (Farrelly, 2007). The content provided in those educational programs may have been influenced through the language used by MoMA's curators. My art historical experience leads me to believe that many curators learned about art while studying within a Euro-centric paradigm. A Western view of art influences how museums and curators value, display, and discuss works of art. These values can be read and interpreted by inspecting the literature and documentation museums provide to their visitors. By being conscious of privilege, power, and biases, museum workers can better consider if their language needs to be appraised and restructured to ensure their values are viewed as inclusive and not racist or discriminatory. In the event museum workers choose not to restructure their language, museum visitors can use this research as a reminder of the power museums possess through the way they display and discuss objects.

MY PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Growing up in Houston exposed to me to people from a multitude of cultures. I attended school with individuals from throughout the world and danced with a team of girls, many who looked different from me. I danced competitively with a predominantly African American group; only about a third of the team was white, like myself. My family

did not discuss race, and I did not know the details of the racial prejudice my peers may have experienced. I learned about race because of my dance teacher, Kelley. Kelley made it her mission at every dance competition to point out the predominance of white dancers that made up the other teams.

One day, I realized that Kelley was right. All around us were young, white girls. The mothers of the white girls worked hard to make them all look the same. Straightening their hair until damaged, making comments on their weight, and trying their hardest to make sure they looked perfect for the competition. All teams except mine had, at most, two African American girls. Those African American girls were not exempt from the pressure. The dance teachers of the teams made a point to make sure the African Americans looked as much as possible like the white girls, even if it meant relaxing their natural hair or wearing light-shaded makeup.

When I look back to my childhood, I realize how oblivious I was to the discrimination going on all around me, the terrible things that happened to those girls. Kelley, on the other hand, embraced every one of the girls' differences. We were encouraged to wear our hair naturally, to use makeup that best suited our skin tone, and to look like individuals. Kelley loved our team; she taught us to love each other, even with our differences. I felt part of a family, and we never talked disparagingly about anyone because of her race. When I left the safety of my dance family I realized the world beyond the performance stage is not as kind as those who surrounded me there. Seeing the racism, prejudice, and discrimination has forced me to reflect and think about how art can make a difference in the world. The art of dance brought my team together, and I believe that

similarly, within art museums, it is there people can look at art and each other without judgment of race and cultural difference.

I noticed an imbalanced emphasis placed on white artists in my undergraduate art history courses. I learned about the "masters," and nearly all those artists were white or met the criteria of the Western-defined art standards. I had to make an effort to learn about artists of color by taking specific classes, such as African Diaspora with Dr. Okediji, or Tibetan Art with Dr. Leoshko, both at The University of Texas at Austin. For a university so diverse, the art history courses seemed saturated with Western art made by white artists.

I make an effort to learn about my privilege on a daily basis. I listen to podcasts and watch YouTube videos about white privilege. I once felt attacked by these videos, but I now know it is my responsibility to be aware of and to address my privileged circumstance. I do not believe people should feel forced to assimilate to the predominant surrounding culture, because the world is full of people from various cultures and ethnicities.

My continuous desire to learn about privilege and my awareness of the priority of Western art has fueled my research. I want to know how the art world of America got to where it is today and what kind of changes are being made to reverse this past condition. I do not want to stand by idly while my peers and those close to me continue to say hurtful words. I want to be an ally with people of color.

I have an understanding of how I view museums as a visitor and how I would like a museum to operate. My vision of a museum is a place where people from various backgrounds, cultures, classes, religions, and other positions of diversity can come together

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and learn in an open environment. I desire to help create a place where visitors connect with art and want to come back to the museum because it is a place that reflects their community in a welcoming and satisfying manner. One way I feel museums can cater to the people is by embracing their community and listening to what the visitors want to see in their museum. Language and display are vital in museums because their values are assumed by the way museums exhibit and write about their collections. As a museum educator, I want to assess critically the language used in museum materials and make transparent the values expressed through language employed in these publications.

MY PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

As a museum educator, I am a liaison between the museum and the visitor. I impart the knowledge gained from the museum to visitors ranging from young children to older adults. In my experience as an educator at a contemporary art museum, I encounter people who want to learn about the art and artists at my institution. The curators tell me and the other docents to be careful about what we say about the artists whose work is on display. As a general rule, the curators insist docents pretend the artists are in the room in order to avoid stating any assumptions or misinformation about the artist or their art. A contemporary art museum is unique because the artwork on display is made typically by artists living today. Curators and art educators can know, quite often, what the artist would want said about their work.

I am conscious to ensure I do not state anything that may be construed as offensive to the artists represented at my institution. If I had assumptions about an artist or culture, and then passed on my biases or personal conventions to my groups, how could I affect

their values of the artists, culture, or object? Since exercising such caution, I began to wonder: do other art museums operate in a similar manner? Since a majority of art museums house art and objects from a more distant past, museum personnel in these locations do not have the luxury of speaking directly to artists in order to ensure their wishes are being met. Wherever my career takes me, I want to guarantee I am approaching all art, objects, and their corresponding people and culture with respect. My position as a museum educator affords power in relation to the public, whether I acknowledge this or not. I must be aware to utilized this position power to make sure my tour groups and all other I serve through education programming leave with culturally sensitive information, as well as create an environment that is welcoming and accessible to all. With my own practice in mind, I wanted to investigate how MoMA approached their African objects and if the museum was respectful of the people and culture associated with these objects.

RESEARCH METHODS

The methodologies employed in this study were historical research and content analysis. Historical research was the primary methodology because I looked at the language used in museum catalogs that were produced by MoMA in two different eras (1935 and 1984). In order to do so, it was necessary to examine historical documents. While looking through my data sources, I also analyzed the content I read in order to interpret what MoMA stated in their exhibition catalogs. My tools for research were the primary resources from MoMA: their exhibition catalogs. I performed content analysis on both exhibition catalogs and provided examples of the change in language used in these publications when discussing African objects and culture. I also utilized secondary sources, the reviews of the

exhibitions, to secure an understanding of how the exhibitions may have been received by people of the art world. I provided at least one review from both eras that corresponds with the exhibit shown at that time. In response to these reviews, I speculated about the value the African objects and the exhibitions had for the reviewers by performing a content analysis of the documents and exhibition reviews. Based on the visitors' reviews, I speculated on MoMA's projected values displayed toward African objects and culture. Analyzing the data from both time frames (1935 and 1984) enabled me to provide examples of the shift in language used by both the museum and by the two reviewers. Then, I researched pertinent events in New York City and MoMA between the years 1935 to 1984, to acknowledge and then speculate about significant civil rights events that may have influenced language found in these two museum catalogs, and the change seen between those two publications. In Chapter 3, I discuss in further detail my research methodology and findings.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are important for understanding the content of this investigation.

Ally: a member of the dominant group who acts to end oppression in all aspects of social life and who is consistently seeking to advocate for the group who is oppressed in relation to them.

Civil Rights Movement: took place in the United States during the 1950s and '60s, the goals of the Civil Rights Movement was to end racial segregation and discrimination.

Content analysis: looking at the text content of a source and making inferences of the messages and values and a technique to summarize content.

Critical analysis: breaking down and critically reading content by asking questions about the purpose of the source, and then critically writing about the content to summarize its purpose or intent.

Discrimination: prejudice plus action; action based on social prejudice toward others.

Eurocentrism: the preoccupation with Western art and the belief of Western art as the most desirable and valuable form of art. Creates a strain between the Western and non-Western art and cultivates "otherness" in art and cultures not related to the West.

Linguistics: the study of language.

Masters: the Western artists made popular in art history and art education because of Euro-centric values in art. Examples being Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci, Claude Monet, and other highly regarded (most often male) artists.

Modernism: a dominant art movement that deliberately rejected the artistic styles of the past; characterized by experimentation in forms, materials etc. and the rejection of history and realistic depictions.

Other/Otherness: the idea that non-Western art and cultures are not relatable or relevant to the Western art standards. Otherness creates a divide between the West and non-West by making non-Western cultures seem strange and in no way similar to the culture of the West.

Power: the ability to define reality and to convince other people that such reality is the case for them as well.

Prejudice: judging an individual or group before knowing them.

Privilege: having an advantage based on one's social identity.

Institutional Racism: racism that occurs within and between institutions. Discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and inequitable opportunities and impacts, based on race, produced and perpetuated by institutions. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they act in ways that advantage and disadvantage people, based on race.

Value: the amount of importance, priority, or recognition given to an object or culture.

Voice: the ability of an individual's or a culture's story to be accurately heard.

White supremacy: belief that the white race is superior to all other races; for the purposes of this research, in relation to the African race.

PARAMETERS AND LIMITATIONS

I worked within the parameters of museum catalogs created during the time of each exhibition (1935 and 1984). I did not look at labels or brochures produced by or for MoMA. The reviews I studied were limited to distinguished art writers or scholars who visited the exhibits. The reviews were written by people familiar with the art world, not the general public. I limited myself to studying one museum, MoMA, and reviews written in response to the exhibitions: *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984). I limited myself to researching the history of New York City and MoMA, within this 50-year period (1935-1984). My goal was to identify differences in language found in the writings about both these exhibitions, and then provide "grounded speculation" (Bolin, 2009) regarding why these changes in language use may have occurred.

BENEFIT TO THE FIELD

This research has benefit for the field because it is intended to direct art educators to consider how they communicate about non-Western art. Over time, our world is drawn closer together and people are more likely to experience various cultures firsthand. I believe it is important for educators to be conscious of their language and how their words affect what learners think of ethnic and cultural groups outside their own. The language museum personnel use can also cause learners to believe we value some particular cultures more than others. Therefore, it is necessary that we, as museum educators, reflect thoughtfully on what we say. I want my research to inform educators and challenge them to understand the power their words convey.

I also believe this research can benefit the field of art history. As someone who studied art history, I saw the priority my professors often gave to Western art. I did not learn about non-Western art as often as we studied the Western "masters." Art historians may use my research to change the way they approach the teaching and viewing of non-Western art. My goal is to encourage art historians to treat all art thoughtfully and with the proper value that should be afforded to it. In the future, students may be able to learn more about African objects, Asian objects, Indian objects, and more of the non-Western cultural objects currently receiving limited investigation. After considering the content of this study, museum curators may be better able to reflect on the language they employ when creating labels and exhibitions. Curators may reconsider how they talk about non-Western art, and museum visitors can be exposed to more art than the Eurocentric collections we know today. Moreover, I believe my research can help to create more diverse art

exhibitions in the museum. I hope to see museums open and excited to talk about and exhibit art that is drawn from more than traditional European cultures and those considered to be "master" artists, and to do so using language that is sensitive and appropriate for those people and groups being discussed.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 2 is a literature review that provides further information on my primary and secondary sources, as well as sources that support my overall historical argument. I stress the importance of studying history and history as a methodology in Chapter 3 and elaborate on how I came to carry out research on this subject. I also provide examples of startling phrases from *African Negro Art* and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* and pose the question, what happened within those 50 years (1935 to 1984) to prompt the change in language MoMA used in these catalogs? In Chapter 4, I undertake a historical analysis of New York City during 1935 to 1984, with a concentration on events focused on African American civil rights. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, I summarize my study and offer suggestions for further research as well as provide methods for museum workers to use when discussing non-Western art.

Chapter 2: Review of Pertinent Literature

This review of pertinent literature related to the study consists of six areas: (a) primary sources, (b) secondary sources, (c) sources pertaining to my research methodology, (d) sources discussing the presence of Eurocentrism in art and language, (e) sources explaining the influential power art museums have on society, and (f) sources discussing the history of the African American Civil Rights Movements in or around New York City and MoMA. These sources provided the foundation for this study and offered substantial academic grounding for the work as it unfolded.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The first section of my literature review discusses the primary sources produced by MoMA. My research is historical in its intent, so it was necessary that I understood as much as possible about the exhibitions held at MoMA during the periods of time under investigation.

One primary source included in this study was MoMA's exhibition catalog *African Negro Art* (1935/1966). This resource provided information about the 1935 exhibition focused on in this study, including some visuals of the art shown and descriptions of it presented by the museum. By looking at this catalog, I set out to analyze the content MoMA provided to the public during 1935. I critically analyzed the language used in the catalog, and from that analysis I speculated about the values regarding African objects and culture held by MoMA during 1935.

The "*Primitivism*" *in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) catalog includes essays from various scholars who wrote about the "discovery" of African art, African art in the context of modern art, and changing perspectives of and towards African objects. This source was valuable for my research because it contained the essays MoMA approved for their exhibition catalog in 1984, and was thus a focus of examination and analysis used in this study. Writers of the catalog, who represented MoMA, selected those essays that aligned well with their views regarding African objects. Analyzing these essays, I was able to deduce values held by the essay writers who represented the museum.

SECONDARY SOURCES

After becoming familiar with the primary sources utilized in this study, I identified and read at least one professional review of each of the two exhibitions focused on in this investigation. The reviews gave me a glimpse into what museum visitors may have thought of the exhibits and what they appreciated about them, as well as their critiques of the exhibitions.

The review I selected for *African Negro Art* is an article from the *New York Times* written by Edward Alden Jewell, an American art critic. Jewell attended the opening night of the exhibit and offered his review based on the collection, aesthetics, and what he considered to be the success of the director. Considering that Jewell was an American art critic, his biases appeared to lean towards praising the Western ideal of art, and his discussion of the exhibition included works and phrases that belittled African culture and art. Jewell's views of the exhibition are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art (1991) is a book with seventeen chapters written by artists, art educators, art historians, and other members of the art world. Each chapter focuses on critiquing the notion of "primitivism" and how each author has experienced such art in their careers. I focused on the chapter, "From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts" by artist Rasheed Araeen (1991). This book was not published until 1991, seven years after the MoMA exhibition of 1984, but Araeen provides a review of his visit to the exhibition in 1984. Araeen (1991) challenges MoMA for its Eurocentric values, and he states that the higher value of Western art is obvious in the 1984 exhibition. He explains in the chapter how the exhibition reinforced the idea of European art being presented as superior to that of Africa.

I included James Clifford's chapter "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" (1988) as a second review of *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*. Clifford's chapter is from the book *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), a source I used for consideration when working with a number of other sections of the thesis. James Clifford, an anthropologist, gives a strident critique of MoMA's exhibit. His views were so strong that he seized the attention of administrative officials from MoMA. Clifford reviews both the exhibition and the catalog and explains why he believes the presentation of the exhibition and writing from it are problematic. He predominantly focuses on the "Eurocentric underpinnings" (Palmer, 2008) of the exhibition. There are commonalities between Clifford (1988) and Araeen's (1991) reviews, and from them I can speculate the message "West is best" was apparent in the 1984 exhibition. Again, a more thorough discussion of these ideas is presented in Chapter 3.

METHODOLOGY/TOOLS FOR RESEARCH

Before undertaking this investigation, I was new to historical research and content analysis. For this reason it was necessary for me to become familiar with various historical research methodologies by investigating their use. While my overall research approach was historical, I needed to understand how to analyze the words I read and conduct a critical analysis of the content embedded in these documents. I referenced *Content Analysis, An Introduction* (2013) to help understand and learn processes of content analysis. The author, Krippendorff (2013), gives a history of content analysis and brings the reader up to speed on how this methodology is used with technology today. It was important for me to understand where the research methodology of content analysis came from in order to recognize why some changes in the content analysis practice have been made. This book furnishes a step-by-step directive to assist in employing content analysis. Through this text I was able to learn what possible pitfalls to avoid when employing this methodology.

Utilizing content analysis, I also discussed why particular words used in the catalogs should be avoided, or how other interpretations and meanings of certain words have emerged over time. In addition to enrolling in a linguistics course Linguistics 350 (Maledicta: Bad Language, Race, Class, and Gender) at The University of Texas at Austin, I made used of the important literature about linguistics, which gave me insights into the intent of racist language and the inflicting power of language on people.

Jane Hill's book, *Everyday Language of White Racism* (2008), discusses the negative implications of words used in our Western culture. Hill (2008) exposes the continued strong presence of racism in America and encourages readers to consider how

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their language keeps racism alive. She provides background information on theories of race and racism to help the reader understand some of the current primary issues regarding racism. An important section of Hill's (2008) book discusses how text and discourse-talk produces and reproduces ideas about race that are both negative and positive. Hill (2008) challenges the reader to think critically about the language we use in our everyday lives.

Allan and Burridge's (2006) book *Forbidden Words* explores words deemed taboo. This book was a useful tool because it explains central issues surrounding why a word or phrase is considered offensive. Allan and Burridge (2006) provides the history of certain words and gives examples of how people have used words in the past in order to foster discrimination. I used this book to aid in my content analysis of the museum catalogs and reviews of the exhibitions, as it helped me to recognize the importance of word choice by the authors of these two museum catalogs.

I used the article, "Imagination and Speculation as Historical Impulse: Engaging Uncertainties within Art Education History and Historiography" (2009) by Paul Bolin because of its focus on multiple historical perspectives. Bolin (2009) encourages historians to question facts that are presented. This source was useful because my research was heavily focused on questioning why the writers of the MoMA catalogs decided to employ certain words to describe African objects. I needed to read further into the words and phrases I encountered, and Bolin (2009) made that an intriguing process with his writing. I possessed many questions including those centered on the intention of the exhibition catalogs and who wrote the catalogs. This article enabled me to see why questioning historical documents is important. I appreciated Bolin's (2009) stress on not taking

historical facts at face value, but to explore them more deeply. I used my imagination to put myself in the shoes of the people of the past in an attempt to understand what MoMA was trying to convey to readers through these catalogs. My research required me to question what certain documents meant, and this article was helpful in accomplishing this during a large portion of my research.

Bolin's book chapter "From Acquaintance to Argument: Five Phases of Historical Investigation Within Art Education" (2013) helped me to see the importance of making concrete arguments in my thesis. Bolin's (2013) writing was useful because he gives five phases for one to begin and develop arguments situated in historical research. Bolin (2013) also provides real-life examples of forming research questions and research topics. Early in the research I was able to use the examples Bolin (2013) provided to guide me in focusing my research question while I examined my historical sources.

Secord's (2003) article, "Tools and Techniques for Historical Research," is likened to a beginner's guide to historical research. In the article, Secord (2003) offers advice to those starting a historical research journey. He gives helpful hints for times when a researcher will hit a wall or feel overwhelmed by their data. Secord (2003) is also helpful by pointing researchers in the direction of where to find useful historical references and what a solid reference looks like. As someone new to historical research, this volume offered valuable insights useful to my investigation.

Williams' book, *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History* (2003), was beneficial to my research from start to finish. Williams (2003) provides a step-by-step guide to the historical research process by starting with how to pick

a research topic and ending with advice on how to cite and annotate the research. The book was relevant for the majority of my thesis work because it assisted me in every phase, whenever needed, throughout the historical research process.

EUROCENTRISM IN ART AND LANGUAGE

My thesis often addresses Eurocentrism in art and language. To assist in my investigation, I looked at sources with examples of how the art world displays non-Western art, and the problematic nature of the Western ideal of art. Jan Pieterse's book *White on Black* (1992) provides images of Africans within the context of Western pop culture. The chapters, "Imagery of Eurocentrism" and "Savages, Animals, Heathens, Races" (1992), describe and depict how the West often constructs a false image of Africa. Pieterse (1992) writes about the West creating "Europe's Africa," and how the West frequently decontextualizes African objects from African cultures to put forward an inaccurate image of Africa. The implications of these inaccurate representations are the West viewing Africa as the "other," and in doing so wedging a bigger divide between the West and non-West in a hierarchical manner.

The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art by James Clifford (1988) explores the authority the West holds in defining non-Western culture. Clifford (1988) and other writers in the book examine how museum displays of tribal art create a divide between cultural groups and marginalize people from non-Western groups. The authors question the right to authority when speaking for groups to which one does not belong. Authority is important when considering museums. Just because a

museum has the power to present images and information about a culture does not mean they should have authority to define a culture's identity and authenticity.

Paul Wood's book *Western Art and the Wider World* (2014) explores the intersection of Western and non-Western art. For example, one topic he discusses is the discourse of "primitivism." Wood (2014) explores the notion of primitive art in the nineteenth century and investigates various disputes surrounding the influence of African creations on Western artistic traditions such as expressionism. The author writes in detail about the similarities seen between Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and Congo Etoumbi masks. Wood (2014) ushers the reader through stories of Picasso appropriating African objects, Picasso's art being described as "barbaric," and a discussion of the struggles to link "primitive" and "modern" art. This book identifies problems with Eurocentrism throughout history, and Wood (2014) gives various examples of how non-Western art is affected because of Western ideals.

Battistella's book *Bad Language* (2005) discusses the notion of political correctness and how changing our language informs the manner in which we as a society approaches an issue or group of people. This book offers examples of Eurocentric language and discusses how people are working to change the language in order to promote a wide diversity of social perspectives. His book provides views from both those who agree with renaming offensive terms, and those who feel Western culture will depreciate if language changes. Battistella (2005) does an insightful job of showing the power of Eurocentrism, and how the words we use can influence our ideas of Western culture in relation to those regarded as non-Western. This book was useful to my study because I addressed instances

of Eurocentrism in both the MoMA catalogs. With guidance from Battistella's book, I explored the negative impact Eurocentric language had on MoMA's audience in Chapter 3. I utilized this source to strengthen my argument that art museums are a powerful source of influence, and for this reason it is vital that museum officials recognize the impact of language used in their didactic materials.

Kryssi Staikidis' (2010) chapter "Artistic Mentorship with Two Maya Artists: Social Justice and Pedagogy" highlights the importance of broadening art education beyond the European model. Staikidis (2010) is an art educator who focuses on art making with students. She is aware of the Western dominant culture in the classroom. Her art making activity in the chapter is a collaborative project between Maya painters and herself. Staikidis (2010) understands the importance of giving a voice to non-Western artists, and she finds issues with the mainstream labelling of non-Western contemporary artists as "primitive". Her ideologies align with my own and her passion to change the art education field was beneficial in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

ART MUSEUMS' POWER OF INFLUENCE

Belfiore and Bennett (2008) explore the power art has to help create personal and societal change. *The Social Impact of the Art: An Intellectual History* (2008) discusses the function of art in both the private and public sphere, such as a museum. Depending on how museum officials choose to display and portray art, cultural change can be perceived as containing features that are both positive or negative. A detrimental construction of a culture can cause a shift in how the culture is perceived and bring about assumptions

regarding the cultural group being displayed. Belfiore and Bennett's arguments are further explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

In *Museum Skepticism*, Carrier (2006) explains the influential role museums play in the public sphere. Art museums influence society in several ways, through architecture, the collections, and the narratives they offer. Carrier (2006) stresses the importance of representing non-Western culture in the art museum as a way to encourage democratic debate and discussion between visitors. For the museum to remain a place for people to discuss and wonder, museum workers need to expand their collections and knowledge to include exhibitions and discussion of the works of many diverse cultures. I selected this book in order to explore what changes should be made to art museums in present time to help ensure visitors feel welcome. A more thorough discussion of Carrier's ideas is made in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 serves as my conclusion as well as a teaching resource for museum officials to use. Theories and ideas from authors are also included in Chapter 5 to provide readers with several educational approaches to employ with their audiences.

Sherman and Rogoff's (1994) book, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* examines museums as a collective institution that displays not only art, but ideas and values as well. The authors argue museums have become a metaphor for contemporary society. This metaphor brings up the question: is contemporary society being accurately represented by the museum? By inspecting the practices of museums, Sherman and Rogoff (1994) explore ways museums assign meaning to the art through exhibitions and display strategies. The authors also offer alternatives to the typical museum display method and furnish examples of museums making changes in society to assist the public in obtaining

an accurate perception of cultural work exhibited. Again, this source was useful to Chapter 5 because I found Sherman and Rogoff's suggestions for museum change beneficial. The authors' focus on considering carefully the visitor and community aligned with my ideals. I utilized their ideas in Chapter 5 to reveal options museum officials could integrate in their art museums.

Lisa Robert's (1997) book, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum* discusses the impact museum educators can have on the public. Roberts (1997) argues that educators should work to construct museum narratives based on what is meaningful to the public, and not focus solely on what the curators desire to display and discuss. The book empowers educators to be activists in effecting changes to exhibit planning and development. I used this source to strengthen my argument that museum workers are responsible for their messages conveyed to the public, and change is possible, and necessary, in museums.

Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) is another source that stresses the influence museums have on visitors. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) describes museum visits as experiences that vary widely by each visitor, and it is necessary to recognize and honor these various experiences. Throughout the book the author details the initiation of museum, how our ideas of museums have changed over time, and what alterations to these institutions are needed today. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) supports the experiences of the public and welcomes new audiences coming into the museum. The author also provides fresh approaches museum educators need to enact in their practice when engaging with these diverse audiences. Hooper-Greenhill's methods

for museum educators are discussed in Chapter 5 in order to provide museum officials with new ways to approach their audiences.

Melinda Mayer's (1998) article, "Can Philosophical Change Take Hold in the American Art Museum?" explores the museum's societal shift, specifically in education. Mayer (1998) discusses the history of American art museum, and relationships that occur between education and art history. The article follows the philosophical trend of art historians, moving from aesthetically-focused to a new art history surfacing in the 1980s and '90s, which explored the importance of investigation new art historical interpretations. Understanding the history of museum personnel philosophies is helpful in understanding why MoMA's curators may use certain language.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) book, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* is focused on the visitor's interpretation of objects in the museum. More specifically, how are interpretations influenced by the choices made by those working in the museum? Hooper-Greenhill (2000) provides museum display information about the modernist museum. MoMA was one of the earliest modernist museums in the United States, and Hooper-Greenhill's explanation of modernist theory helped me to understand some of MoMA's interpretive choices.

Museum Texts by Louise J. Ravelli (2006) stresses the importance of communication between museums and visitors. This book explores the complexities of understating museum texts, including catalogs. It is critical that museum personnel recognize how their texts will be interpreted by the public. Ravelli's (2006) book also

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investigates the history of interpretative text, which was beneficial to my analysis of historical catalogs that were central to my study.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF NEW YORK CITY AND MoMA, 1935-1984

Martha Biondi's (2003) book, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* provides a history of the social struggles of African Americans and significant Civil Rights Movements occurring in New York City after World War II. This book was a useful resource because Biondi (2003) is one of the few authors who has written about the often-forgotten civil right struggles in the northern United States of America. Biondi (2003) delves into detail about the daily struggles of African Americans in New York City and their fight for equality. Examples of the issues Biondi (2003) discusses include: job discrimination, welfare, housing, police misconduct, and political representation. Specific events that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement are discussed in some detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Biondi's (2007) article, "How New York Changes the Story of the Civil Rights Movement," served as a supplemental resource to the book *To Stand and Fight* (Biondi, 2003). The article explains why certain Civil Rights Movements mattered deeply and how they were influential in changing notions of civil rights for African Americans in the United States. This article aided in my understanding of why the events and struggles I studied could have influenced what occurred at MoMA. I used Biondi's (2007) arguments regarding Civil Rights events in New York City to help explain the change in language seen in MoMA's museum catalogs.

A special issue of the journal *Afro-American in New York Life and History* discusses the Civil Rights Movement in New York City. The issue includes articles from several authors, and each writing discusses significant struggles of African Americans in New York City predominantly in the 1950s and 1960s. Events discussed include struggles in schools, gentrification, and housing. I used the articles to help catch a glimpse of the everyday issues African Americans experienced in New York City at that time, and surmise their influence on New York society, which includes MoMA.

Karsten Schubert's book, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (2009) explores the history of the museum from the opening of European museums, including the Louvre, to the contemporary art museums in the United States. Schubert's book contains a historical look at MoMA from 1930 to 1950, the time period this study embraces. MoMA is presented as a fresh type of museum, one that does not possess a European precedent. Schubert discusses the introduction of museum catalogs and the influence MoMA's new ideas as an institution that influenced the modern art museums we are familiar with today in the United States.

CONCLUSION

The importance of understanding the implications of our language, and how we use it, cannot be stressed enough. Relationships between history and the actions of humanity may very well go hand in hand. This chapter worked to marry history with the difficult subject of racism in the public sphere of MoMA. My primary sources included the two exhibition catalogs from MoMA during the years 1935 and 1984. My secondary sources

were comprised of critiques or reviews of MoMA's exhibitions that corresponded with the museum catalogs from 1935 and 1984. The sources regarding Eurocentrism in art and language defended my argument against the language used in MoMA's catalogs. I utilized literature on the Civil Rights Movement in New York City in order to explore what events may have influenced a change in MoMA's language seen between the two exhibition catalogs. Last, the sources concerned with the art museum's power of influence on visitors and society strengthened my idea that museums can affect the way the public perceives features of culture. Knowing the power of the museum, I encourage readers to consider new ways of approaching their museum audience. To assist, I provide examples I discovered of museums working to change their institutional practices. In the chapter that follows I provide examples of language and ideas found in two of MoMA's catalogs from the years 1935 and 1984, and discuss differences seen between the language used in these two documents during these eras separated by 50 years.

Chapter 3: Methodology

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Philosopher George Santayana (1905/1998) is well known for writing, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284). If for no other reason, this statement gives strong purpose for examining the past. By looking at history, we may notice trends that mirror the present and use these insights in working to eliminate detrimental circumstances in society, such as segregation, misogyny, war, and racism. Currently, the United States is experiencing race wars, not unlike the Civil Rights Movement fifty years ago. I contend that we, as a country, are living through a racially tumultuous historical moment. What can we do differently today to ensure we do not see inequality in our country again? Looking at the past may enable us to work in creating a better and more equitable future. I argue it is vital to continue to speculate and ask questions regarding history in order to provide new stories and voices for the historical record. Often, we learn about history through one lens and accept that viewpoint as objective truth. What opinions or values are we dismissing by recognizing and accepting only one side of the story? As Robert Williams (2003) states, "historians often disagree about their interpretation of the past, even when looking at the same body of evidence" (p. xiv). Each individual is a part of history, and their story is just as important as that of anyone else. By continuously exploring history, we as researchers can better understand "why did" something happen or "how might" (Bolin, 2009) our world be different if something else had occurred? History is a vibrant field to study; by asking important questions we can

better understand why events happened and continue to learn new things about the past and present. Researchers cannot only look at events through a present-time lens. As a historian, one must metaphorically attempt to put yourself in the shoes of people who lived during the time under study. History is more than learning about an event that occurred. It is an attempt to understand society during the time an event arose, what was happening to individuals of that time, and what values did those people hold? In hindsight, it is not difficult to recognize the racist language embedded in the primary sources utilized in this study, but this usage may not have been so obvious to those living in 1935 and 1984. Therefore, it was necessary that I worked to become familiar with viewpoints of individuals living during 1935 and 1984. Digging deep into history creates an increased understanding of what life was like at another time, and recognizing similar trends today can help establish an improved present and possible future.

Art education history provides an alternate lens to look through in asking: How have the arts contributed to the past? Specifically, how influential have art museums and their personnel been to the public? The following section explores museum documents, which I argue were presented to the public in ways that were detrimental to society.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis entails a thorough investigation of a source. Investigation is made of words and phrases utilized by an author, thus exploring in depth the writing under question. By conducting content analysis, I found that the exhibition catalogs under question possessed a deeper meaning beyond the text registered on the pages. *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*'s definition of content analysis is, "analysis of the

manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through

classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain

its meaning and probable effect" (as cited in Krippendorff, 2013, p. 1). My research was

focused on the evaluation, meaning making, and effect of the language written in the

catalogs. I wanted to discover underlying messages that may have surfaced through the text

used in the catalogs. Moreover, what effect did language employed by MoMA have on

those who read it? Krippendorff's introduction to content analysis provides ample

information about the positive and negative effects of language, and I found his expertise

to be beneficial in deciphering language MoMA used in its catalogs. I referenced

Krippendorff's (2013) indices for evaluation in content analysis (see Appendix A for a list)

as a guide while analyzing my primary and secondary sources. Krippendorff's list

introduces guidelines for a researcher to follow. For example, the frequency of words,

phrases, or idea mentioned in a document is correlated with importance. In addition,

positive or negative adjectives assigned to a symbol, idea, or reference could reveal the

attitudes held by the authors toward the described subject. These qualifiers from

Krippendorff's list guided my content analysis through MoMA's catalogs.

Discourse Analysis

While reading Krippendorff's (2013) work, I was introduced to the related research

method of discourse analysis (p. 22). Discourse analysis focuses attention on how certain

phenomena are represented through text (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 22). Teun a. van Dijk is a

recognized scholar performing discourse analysis; he studied racism in the press, and the

differences displayed in press accounts between representations of minorities verses whites

(Krippendorff, 2013, p. 22). van Dijk (1991) stresses the importance of acknowledging the relationship between content and "cognitive, social, political, and cultural structures of their contexts" (p. 49). By thinking beyond the physical catalogs from MoMA, and considering the social climate of New York between 1935 and 1984, I began to analyze the documents of my study. Before moving ahead with the study it was vital for me to acknowledge that all content analysis possesses subjectivity. Krippendorff (1991) reminds the researcher that "context is always constructed by someone…no matter how hard they may try to objectify it" (p. 31). These words were useful as I undertook this investigation.

MY JOURNEY THROUGH *AFRICAN NEGRO ART* (1935)

After being introduced to the study and analysis of African objects during my undergraduate studies, I became more interested in how African items traveled to the West and specifically the history of African objects housed and displayed in American museums. I honored my curiosity by choosing to learn more about African objects in museums as a graduate student, and initiated my search by looking at well-known and established museums. In my initial investigation, I came across MoMA's website, which included a list and timeline of their exhibitions. The first word I typed into the search bar was "African," and to my surprise the earliest exhibition I found was named *African Negro Art* from 1935. "Negro" was a word I had only heard when reading books like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Those books revealed a glimpse of discriminatory treatment toward people of color, specifically African Americans. I was startled to read such a title of an art exhibition, and I instantly searched for the corresponding catalog.

African Negro Art was the first major exhibition that showcased African objects. In the exhibition, MoMA displayed 603 objects including sculpture in wood, bronze and ivory, textiles, implements, and weapons. The catalog ordered the objects by origin region. Starting in northwest Africa, the collection consists of objects from French Sudan, from the catalog moves east then south, which includes countries: French Guinea, Upper Volta Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast and Gold Coast, Dahomey, British Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabun, French Congo, Belgian Congo, Angola, and British East African (Sweeney 1935/1966). These objects came from private museum collections from England, Germany, Belgium, France, and the United States (Glueck, 1986). *African Negro Art* exposed the Western art world to examples of non-Western objects. I located the catalog for *African Negro Art* which included an introduction written by the director of the exhibition, James Sweeney. I began to read the catalog, and with dismay Sweeney's words greatly incensed me. The introduction, as a whole, described the differences between the "art" of various tribes in Africa, but his descriptions of the African people were worrisome. Sweeney (1935/1966) spoke of Africans as people of the past, and described their beliefs and community as "strange" (pp. 16, 21). His language led me to believe that Sweeney did not think highly of those from Africa; his words described African people as the other, different and separate from those in White America. Sweeney (1935/1966) referred to some African people as "Negroes of the primitive type" (p. 18). With this language, Sweeney further alienated people from Africa by categorizing them as people from a time now over. Unfavorable characteristics of African people such as "primitive" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, p. 18) mirror Sweeney's attitude projected toward people of African descent (Krippendorff,

2013, p. 62). The author also described their "art" as unlike the art we traditionally and normally see in the West.

AN ANALYSIS OF *AFRICAN NEGRO ART* (1935)

Some words Sweeney wrote in this exhibition catalog may not be initially obvious in their offensiveness. Much of the language used in the 1935 *African Negro Art* exhibition catalog is not readily seen as blatantly racist, but Sweeney's words contributed to the formation of ideas concerning African objects and African culture. Much of Sweeney's language possessed a Eurocentric tone, or the idea that Western art, culture, and life, are superior to the non-West or Third World. A harmful implication of Eurocentrism is that it eliminates narratives of non-Western cultures. Samir Amin, initiator of the term "Eurocentrism," states, "[Eurocentrism] constitutes one dimension of the culture and ideology of the modern capitalist world" (as cited in Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, p. 25). Amin then declares Eurocentrism focuses on viewing all cultures through one paradigm, that of the "civilized" Western world.

An example of Sweeney's Eurocentric language comes from the Introduction of *African Negro Art* (1935). When describing African people, Sweeney often wrote of them as being of less value than himself and white people of the West. For example, Sweeney (1935/1966) likened Africa to a long-lost world; he claims the value of the objects "is not tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that are interesting. It is its plastic qualities. Picturesque or exotic features as well as historical and ethnographic considerations have a tendency to blind us to its true worth" (p. 21). Words such as "strange" and "exotic" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, p. 21) alienate African people and their

culture, which places them in an inferior position to whites. These "qualifications"
(Krippendorff, 2013, p. 63), or adjectives, intensify the idea that people from Africa are
also "strange" or "exotic" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, p. 21). Sweeney effectively used his
language to estrange African people and situate them to be viewed as the "other" or a
mysterious person unlike the population of white. Sweeney's language is also problematic
because he assigned his own value to the African objects. His language choice reveals his
hidden assumptions of African people and culture (Battistella, 2005, p. 95). Instead of
including an interview with persons from the tribe or a person of color familiar with African
objects, Sweeney, a white man, expresses his own view of what makes African objects
worthy of study and exhibition.

A second example of Sweeney (1935/1966) generating the idea of Africa being the
"other" occurs when he wrote, "where Negroes of the primitive type are still to be found"
(p. 18). What is problematic here is Sweeney's use of language in which he made Africa
seem like a place we should be surprised still exists. His use of "primitive" invokes mental
sub normality toward African people (Allan & Burridge, 2006, p. 82). Frequently, Sweeney
used words to create a divide between the West and Africa. There are consequences to
Sweeney's language and his making African culture out to be the "other." For example,
Pieterse (1995) states, "probably the single most important feature of representations of
otherness is the role they play in establishing and maintaining social inequality" (p. 234).
I argue Sweeney is, unfortunately, successful at generating a feeling of social inequality
through the language he employed in his writing. In Chapter 4, I discuss in further detail

examples of social disparity between white and African American people in New York City during the Civil Rights Movement.

CRITIC'S REVIEW OF *AFRICAN NEGRO ART* (1935)

The *New York Times* review of the MoMA exhibition *African Negro Art*, held in 1935, affirmed my sense that there was an air of superiority being displayed at MoMA during this time. Edward Jewell, art critic, wrote a review for the *New York Times* on opening day of the exhibition. The *New York Times* title read: "African Negro Art on Exhibition Here: An Unusual Show Opens with Reception at Museum of Modern Art" (Jewell, 1935, p. 19). Right away, Jewell distances the African objects from Western society by describing the show as "unusual." Similar to the effect of Sweeney's (1935/1966) adjectives, Jewell (1935) assigns unfavorable descriptors to the African objects and therefore creates an association of Africa and Africans being "unusual." This review positions the African objects as unfamiliar or as the "other," when compared to Western art and culture. When writers such as Sweeney and Jewell write about African culture in this manner, they assert a desire to disassociate the West from anything that is unlike it or considered "unusual." Groups like MoMA use otherness in claiming a higher status by making the African culture seem odd or "strange" (Jewell, 1935, p. 19). Pieterse (1995) affirms this position regarding the negative repercussions of othering a culture:

> Assigning attributes of otherness serves multiple functions for the labelling group. It may be a critical expression of social distance, of a claim to status on the part of the labelling group, or it may serve to negotiate internal group relations by reference to an out-group. (p. 230)

Readers of this *New York Times* review may have associated African objects and culture as being othered, distanced, and of less importance than those created in America, even before entering the exhibition at MoMA.

A second issue taken with Jewell's review is his assumption that the general public would have trouble visiting the show. Jewell assumes visitors who were not highly-educated must be cautious when entering the museum:

> On the esthetic side, in approaching this strange tribal art, the public will probably encounter this principal difficultly. Visitors, except they be specialists and learned authorities, should be advised to check their preconceived ideas, their prejudices and all narrow standards at the door. (Jewell, 1935, p.19)

It may be that MoMA and the Western art world during 1935 did not kindly welcome the general public. If a reviewer felt the need to point out that a large majority of the New York City population may want to avoid the museum, it is possible MoMA made its setting feel unwelcoming to anyone who was not an entrenched member of the art world. I found hypocrisy in Jewell's (1935) statement because within Sweeney's catalog of *African Negro Art* there is a presence of "prejudice" and "narrow standards" (p. 19).

Based on the language used in Jewell's review, I continue to argue that some visitors from the art world regarded the objects from Africa as inferior and strange when compared to those of the West. I would extend further and state that the opinions of MoMA and critics similar to Jewell may well have had a negative effect on the public's perception of Third World objects, and the people whose objects were displayed in this exhibition.

MY JOURNEY THROUGH *"PRIMITIVISM" IN 20TH CENTURY ART* (1984)

It seemed Sweeney, the author of MoMA's 1935 *African Negro Art* exhibition catalog, described the African people to be a monolithic primitive group. For this reason, I decided to explore MoMA's archives and search for phrases containing the word "primitive." This investigation revealed a second exhibition, more recent, titled *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. This exhibition took place in 1984. The premise of the exhibition was to show examples of modern artists who incorporated African elements into their works. An inadvertent side effect of the juxtaposition was a comparison between the "primitive" art of African people with the highly-revered art of the masters such as Picasso, Brancusi, and Matisse. This exhibition was the first to "juxtapose tribal and modern objects in the light of informed art history" (MoMA, 1984). During the time of this exhibition, modernism was a popular art movement. Modernism is known for its rejection of artistic styles of the past, including realistic renderings as well as the denunciation of history and context. Instead, modernism emphasized innovation and experimentation in form, materials, and techniques (Tate). African objects encapsulated modernists' dismissal of realism in art, as well as their preoccupation with new form. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) describes the modernist museum as an institution that "understood its visitors as deficient" (p. 125). Little information was provided along with the objects because modernist museums viewed the public as members with little information about the collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 125).

The title of this exhibition was questionable to me because of the quotations marks employed around "Primitivism." I wondered why MoMA chose to use these marks in this

way because sometimes such marks are used to convey irony or doubt. Does this imply that in 1984 MoMA viewed objects from African cultures as inferior, when compared to modern art? I immediately felt the anger rise as I revisited the catalog of this exhibition, and I was surprised to rediscover this show is not far from present day. To its credit, the language appears less direct in its racial disrespect than the text used by MoMA in the 1935 catalog.

The "*Primitivism*" *in 20th Century Art* catalog from 1984 is a large, two volume set filled with essays written by ethnologists, MoMA's staff, and various art scholars. In Volume One the curator and director, William Rubin, writes a lengthy introduction that includes a discussion of what primitivism is, where modern artists found inspiration, and the affinities found between African objects and the art of modernists. Following the introduction are essays that explore how the "tribal" (1984) objects arrived to the West. Finally, Volume One finishes with three essays focused on Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso's African-inspired art. Volume Two of "*Primitivism*" *in 20th Century Art* is a continuation of the essays focused on Western artists who were incorporating African objects, as well as art movements, including: German Expressionism, Italian Painting, Dadaism, and Abstract Expressionism. There are no dedicated essays regarding modern African artists or contemporary art practices in Africa. Content analysis guidelines show that the frequency of a topic being referenced indicates the importance authors place on that topic (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 62). Western artists are mentioned overwhelmingly more often than African artists, and from this it appears the authors of MoMA's 1984 catalog

regarded Western art and artists as being worthy of more attention and superior to curators within the art world.

When I began reading the 1984 catalog, I started with the introduction written by William Rubin. In doing so, it became quite clear that a bias existed in support of Western art and artists. Rubin appeared far more concerned with discussing the African objects within the setting of the West than focusing on the works themselves within the context of where and when they were made. He begins the catalog with the following:

> I want to understand the Primitive sculptures in terms of the Western context in which modern artists "discovered" them. The ethnologists' primary concern—the specific function and significance of each of these objects—is irrelevant to my topic, except insofar as these facts might have been known to the modern artists in question. (Rubin, 1984, p. 1)

While the language employed here in 1984 is not as jarring as that used by Sweeney in *African Negro Art* from 1935, it seems obvious that museum officials continued to regard the focus on Western art as being more important than examining African objects in 1984. Rubin appears to show no interest in illuminating the history behind the African objects and, therefore, he has erased the narrative surrounding the creators of these objects. What Rubin leaves us with is a discussion of what these African creations mean according to Western standards, and through this an important portion of Africa's history is disregarded, omitted, and lost. Rubin curated *"Primitivism" in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* with modernism in mind. As stated before, modernism is not predominantly concerned with the history of art and rejects the past and context of art. Rubin's reasoning for the lack of contextual inclusion could be explained by the popular art historical trend of modernism during this time. It is

possible other art museums during the 1980s could have approached non-Western art in a similar modernist fashion.

A troubling theme appearing in "*Primitivism*" *in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) is the predominant focus on the Western artist, with little to no discussion of African culture, African people, and objects within their world. The essays address how African objects inspired Western artists and the success of African objects and culture being integrated into Western culture. Yet, there is little to no contextual discussion surrounding these objects from Africa.

Within the volume there is not a presence of highly-upsetting specific language similar to what I read in *African Negro Art* (1935), such as adjectives describing African people as "Negroes of the primitive type" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, p.18) or categorizing African objects as "strange" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, pp. 16, 21). However, discriminatory undertones made towards African culture, and the subjected status of African objects, were woven throughout the discussion present in the 1984 volume "*Primitivism*" *in 20ᵗʰ Century Art*.

AN ANALYSIS OF *"PRIMITIVISM" IN 20ᵀᴴ CENTURY ART* (1984)

The Introduction, written by William Rubin, is the main essay focused on in my analysis of the 1984 catalog. Rubin was the Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA as well as curator of "*Primitivism*" *in 20ᵗʰ Century Art*, and I believe his values are those that would align closest to the values of MoMA.

Two major themes are present throughout Rubin's essay. The first theme is the praise directed toward Western artists. The second theme is the omission of contextual

conversation associated with the African objects displayed in the exhibition. Rubin gives credit to modern artists exposing the West to African objects. In the eyes of Rubin, African objects were not of importance until their presence could be lucrative for the art museum and the rest of the art world. Rubin (1984) provides a history of MoMA and explained, "The Museum mounted major exhibitions concerned with the aesthetics of African and Oceanic art in 1935 and 1946 when other museums dealt with this material only in ethnographic terms" (p. viii). Again, Rubin ignores the context associated with the African objects housed in the exhibition. In his efforts to find affinity between the modern Western artist and African objects, he disregarded and thus erased an entire portion of the objects' history. Museum visitors of 1984 were not presented with facts regarding African culture, the people, or their beliefs. Instead, MoMA furnished the objects from Africa as secondary pieces alongside the idealized art made by Western modernists. Wood (2014) argues that there is a general double standard seen between Western and African objects:

> It was legitimate and invigorating for European artists to have increased the expressive power of their work by drawing on African models, if the situation was reversed, a modern African work drawing on Western examples would be rendered comprised and inauthentic. (p. 160)

While modernists were applauded for their inventiveness, a modern African artist would most likely be criticized for taking cues from Western artists. My reaction to the catalog is not unique. The following section provides two critical reviews that align with and support my position.

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CRITICS' REVIEW OF *"PRIMITIVISM" IN 20TH CENTURY ART* **(1984)**

James Clifford, an anthropologist and author, offers a thorough review of both the catalog of "*Primitivism*" *in 20th Century Art* and the exhibition that bore this name. To begin, Clifford challenges the formation of the exhibition. The author questions the validity of the "affinities" occurring between the modern art displayed and the African objects contained in the exhibition. In actuality, Clifford asserts the belief that MoMA personnel forced an affinity between the objects of the West and those from Africa. Clifford (1988) states, "The catalogue succeeds in demonstrating not any essential affinity between tribal and modern or even a coherent modernist attitude toward the primitive but rather the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world" (p. 196). All the similarities expressed in the catalog and exhibition of 1984 are determined by the authority of the Western "modernist" (Clifford, 1988, p. 195). Although MoMA created a show to exhibit objects from multiple cultures, it failed at commending the creativity of non-Western cultures (Clifford, 1988, p. 195). Clifford's reactions are similar to the position I take: the catalog is infused with Eurocentric language, and through analysis reveals an agenda to assert the power and position of the West over non-Western cultures.

Clifford shares a similar sentiment to my own in regard to Rubin's disconnect of context and object in the catalog Introduction. As stated before, Rubin is far more concerned with the formal elements of modernism in relation to the African objects. Clifford (1988) states, "Rubin tends to be more interested in a recovery of elemental expressive modes…," but the effect is an exclusion of Third World modernism (p. 195). I share Clifford's concern with Rubin discounting artists who are not from the West.

Unfortunately, authors and personnel of "*Primitivism*" worked to push cultures apart by writing about and showcasing art through a lens of Eurocentrism. Visitors to the exhibition missed out on the opportunity to learn about modernism around the world and narrative discussion from and about the Third World was absent from the exhibition.

At the same time, Clifford does give credit to MoMA for being somewhat progressive and not entirely lumping together African objects as artifacts only of the past. Within the 1984 catalog, MoMA revealed "evidence of living tribal peoples…not [being] entirely excluded" (Clifford, 1988, p. 209). Clifford acknowledges that MoMA included a small text explaining the purpose of a Zuni tribe figure (1988). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the catalog and exhibition is directed toward championing the successes of Western modernists, without mentioning the context wherein the African works of art were made. Clifford (1988) laments about MoMA's lack of acknowledging context, by stating:

> What was good enough for Picasso is good enough for MoMA. Indeed an ignorance of cultural context seems almost a precondition for artistic appreciation. In this objects system a tribal piece is detached from one milieu in order to circulate freely in another, a world of art—of museums, markets and connoisseurship. (p. 200)

In regards to the exhibition, Clifford's critiques are similar to his review of the catalog. Again, Clifford believes MoMA worked to construct a false image of these Third World objects. Tribal objects from Oceania, Africa, and North America were selected based on an idea of what MoMA considers African objects to be. Clifford (1988) asks, "Why, for example, are there relatively few 'impure' objects constructed from the debris of colonial

culture contacts? And is there not an overall bias toward clean, abstract form as against rough or crude work?" (p. 192). The authenticity of Third World objects is challenged through the way the exhibition is curated by MoMA. Visitors are presented with a false idea of what Africa's objects are and there is no indication of tribal or regional variety. I build on the argument that MoMA generated a false image of Africa in my defense of Clifford's critique of discriminatory treatment of the African objects that were exhibited in 1984. MoMA created a contrasting duality between pristine western modernism and the barbaric Third World. According to Clifford (1988), "The modernism represented [at MoMA] is concerned only with artistic invention, a positive category separable from a negative primitivism of the irrational, the savage, the base, the flight from civilization" (p. 197). The constant praise for the Western modernist and corresponding ignorance by Third World cultures in MoMA's 1984 show created a detrimental connection that the "civilized" West possessed and demonstrated the superior form of art.

Artist Rasheed Araeen provides a brief but insightful review of his visit to MoMA's 1984 exhibition. First, Araeen (1991) takes issue with the language MoMA employed in the show when comparing the tribal objects with American art. The author noticed, "the texts displayed around were sometimes interesting…at other times also disturbing in the way they mediated between the work of the modern artists and the so-called 'primitive' art" (Araeen, 1991, p. 163). His reaction is similar to Clifford; there is an uncomfortably false feeling as MoMA attempted to find affinity between contextually unrelated objects. Through an analysis of the two exhibition catalogs, I could affirm both critics' reaction to the image MoMA constructed. I found MoMA's comparisons to lack information and most

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pairings of tribal objects felt forced. Araeen also noticed the overarching Eurocentric values evident in the 1984 show. He challenged MoMA's admiration for the tribal objects and claimed the "primitive" was accepted under the pretenses that it attributed to the success of Western modernists (Araeen, 1991, p. 160).

Araeen's strongest and most disappointing discussion was his friends' reaction to the 1984 exhibition. After speaking with his artist colleagues, Araeen (1991) realized, "The general feeling was lack of interest and cynicism. Some shrugged their shoulders, saying what else would one expect from MoMA, and others denounced the whole thing as another imperialist enterprise" (p. 164). The unsurprised reactions from the public stated here strengthen my argument that discrimination at MoMA existed and it affected the visitor. After analyzing both catalogues and exhibition reviews, a noticeable difference arose in the language MoMA used in the two catalogs.

LANGUAGE CHANGE OVER 50 YEARS

Through an analysis of the exhibition catalogs from 1935 and 1984, it appears that over this fifty-year period at MoMA the language used in these two writings is less blatantly offensive, but is still influenced by racially compromised thinking. Pieterse (1995) defines racial thinking as "attributing inferiority or superiority to people on the basis of their racial characteristics" (p. 45). Both exhibitions operate under racial thinking, but the product appears different. In considering the 1935 catalog, I felt uncomfortable reading the descriptive words written by Sweeney (1935/1966), such as "strange" and "Negro." On the other hand, the discriminatory undertones are more subtle in the 1984 exhibition catalog. Racial slurs and negative connotations are not as clearly evident in the more recent

publications, but upon investigation readers may encounter a bias toward the Western artist

and an assignment of inferiority placed upon the Third World people discussed. Araeen

(1991) states a similar sentiment regarding the 1984 exhibition:

> It seems that the purpose underlying all this scholarship was to perpetuate further
> the idea of primitivism, to remind the so-called 'primitives' how the west
> admires…their cultures and at the same time tell the modern artist, who could only
> be the western artist, the importance of this is his continuing historical role as an
> advancing force. (p. 164)

Both catalogs and exhibitions are upsetting, but for different reasons. The catalog

from 1935 belittles African people and their culture by using discriminating language,

while the catalog in 1984 prioritizes Western art over African objects and perpetuates

Eurocentric values in art. After determining what seems to be inappropriate language

MoMA uses in the catalog descriptions, it is useful to discuss the influential power of

museums and how language used by the museum may very well affect the perceptions and

views of visitors who engage these written materials.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AT THE MUSEUM

For a portion of my study, I wanted to focus on the potential impact language has

on the reader. When experiencing both these catalogs, I could not help but to wonder, how

did the public interpret these texts? How did MoMA's language help to form the public's

opinion of African people? As Araeen (1991) revealed, some visitors were disappointed

but not surprised by MoMA's stance, referring to it as "imperialistic" (p. 164).

When institutions such as museums were initiated in the United States in the

nineteenth century, their ethics were created by the interpretations of "a European, usually

upper-class, and often male, perspective" (Roberts, 1997, p. 115). This Eurocentric scholarship generated the colonial discourse museums continue to use today (Araeen, 1991), and supports a position that museums' ethics are affected by community. I argue the relationship between museum and society is symbiotic, museums influence the ethics of people, and the ethics people hold are shaped, to some degree, by their involvement with museums.

It is common for docents in museums to use the research drawn from museums to provide information and fuel their tours. For this reason, it is worrisome to realize that docents may have used the same language employed by Sweeney and Rubin to educate museum visitors who toured these exhibitions. The text from both catalogs may well influence the visitor and, to some extent, may have left the visitor with negative views of African people. Authors of museum documents bring their own life experiences and beliefs to their writings, similar to the actions of museum visitors. When museum personnel express their viewpoints, those are seen as a reflection of the museum (Roberts, 1997). In some instances, speakers such as Sweeney and Rubin from MoMA reinforce their existing privilege as white men when they use traditional, condescending, or outdated terms in reference to African people and culture (Battistella, 2005, p. 13). Museums have a debatably deserved power to assign an identity to objects, which in turn affects the identity of the object's culture (Roberts, 1997). By recognizing the power museums have within society, it is imperative that museum personnel carefully select their words and work to include multiple narratives in their descriptive and pedagogical material. It may well be that the perspectives communicated from established institutions such as MoMA

contributed, at least to some degree, to the prejudiced and unjust way people treated African Americans at that time, and still do so today.

CONCLUSION

A content analysis of MoMA's exhibition catalogs (1935 and 1984) revealed instances of biases toward Western art and artists, a high frequency of unfavorable characteristics applied to African people and objects, and a discrepancy between the descriptions of African objects and Western art. The *New York Times* review of *African Negro Art* (1935) possessed disparaging words to describe objects made by people in Africa. The harsh words in the *New York Times* coupled with the legally segregated racial society worked to shape a hierarchy of Western art over African objects, and therefore deepened the divide between American whites and African Americans. As time went on, the text used in MoMA's later catalog appears not to be as transparently racist. In MoMA's 1984 catalog, there is a higher frequency of referencing Western art over African objects, which can indicate the importance MoMA assigned to Western art and artists. Both Clifford (1988) and Araeen's (1991) reviews of *"Primitivism" in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) support a position that in 1984 MoMA chose to emphasize and favor Western art over African objects through the language used in the exhibition catalog. After reading and analyzing both catalogs, I started to question what events outside the museum could have influenced this change in language? Knowing that many of the expressive events of the Civil Rights Movement in America occurred between 1935 and 1984, what of these events may have attributed to the still offensive, but less so, language used in MoMA's catalog in 1984? In the following chapter I explore events from the Civil Rights Movement in New

York City, acknowledge their significance for African American people, and speculate how

these events may have affected MoMA in the 50-year period between 1935 and 1984.

Chapter 4: Civil Rights Movement Events in New York City and MoMA Leadership 1935 to 1984

Discourse analysis of MoMA's exhibition catalogs from 1935 to 1984 reveals a change in the language used to describe African people, their objects, and their culture. The change in language shifted from being transparently offensive to becoming more conscious and supportive of African culture. However, the language employed in the later volume was still problematic in many cases. Considering MoMA in a wider context, it is useful to ask what was happening in New York City between 1935 to 1984 in order to help understand why this change in language may have occurred. In searching to answer this question I set out to discover historically important events that occurred in New York City and MoMA that perhaps contributed to the change in language seen in these two museum catalogs separated by 50 years. By researching events that took place during this 50-year period, significant occurrences are revealed involving African Americans that may have influenced MoMA's shift in language in these exhibition catalogs. For the purposes of this study, historical research is focused on events in New York City because immediate occurrences surrounding the community of MoMA seemed to carry the most significant impact. All events discussed here are directly associated with New York City, yet it is useful to acknowledge that the residual effects of these events spread nationwide.

In order to determine which events to focus on for this study, I reflected on happenings in the United States from 1935 to 1984. Ultimately, the Civil Rights Movement was the focus of my study because I felt it was a critical turning point in America's history,

and I was also curious to know what the Civil Rights Movement looked like within New York City. People often learn about the Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 within the context of the South. Biondi (2007) shares a similar position and also claims there should be a differentiation within the Civil Rights Movement: "We actually should call it the southern civil rights movement, because there was a northern civil rights movement that needs to be recognized and understood on its own unique terms" (p. 1). In my school experience, I did not learn much about events in the North during the post-World War II Civil Rights Movement. It is often assumed that locations like New York City were liberal havens and there was not as much of a necessity for people of color to fight for equality in this location.

My research conducted into museums' handling of art emerging from minority groups reveals that racial discrimination was not limited to the South. As shown in Chapter 3, problematic language was present in the North, specifically seen in museum catalogs at MoMA in New York City. Through investigation, I found the North to be an integral component within the Civil Rights Movement. However, it was difficult to identify a large number of scholars who have illuminated the contributions of the North during the Civil Rights Movement, compared to the many writers who have addressed civil rights issues as they unfolded in the South. Martha Biondi's research and writings of the Civil Rights Movement in the North served as the predominant sources throughout this chapter. Biondi (2007) credits civil rights activists for forming our contemporary idea of New York City: "New York is widely seen as a bastion of liberalism in the United States, especially socially and culturally. But it's really the robust movement culture of the city, rather than its

dominant culture, which has generated this image" (p. 5). I use this quote from Biondi (2007) to show support for how influential the Civil Rights Movement was on the city of New York. Taylor (2007) also believes New York City was "one of the most important centers of civil rights activities" (p. 9). Events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956 were inspired by protests in New York City like the Harlem Bus Boycott of 1941 (Taylor, 2007, p. 9).

Civil rights workers were active and dynamic within New York City. It may well be that MoMA experienced a similar cultural shift as the city that surrounded it. In this study, I chose to focus predominantly on significant Northern Civil Rights Movement events that included police brutality, desegregation of public spaces such as amusement parks, and integration of races in cultural industries, because they offer a window toward a variety of struggles African Americans encountered in New York City during the Civil Rights Movement. These events are regarded as benchmarks within the Civil Rights history of New York City and beyond (Biondi, 2003). They show how indirectly related issues could occur in efforts to change the culture of New York City, and are discussed here to help reveal the many and vast avenues of discrimination African Americans have experienced. In the following sections I detail three prominent Civil Rights events that occurred in New York City during the 1940s. A majority of these events in the North served as a catalyst for future civil rights victories for African Americans nationwide in the 1950s and 1960s. For a more detailed timeline of events that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, refer to Appendix B.

FERGUSON BROTHERS KILLING

In the village of Freeport, Long Island on February 5, 1946, two African American brothers, Charles and Alfonso Ferguson, were shot and killed by police officer Joseph Romeika. On that day, Charles and Alphonzo were enjoying a reunion with their other two brothers, Richard and Joseph Ferguson. Both Charles and Alphonzo were US army soldiers. Also, Joseph was in the Navy and Richard was a civilian. Because of their service in World War II, the brothers had not seen each other for some time and decided to spend an evening together, starting at a local coffee shop. While the brothers were at the coffee shop, a white manager refused to serve them and claimed there was no coffee left in his shop. When the Ferguson brothers first protested, and then left the coffee shop, the manager called the police. As the brothers were walking towards the bus stop, Joseph Romeika, a white rookie officer, arrived on the scene and made the decision to arrest the brothers for disorderly conduct. He began to argue with the Ferguson brothers. As the confrontation escalated, officer Romeika ordered the brothers, as well as an African American passerby, to line up. Charles and Joseph Ferguson questioned their arrest. In response, Romeika kicked the men in the groin and then the officer fired his weapon, multiple times, which resulted in the death of both Charles and Alphonzo, as well as wounding Joseph. Suddenly, more police rushed to the scene, ready to de-escalate any "possible uprising of local Negroes" (Biondi, 2007, p. 5).

A few hours later, Richard Ferguson was tried and convicted of disorderly conduct ("Cop Kills Negro Soldier," 1946). Judge Hilbert Johnson felt the punishment was justified and declared, "four fellows going out looking for trouble—they are going to get just what

they are looking for" (Biondi, 2003, p. 62). The brothers were seen as troublemakers and the outcome of their activities was not surprising to the Judge. Nassau County District Attorney James H. Gehrig questioned Romeika's conduct, which resulted in the officer being brought before an all-white Nassau County grand jury. On February 22 the grand jury announced that Romeika would not face indictment. Relatives of the Ferguson brothers were swift to contact local activists, who organized support committees in both New York City and on Long Island. The killing of the two Ferguson brothers ignited a five-month protest in New York City and Long Island. Protesters pressured Governor Thomas Dewey to appoint a special prosecutor, and called for the indictment of officer Romeika, as well as federal intervention. Charles Ferguson's death was ruled as being shot in the line of duty, according to the US army, and Ferguson was buried with full military honors (Biondi, 2007, p. 5). In response, Governor Dewey opened the investigation of the killings, but officer Romeika was never charged with a crime. Vague standards of intent within the Supreme Court prevented the case from being considered. Because of the lack of justice for the Ferguson brothers, activists strengthened their mobilization for a federal anti-lynching statute. Biondi (2003) clarifies that this legislative action was termed an "antilynching law, even though it pertained to police killings as well" (p. 66).

Biondi (2007) states that the Ferguson brothers event was paramount in reviving the national anti-lynching movement after World War II (p. 5). Even though many believe the Ferguson brothers did not receive their due justice, this event spurred Northern civil rights activists to mobilize, and they played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement countrywide. The demonstrations and legal investigation in New York inspired protests

against lynching cases in the South. In such instances, Southern protesters faced heavy violence and resistance from racist white mobs. Northern activists took action by defending their allies in the South, and many Southern activists found refuge from white southerners in the North. Protests against attacks on minority groups were held throughout the country, and eventually influenced President Truman to create the President's Committee on Civil Rights, December 1946. The committee created a report titled *To Secure These Rights*, which "called for the elimination of racial segregation and discrimination in the United States" (Biondi, 2003, p. 69). This report would be influential in shaping civil rights advocacy for the next twenty years.

The Ferguson brothers' family is still seeking justice for this tragic event, and has not found resolution. The *To Secure These Rights* (President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947) report did not succeed in abolishing all forms of discrimination, including police brutality. There is still a need for civil rights activism in attempt to achieve true racial equality.

The shocking and unjust deaths of the Ferguson brothers occurred about twenty years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and forty years before the 1984 MoMA exhibition *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*. Obviously, as seen through the activities surrounding the death of the Ferguson brothers and many other racially motivated acts of harm, African Americans were being discriminated against at this time. During 1946, segregation was still legal and practiced, even in the North. In 1935, it would have been acceptable by the standards of white society for MoMA to describe people from Africa as "Negroes of the primitive type" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, p. 18). Knowing a museum can and

did display this language to the public raises the questions, What impact did MoMA and other institutions have on the public in regards to recognizing and validating people of African descent and or African Americans? If a museum could say those words ("negro," "primitive," and "strange") then were all avenues of society given allowance to say the same?

PALISADES AMUSEMENT PARK POOL PROTESTS

African Americans struggled to gain equality in restaurants and hotels, but public swimming pools posed a more difficult resistance from white society. Severe racist thinking kept swimming pools segregated by race. For many whites, the inclusion of African Americans in the leisure of swimming would raise the possibility of interracial intimacy, something that was not acceptable to many during the 1940s. Even worse, many whites subscribed to the idea that African American bodies were unclean. Because of this racist thinking, some communities would drain and refill pools with new water before whites would swim because African Americans had been in the pool before them (O'Brian, 2009). Young civil rights activists classified swimming pools as representative of "leisure, class mobility, and youth culture—aspects of the so-called American Dream" (Biondi, 2003, p. 82). In order to achieve true social equality, social activists needed to protest segregated swimming pools as one example to show that everyone should have access to the American Dream.

Palisades Amusement Park was situated on the Hudson River, directly across the water from Harlem. The owner, Irving Rosenthal, insured his white clientele that African Americans could not partake in the white working class swimming oasis by claiming that

the pool was a private club. In 1947, direct action campaigns were started by the Harlem-based Modern Trend Progressive Youth Group and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). These groups engaged in non-violent demonstrations of protest similar to those of Mahatma Gandhi (Biondi, 2003, p. 82).

These youth groups engaged in a stand-in. They lined up close by the pool's ticket booth and began to chant, "Don't Get Cool at Palisades Pool, Get Your Relaxation Where There's No Discrimination" (Biondi, 2003, pp. 82-83). The pool was successfully closed on the first Sunday in July 1947, but their efforts would not go unpunished. The Palisades security guards, who were also moonlighting police officers, used force to break up the youth's picket line. The guards shoved and punched some of the protestors; the police were so rough that they fractured the ribs of one protestor. The violence led Rosenthal, the owner of the pool, to call the police. The officers also used forced to remove the protestors. Fred Stengell, Police Chief, told the protestors, "Negroes are not allowed in this pool. They are allowed in the Park—if they behave themselves" (Biondi, 2003, p. 83). Four protesters were detained for picketing at the park's gates, but these protestors did not give up easily.

The activists attended training in nonviolence and continued to picket the pool every Sunday. On August 10, six CORE members were swiftly seized when they began to picket at the park's gates. Palisades security guards reacted with force and violence, but could not stop the youth from returning. This action continued through the month of August until a security guard reportedly told a picketer, "I'd like to kill you." The security guard then beat the protester unconscious, breaking his jaw (Biondi, 2003, p. 83). This act

prompted African American leaders to call for federal authorities to stop the Palisades' "Mississippi-style reign of terror" (Biondi, 2003, p. 83).

Activists used New York's pride to their advantage. They drew comparisons between southern Jim Crow and New York City in order to shame white New Yorkers into changing segregation practices in the North. In the summer of 1948, the youth activists returned to picket at the Palisades Amusement Park. Even though the protestors encountered resistance from Palisades Park owners and security guards, the violence had significantly diminished.

CORE filed state and federal civil rights suits against Palisades Amusement Park. Palisades ownership responded by defending its right to discriminate against pool visitors on the grounds of being a private business beyond the influence of federal regulation. However, CORE was successful in the U.S. Court of Appeals. CORE's legal victory included the ruling that the sales of tickets at the Palisades Park constituted a contract, and the right to enter into contracts rested under the same terms for both African American and white citizens, thus they were both protected by federal law.

The Palisades Park protests were the catalyst for a civil rights law passed in New Jersey that prohibited racial discrimination in swimming pools. This legal outcome of the protests serves as an example of the influential reach of civil rights activists. If an event like the Palisades Amusement Park protests could lead to the enactment of statewide laws, then these events are influential enough to affect a change in New York City's perception of people of color. As equality was being championed by activists and laws were changing

to abolish segregation, institutions like MoMA needed to respond also to the new status quo that was emerging in the area in and around New York City.

In 1935, MoMA introduced their first exclusively African object exhibition. This exhibition was a benchmark in innovation, yet the African culture was presented here in what I consider to be a highly offensive manner. As time progressed in New York City and civil rights activists were demanding change, shifts are seen in MoMA's exhibitions. MoMA integrated African objects and modernist works into the same exhibition. MoMA's *"Primitivism" in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984) situated African objects within the field of art history, yet the museum's methods in doing so remain questionable. In other words, progress was seen in the presentation and in the number of objects displayed, yet the language used to do so still displayed a clear sense of racial hierarchy. Unfortunately, MoMA had to use the Western paradigm of modernist art in order to approach the African objects, but there appears to be some progressive change seen in the language used between *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20ᵗʰ Century Art* (1984). As society changed—albeit slowly—through protests, and the United States granted the deserved equality to people of color, it appears MoMA reacted with their exhibitions in a somewhat similar manner.

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES INTEGRATION

In the 1940s, Black[3] cultural workers sought inclusion and representation in the arts such as film, theater, television, radio, and music industries. They also desired and worked

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[3] "Black" is capitalized and recognized as a proper noun to respect the self-identification of African Americans.

toward having greater say in what was produced within these industries. Political activists found affinity between the visual representations or productions and African Americans' "struggle for racial justice" (Biondi, 2003, p. 93). When African Americans were present in film, radio, or other cultural productions, they were often portrayed with negative characteristics. In 1947 the National Negro Congress (NNC) conducted a conference in Manhattan with over a hundred workers in the cultural industries. The purpose of the conference was "to survey the position of Negroes in the theater, radio, screen, music, and advertising" (Biondi, 2003, p. 93), as well as the presence of African American employment in the cultural industries. A report was generated from those findings, which revealed that racial discrimination permeated all aspects of cultural industries in the United States.

The report revealed that there was a significant disparity of employment between African American and whites working in these cultural industries. For example, major motion picture companies employed seven African Americans out of three thousand white-collar workers (Biondi, 2003). While a large number of African American musicians was identified, it was found that they were segregated and underpaid when compared to their white counterparts. Discrimination prevented African Americans from joining symphony orchestras or performing at and working for high-class cultural affairs. African American musicians were limited in the spaces they could perform, which prevented most of them from working full-time. The report found jazz clubs to be the main exception within the white-dominant musical world. The NNC report advocated for the hiring of African American writers, actors, producers, and white-collar service workers. Their argument for

including African Americans in the cultural industries was that the exclusion "from the culture and media of an affluent and powerful nation produced cultural stereotypes, distortions and evasions" (Biondi, 2003, p. 94). The discrimination of African Americans in the cultural industry perpetuated the idea that privileged forms of entertainment, such as film and music, were only for white people. Since African Americans were less involved in the cultural productions during the 1940s, most of what was revealed to the public was done so through a white paradigm, similar to what was seen at MoMA's *African Negro Art* (1935) exhibition.

In film and radio, African Americans were very often depicted in a severely negative manner and frequently subject to being revealed through offensive stereotypes. If an African American did appear in film, they were often "depicted in a derogatory manner, drunk and vulgar," and in radio African Americans were presented in "subordinate or criminal roles" (Biondi, 2003, p. 94). In 1949, African American actor Canada Lee spoke on the issue of the distorted image of African Americans in media in his speech, "Radio and the Negro People." Lee argued that radio shows where African Americans are depicted in negative roles abetted the racial discrimination and pigeonholed African American performers into undesirable roles (Biondi, 2003). Lee stated, "It is the lazy gambler, the shiftless-thieving, razor-wielding Negro that has come to represent the totality of Negro life" (Biondi, 2003, p. 94). These stereotypes from the media revealed subtle–and sometimes clear–ways of keeping the races separate and denied African Americans true equality and the recognition of being mature and thoughtful citizens. Lee claimed the voices of African Americans were not being represented or heard because the stereotypical

African Americans who were presented in the media were not truly representative of African Americans. To the white public, equal rights were not a necessity and African Americans did not deserve respect because the only depictions of African Americans they received were distorted and negative, and affirmed racist whites' ideas and beliefs about non-white people.

All forms of media were very white-washed. Viewers who tuned into radio or film saw everything through a "white normative society" (Biondi, 2003, p. 94), while ignoring the cultural vibrancy of African Americans. Lee's critiques and call for African American centered programming sparked grassroots mobilization to protest racist media.

Activists specifically targeted the film *Birth of a Nation*, which was being screened in various locations even though it was banned in 1915. *Birth of a Nation* is a troublesome 1915 film that, according to the NAACP, "glorifies the Ku Klux Klan, preaches race hatred against Negroes and openly advocates mob violence against them" (Biondi, 2003, p. 97). The film received resistance two decades before the re-screening in 1947 and was declared as "Ku Klux Klan Propaganda" ("Negroes Oppose Film," 1921) by the NAACP. Protestors shortened the screenings of the re-release of the film in at least three instances, and venues such as The Majestic Theater and the Republic Theater in New York City withdrew the film in 1946 and 1947, respectively. The picketing and protests of *Birth of a Nation*, the vocalization for representation of African American in cultural institutions, and the call for wider employment opportunities had a national effect on changing the character of public institutions. In the North, racial discrimination was pushed to the forefront and forced the city government to take a second look at the relationship between race and public policy.

Canada Lee's sentiments about negative depictions of African Americans in the media in the 1930s and '40s can be applied to MoMA's exhibition *African Negro Art* (1935). In *African Negro Art,* African people were distortedly represented as primitive people, difficult to understand, and their objects are considered "strange" (Sweeney, 1935/1966, pp. 16, 21). Visitors of MoMA approached the African objects through the lens of a "white normative society" (Biondi, 2003, p. 94) and African cultural context was not prevalent in the catalog or exhibition. Similar issues that activists had with film and radio are found at MoMA in 1935. Art museums are a part of cultural society and a negative image or sweeping stereotypes about African people could have been applied to African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s.

MoMA HISTORY AND LEADERSHIP 1935 TO 1984

After taking a look at some events that occurred outside MoMA from 1935 to 1984, it is valuable to narrow the focus directed toward those individuals who curated the exhibitions, and become familiar with their leadership styles. It is apparent by the racial segregation and oppression in New York City during the mid 1900s that white society, in general, did not value African Americans. Based on the personality and leadership styles of the curators at MoMA, what can we infer about their values directed toward people of color?

MoMA was founded in 1929 by Alfred H. Barr, a man who envisioned a museum different from any other collection and exhibition institution the United States had seen until that time. Before MoMA, museums followed the format of the European museum, a collection of historical objects. American museums also differed from European museums

because they were endowed by private individuals and not by politicians (Schubert, 2009, p. 39). Barr created a museum dedicated to modern art and he defined it as "a laboratory" (Schubert, 2009, p. 45) because of the new and experimental collecting habits at MoMA. Modern and contemporary objects were not a source for collection before MoMA, and Barr was an entrepreneur for the modern museum we are familiar with today.

James Johnson Sweeney, a white man, was the curator and director of the department of painting and sculpture at MoMA from 1935 to 1946. For the *African Negro Art* (1935) catalog, Sweeney commissioned photographer Walker Evans to take photos of the African objects for the exhibition (Webb, 2000). In the catalog, the photographs are not accompanied with lengthy captions (description of piece, location, collection), as Sweeney called on Evans to capture the formal aesthetic qualities of the objects ("African Negro Art," 1940). It does not appear Sweeney was concerned with furnishing contextual information about the work or supplying didactic panels to accompany the photographs. Sweeney curated other exhibitions for MoMA until 1946, when he resigned after an administrative structure change abridged his authority as curator. Sweeney commonly reacted to power threats by resigning or leaving his positions at museums (Glueck, 1986). In 1952, Sweeney was hired as director of the Guggenheim Museum (Glueck, 1986, p. 8). During Sweeney's time at the Guggenheim he focused on exhibiting and buying the works of modernists, and European and American artists. Sweeney's idea of a museum was in line with the "white cube," a common museum-world perspective utilized during the 1950s. He painted the walls of the Guggenheim white and stripped paintings of any frames he deemed "distracting" (Glueck, 1986, p. 8), and again prioritized the collecting and

exhibiting of modernist paintings. Over time, Harry Guggenheim requested there be a more popular education approach to the public; Sweeney responded by resigning his position at the Guggenheim. Finally, Sweeney was appointed director of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in 1961, but resigned once more after a trustee objected to his style management (Glueck, 1986, p. 8). Sweeney spent the remainder of his professional life as an art adviser.

As seen by example, Sweeney did not respond well to change. It appears that when the museum—as an institution or individual—challenged Sweeney, he responded by recoiling and resisting. He championed art for aesthetic ends and did not place the same priority on the contextual components of art and objects. We can only speculate that Sweeney would not have approved of MoMA changing his catalog or exhibition to include more contextual information or voices of African people. Many of his exhibitions were confined to a Eurocentric vacuum, which seemed to be his preference of display. In the 1930s, when Sweeney was curator at MoMA, African Americans were not given a platform to speak for change, and employing people like Sweeney in powerful institutions, such as museums, kept racial integration from mobilizing. If people in power are resistant to change, then their work will reflect these values. Digging deeper into Sweeney's character reveals how much his exhibitions paralleled his personality. Sweeney appears biased in a positive way toward Western artists, and approached African objects in the same manner he would Western art. His ideals and values were harmful toward Blacks because *African Negro Art* (1935) portrayed a distorted vision of African people and culture. Therefore, people who visited the museum easily left this esteemed institution with perceptions of false stereotypes and mislabeled understandings about people of color.

As time went on, hiring practices at MoMA did not change drastically. William Rubin, a white man, was director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA from 1973 to 1988. Rubin, like Sweeney, was enamored with modernists. By the 1960s, MoMA became a capsule for modern art and defined itself as the collection of record for modern art (Schubert, 2009, p. 48). Rubin was especially enthralled with Picasso, and Rubin curated myriad exhibitions focused on Picasso and other modern artists from MoMA's collection. Like Sweeney, Rubin positioned himself as the museum personnel in charge, and he often engaged in debates with critics of his shows. William Rubin was a controversial figure in the art world. He was described as an egotist who negotiated with the art world in order to ultimately benefit the collections at MoMA (McGill, 1985). He followed in the trend of his predecessors and sold off artworks he considered unimportant, in order to finance new and typically Western art for MoMA's collection. Rubin's installation style followed in the tradition of MoMA's founder, Alfred H. Barr Jr. Barr demonstrated entrepreneurial power and an "unashamedly Eurocentric outlook" (Schubert, 2009, p. 49) towards art. He created exhibitions that were inspired by the formalist and historically linear history of art, which emphasized Western "masters." Rubin followed the tradition of Barr's narrowly focused exhibitions and continued to champion Western modernists.

Again, Rubin resisted changing the practices of MoMA, much like his predecessor Sweeney. Rubin's extensive record of modernist-focused exhibitions, coupled with his aggressive arguments conducted with those who disagreed with him, paints Rubin as another figure who resisted a new kind of museum education. By 1984, the Civil Rights

Act was twenty years old and progress toward racial acceptance was being made nationally. However, it seems as though MoMA did not progress at the same pace of change as society in general, based on the frequent critiques Rubin received. It appears MoMA did not take cues from the activists in the Northern Civil Rights Movement and welcome change to their institution. By hiring men like Sweeney and Rubin, MoMA sanctioned the institution to continue displaying their racist values in the exhibitions they mounted. Visitors to the museum may well recognize instances of racism, sexism, or oppression and bring those issues to light. If visitors to the museum are met with discriminatory curators like Rubin, who refuse to acknowledge a changing world, then society may well label the museum an unwelcoming and unrepresentative space.

CONCLUSION

Researching an uncommon avenue of civil rights history revealed how impacting protestors and activists could be on the culture of New York City and beyond. The death of the Ferguson brothers sparked protestors to help bring an end to lynching and curtail police brutality in the United States. Southern states responded in solidarity and urged for legal action and the induction of anti-lynching laws. While activists were successful in persuading the President's Committee on Civil Rights to create *To Secure These Rights* in 1947, issues such as police brutality are still prevalent in contemporary United States. Activists at the Palisades Amusement park protested for the right to equal opportunities in leisure. Swimming pools were one of the last public areas to be integrated in the United States. Racist individuals feared pools would promote intimate contact between African Americans and white people, which could result in interracial relationships. Ultimately,

persistent protestors were able to influence a law in New Jersey barring segregation of public swimming pools. Canada Lee and his speech "Radio and the Negro People" sparked protests for equal employment opportunities for African Americans in cultural industries and the demand of halting distorted depictions of African Americans in the media. The numerous protests against the severely racist film *Birth of a Nation* successfully shut down the screening of it in numerous theaters. Persistent protests in 1940s New York City proved to be paramount in shaping the future of civil rights in the United States.

Revealing the personalities behind the curators of MoMA's exhibitions from 1935 and 1984 helped to unmask how influential one's values are in shaping their professional work. Both Sweeney and Rubin were white men with seemingly little interest in accepting ideological challenge and criticism. They were both in powerful positions at MoMA, and their Eurocentric values of art were a reflection of the museum in general. Their bias toward Western art is seen in both the exhibition catalogs (1935 and 1984), after learning about Sweeney and Rubin's underlying beliefs and approaches to exhibition practice. However, this study did find some visible evidence of change in the catalogs between 1935 and 1984. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) argues "museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surround them" (p. 1). MoMA and the staff could have reacted to the political changes surrounding the museum and changed their language in the catalogs based on what was unfolding in society.

Chapter 5 revisits the thesis as a whole as well as offers further suggestions for contemporary museum educators who want to teach in an anti-racist manner. Currently,

museums are still adjusting to contemporary society and may likely benefit from anti-racist

museum education methods. Chapter 5 briefly considers changes that need to be made in

museums and discusses the kind of daily considerations museums educators should think

about during their practice. The concluding chapter will recap my research, the poignant

outcomes of the study, and identify recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the change in language found in MoMA's exhibition catalogs, *African Negro Art* (1935) to *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984). Both catalogs described the aesthetics of African objects, but do so in different ways. *African Negro Art* (1935) was the accompanying catalog for MoMA's first African-centered exhibition, which introduced an enormous volume of African culture and cultural objects into the United States. The curator of the exhibition, James Johnson Sweeney (1935/1966), referred to the African objects as "exotic" (p. 21) in the catalog, which distanced the museum audience from the exhibition by othering African people and framing African objects as a subject more difficult to approach than Western art. In the *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) catalog, embedded language highlighted and prioritized modernist Western artists over African artists. William Rubin (1984), curator of the exhibition, was not concerned with the African objects in the same way as the modernists, and wanted to "understand the Primitive sculptures in the terms of the Western context" (p. 1).

MoMA's language used in the exhibition catalogs changed from 1935 to 1984. During that fifty-year period there were heavily influential moments in U.S. history, such as the Civil Rights Movement, which worked to give voice and agency to African Americans in this country. The primary research for this study was a look into events that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement in the North, specifically in New York City, in order to uncover the influential power of African American civil rights activists on

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society, and ultimately on MoMA. This study focused on three separate events in New York City that contributed to the progress of civil rights in the United States. These events influenced decided change in New York City, and therefore could very well have impacted, to some degree, MoMA's shift in language used in the exhibition catalogs.

THE NECESSITY TO STUDY MUSEUM LANGUAGE

Language used in MoMA's exhibition catalogs in 1935 and 1984 was shocking and upsetting to read. This is especially the case for the earlier of the two publications. There was an overbearing air of Western superiority present in both examples. Recognizing that an esteemed institution like MoMA used language which had such an offensive tone in their publications concerned me because I wondered about the message regarding African culture and people the audience received in 1935 and 1984. As someone who aids in the training of museum docents, I am extremely careful about the language I use to talk about artists, culture, and art. Directly prior to the publication and display of *African Negro Art* (1935), MoMA introduced their docent program in 1932 (MoMA.org, 2009). In my experience, docents receive the majority of their training information about the art in the collection from curators and the exhibitions department. As recognized in Chapter 3, the language used by the curators in MoMA's exhibition catalogs was belittling towards African culture and people. If MoMA trained their docents with the curators' writings from the exhibition catalogs, then the public who partook in MoMA's tours lead by these docents may well have understood African people and culture in a distorted and very biased manner. Additionally, visitors who chose to buy exhibition catalogs or read the museum brochures would leave the museum with a low and negative impression of African culture

and people portrayed by MoMA's curators. Ravelli (2006) highlights that museum texts are important because they "form a central component of a museum's communication agenda" (p. 3). The literature provided by museums is a reflection of the institution's thoughts and beliefs about what is being displayed. Museum personnel should be aware of what they are portraying to society through their language, ensuring that what is written and said is exempt of stereotypes, assumptions, and portrayal of a narrowly reinforced narratives. The museum needs to be aware of its influential power in society and reexamine what is being shown to their communities in order to ensure they are inclusive and not discriminating toward a group of people through their language. Museum educators can use this study to initiate consideration and conversation about of how much of an impact the beliefs and personality of museum personnel can be reflected in the written texts museums produce for the public. This study also highlights the influential power of society, and how protests contributed to the shift in the status quo of New York City and various locations within the United States. In contemporary society, civil rights protests are still prevalent and museums should recognize how they can help elevate dampened voices of minority groups. Museums could be a new avenue for activists, and reside at the forefront of a progressive society.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

After the initial look at the language change in MoMA's catalogs seen between 1935 and 1984, I began to question what historically significant events may have come to bear on MoMA to direct changes in the language used in these two exhibition catalogs. In the 50-year period between 1935 and 1984, the United States experienced a societal shift,

and a large part of that change was a byproduct of the Civil Rights Movement and Civil Rights Act of 1964. Knowing how influential events such as protests were in changing the social fabric, structure, and laws of the United States, it could be assumed that MoMA, to some degree, also changed in response to civil rights events. When we learn about the Civil Rights Movement, it is generally centered around the South (Taylor, 2007, p. 7). For purposes of this study, the historical research was focused on civil rights events that occurred in New York City in order to attempt to understand how shifts in the immediate community surrounding MoMA could have influenced the language change seen in these museum catalogs.

The following research question directed and motivated this research: A critical analysis of written text and visual images included in The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition catalogs *African Negro Art* (1935) and *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) reveals a decided difference in how African objects and culture are depicted in these two publications. Exploring these differences in MoMA's depictions of African objects, what social and political events occurred in and around the city of New York and MoMA between 1935 and 1984 that may have contributed to this change in the verbal depiction of African objects and culture identified in these museum catalogs?

By looking at the impact significant civil rights events that occurred in New York City between 1935 to 1984 had at the local and national level, it could be surmised that MoMA felt the direct or residual effect of social change, and in response shifted the language used in their catalogs. The relationship between the selected Northern Civil Rights Movement events and the language change of MoMA's catalogs between 1935 and

1984 provide support for the view that museums are influenced by their surrounding community. Throughout the course of this study, my findings were focused on civil rights events in New York City and how these events may have affected MoMA's curatorial practices and writings in their catalogs.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS

This study was comprised of two methods of research: content analysis and historical research. In Chapter 3, I identified examples of offensive language in MoMA's catalogs *African Negro Art* (1935) and "*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) to critically analyze the text and deduce embedded meaning from the catalogs. Content analysis is a thorough investigation of the words and phrases utilized by the author. For the purposes of this study, I focused on the embedded meaning of the language written in MoMA's exhibition catalogs. Beyond this, I speculated about the effect of this language on those who read the museum's literature. I referred to Krippendorff's "Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology" to aid in my understanding of what content analysis can accomplish and how to conduct this form of research. Krippendorff's book includes brief descriptions of types of analysis within content analysis, including discourse analysis. According to Krippendorff (2013), discourse analysis is focused on how certain phenomena are represented through text (p. 22). Krippendorff references Teun a. van Dijk, a scholar who performed discourse analysis in order to study racism in the press. van Dijk's (1991) study focused on the language used to describe African Americans, but also centered on the relationship between the content of the text and the "cognitive, social, political, and cultural structures of their contexts" (p. 22). This thesis research stressed the

significant connection seen between MoMA's content included in the catalogs and the "social, political, and cultural" (van Dijk, 1991, p. 22) structure of New York City. In MoMA's catalogs published in 1935 and 1984, the curator informed readers about African objects and culture. Through discourse analysis, this study found affinity between the offensive language used in MoMA's catalogs and the disrespectful treatment of African Americans in the United States during the 1940s. As the language in MoMA's catalogs changed from overtly offensive to less so, but still containing some problematic phrases, New York City experienced some degree of social, political, and cultural reformation for African Americans.

In order to connect the content of MoMA's catalogs with the context of New York City, it was important to research historical events in New York City between 1935 and 1984. In Chapter 4, I provided accounts of three events centered around African American civil rights activities in New York City during the 1940s. Martha Biondi's research was paramount in this study because she offers a comprehensive study of Civil Rights Movement events that occurred in New York City. As stated in the above section, the Civil Rights Movement is typically discussed within the context of the southern United States. The sources written by Biondi provide details about significant civil rights events such as protests against police brutality and segregation. Biondi then expands on those actions and explains how occurrences that happened in New York City affected legal and social change throughout the United States. Historical research was necessary in this study because studying history aids researchers in better understanding "why did" something happen, such as the change in language found in MoMA's catalogs, and "how might" (Bolin, 2009)

events such as civil rights protests affect MoMA? Continuing to research past events also illuminates stories that may have been ignored by researchers in the past. Researchers such as Biondi furnish a new addition to history; she provided a voice for New York City civil rights activists. It is imperative historical research remain a staple of methodology so that as many voices from the past as possible can be heard.

SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES FROM THE STUDY

In Chapter 3, a thorough analysis of the language used by MoMA in the catalogs from 1935 and 1984 revealed instances of racism and examples of embedded racial oppression. For example, in the 1935 catalog, *African Negro Art*, James Johnson Sweeney, a white man and author of the catalog, attributed "unfavorable characteristics" (Krippendorff, 2013) toward African objects and culture. Some of the characteristics Sweeney (1935/1966) assigned to the African objects and people included the descriptors "strange" (pp. 16, 21) "primitive" (p. 18), and "exotic" (p. 21). According to Krippendorff's (2013) list of indicators in content analysis, the number of "unfavorable characteristics attributed to a symbol, idea, or reference are taken to indicate the attitudes held by the writers, the readers, or their common culture toward the object named or indicated" (p. 59).

In Chapter 4, research into James Johnson Sweeney, the MoMA curator of *African Negro Art* (1935), revealed Sweeney most likely did regard African culture and people unfavorably based on the African descriptive characteristics he employed in the catalog text as well as his leadership style at MoMA. Sweeney chose to publish the *African Negro Art* (1935) catalog with photographs of the objects from the exhibition and accompanied

the photos with short captions containing little to no contextual information. Sweeney focused his attention on the formal aesthetic qualities of the African objects, and it appeared that Sweeney was not concerned with exploring and presenting the contextual content associated with the African objects.

As a curator, Sweeney did not react positively when his power as a leader was questioned or threatened (Glueck, 1986). In 1946, Sweeney resigned as curator at MoMA when an administrative structure change abbreviated his power as a curator (Glueck, 1986, p. 8). Throughout his career, Sweeney often left his positions at institutions for similar reasons. It appears he was not receptive to change at the museum, which seemed to translate into his writings in the 1935 catalog, as he addressed African objects in much the same manner he had always approached Western art. However, Sweeney (1935/1966) could not categorize the African objects in a similar fashion as Western art, so he described the African objects and culture as "strange" (pp. 16, 21).

Discussed in Chapter 4, it was apparent that African Americans were treated unjustly by many members of white society in the United States during the 1940s. Like Sweeney, business owners of coffee shops or amusement parks were resistant to change their practices and serve customers of color. People like Irving Rosenthal, owner of the Palisades Amusement Park pool, was very adamant to keep the swimming pool a place for white people only (Biondi, 2003). Rosenthal was resistant to change swimming pool restrictions to include people of color, and it took a year of persistent protestors and legal action to alter the social demographics of those served by Rosenthal's swimming pool (Biondi, 2003). There are similar personality traits seen between James Johnson Sweeney

and Irving Rosenthal, such as their dominant attitudes and resistance to change. This study found that during the 1930s and '40s white people in power from various industries would not accept the shifting social and cultural profile of the United States. People like Sweeney and Rosenthal prioritized white people in the venues of art and recreation over people of color. Various parts of New York City's society did not value individuals of color to the same degree they did white people. The affinity between James Johnson Sweeney's offensive language in MoMA's catalog *African Negro Art* (1935) and the discriminating behavior of Irving Rosenthal affirms that there was a culture of white superiority that spanned through an array of areas in American society.

Chapter 3 revealed a change in language employed in MoMA's catalog between the years 1935 and 1984. The 1984 catalog "*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* was written by William Rubin, a white man and curator of the exhibition. Rubin's introduction in the catalog was embedded with language that prioritized modernists over the African people and culture. In *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) there was a complete absence of chapters referring to African artists; the two volumes of the catalog were filled with chapters focused on modernists. Krippendorff's (2013) list of indicators in content analysis states that the "frequency with which a symbol, idea, reference, or topic occurs in a stream of messages is taken to indicate the importance of, attention to, or emphasis on that symbol, idea, reference or topic in the messages" (p. 59). The catalog for *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984) is filled with a multitude of references to modernists and the focus of the chapters is placed on Western artists. Through content analysis conducted on the texts, it can be deduced that Rubin, as the curator of *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*, did not

believe African objects and culture to be nearly as important as modernists or Western art because of the infrequency of the writings included about the African objects. Rubin, like Sweeney, employed his power as curator to elevate the presence of Western art. Rubin approached "*Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* through a Eurocentric paradigm because he wanted to follow the tradition of MoMA's founder, Alfred H. Barr Jr. Barr emphasized MoMA's collection of art by Western "masters" and did not focus attention on non-Western art to the same degree.

The most significant finding in this study involved the various ways white supremacy was presented in MoMA's catalogs. Even though the 1935 catalog for *African Negro Art* is a more obvious example of racist language, content analysis reveals that discrimination and racism can manifest themselves in various ways such as the frequency in which a topic is discussed in *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984). Reading deeper into the resources that MoMA distributed reveals a strong priority directed toward white and Western art in both instances that were studied.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on two MoMA catalogs produced in the years 1935 and 1984, and did not explore any of MoMA's most recent resources from the past twenty years. It would be interesting and worthwhile to conduct a study that compares the language used in *African Negro Art* (1935), *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* (1984), and a more contemporary exhibition catalog that includes discussion of African objects, culture, and people. Content analysis undertaken on the language used in an exhibition catalog from the

twenty-first century could reveal how MoMA's values regarding Africans and African Americans have or have not changed since 1984.

In the future, a study related to this thesis could also focus on the civil rights events taking shape today. Civil rights activists continue to pursue equality for minorities through protests against police brutality and institutional racism. A future study could focus on events happening today that are making an impact on society and museums like MoMA. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) argues that museums react to political change in their community and attempt to alter their position and practice in accordance with the surrounding social, economic, and political climate. Further research could reveal examples of other museums that have modified their practices and values over time.

Moreover, a future study could focus on a museum with exhibitions focused on or including minority groups, such as people of color other than African Americans, women, or members of the LGBTQ community. The study could center on language museum personnel used to describe minorities in the museum's written resources as well as historically impacting events related to equality movements and LGBTQ individuals, women, and other people of color. Ultimately, I would encourage researchers to study the museum through the paradigms of marginalized groups and revisit exhibitions or catalogs that seem inclusive on the surface, but doing so through critical analysis may reveal questionable, yet easily overlooked, museum values.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUSEUM EDUCATORS

Museum educators serve an important role in the museum because they reside and are a critical communication bridge between the museum and museum visitors. Because of

that responsibility, it is imperative for museum educators to recognize what kind of information, in the form of written and spoken language, is being shared with the community. Museum educators should analyze the past language used in catalogs, brochures, wall labels, and in tours, and then reflect on how their dialogue could be interpreted by the public. Educating museum visitors goes beyond viewing an object, as a recognition of context is also necessary to consider (Mayer, 1998). This thesis could serve as motivation for museums and museum educators to explore the use of content analysis. In so doing museum educators may notice similar trends of offensive or embedded language in their literature, such as training materials for docents. Changing the language produced by a museum cannot be accomplished by one department. As revealed in this thesis, museum catalogs are primarily the responsibility of curators, who are typically members of the exhibitions department. The education and exhibitions department should work in tandem to search for and eliminate potentially harmful language in their literature. This process requires discomfort at times, as it is necessary for museum personnel to recognize their personal biases directed towards groups of people unlike them. Melinda Mayer (1998) acknowledges the struggle and work needed to make the museum an educational institution that is beneficial to people and objects. More effort needs to happen within the galleries, beyond placing objects in them with little to no contextual information (Mayer, 1998). Thankfully, the field of art history and, therefore, curators, are changing. Mayer (1998) addresses that the shift in art history philosophy opens up alternate interpretations informed by social issues such as multiculturalism and feminism. The new art history began around the post-modern era (Mayer, 1998), around the time of

"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art, so it is possible that curators are operating in a more conscious way when approaching non-Western objects. However, as new social concerns rise, such as discrimination against the LGBTQ or refugees, museum personnel should be open to art that relates to them.

Establishing a museum with inclusive language in tours and literature could change the social dynamic of the museum, and as a result a new museum audience could form. Sociologist Zolberg (1994) states it is the museum's responsibility to "seek out those who would normally not enter" the museum (p. 49). Museum personnel need to become familiar with a range of museum visitors and study the local audience. In doing so the museum learns if they are reflecting the values and identities of their community. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) reveals that museums are approaching their audiences in new ways by recognizing the various attributes of the surrounding community (p. 125). However, there is still room for museum personnel to grow. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) points out that the "new ways of thinking about visitors are themselves not yet sufficiently sophisticated" (p. 125). Educators should work with the community and reach out to people who would not typically visit on their own accord. The relation between the museum and visitors have changed over the years; Ravelli (2006) reveals that museums are attempting to understand the demographics of their visitors. In addition, museums are working more diligently to evaluate their visitors' responses to the museum and then adjust their practices accordingly (Ravelli, 2006, p. 2).

Community outreach is not the only task educators need to undertake; they also need to generate activities and exhibitions that relate to more than the traditional museum

visitor. Creating an inclusive environment in the museum requires museum educators to involve the other museum departments in their endeavors, especially the exhibition department which normally generates the catalogs, labels, and other written resources. Museums possess the power to shape and change the way the public perceives art and objects (Carrier, 2006, p. 87), and that responsibility for doing so should not be taken lightly by museum educators.

Moreover, it is imperative that the museum staff is aligned with their community. Hiring practices should change to involve a diverse staff of people working in the education department, and then extend those hiring practices throughout the entire museum. When people from various backgrounds work together, new ideas and values can surface and form fresh ways for the museum to approach various types of cultural art. In this study, MoMA approached African objects through the Western paradigm that defined African objects, culture, and people as the "other," in comparison to the rest of MoMA's collection (Bohrer, 1994, p. 197). While it is not wrong to find differences between cultural objects from the West and non-West, MoMA generated a definition of Africa based on it being unlike the familiar (the West), which created and reinforced incorrect assumptions of Africa for the public. It is imperative museum educators become more aware of cultures that are not Western, but proceed with caution and ensure the information they receive is valid and not viewed solely through a Western lens.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In order to ensure a viable future for museums, those in power at the museum should continuously work to modify how they are perceived by the public. Museum educators

should ask themselves how their privilege affects areas of their work. It is necessary for those privileges and biases not to manifest themselves in the language employed in the museum. Museum educators may have to reprogram their minds, Staikidis (2010) reveals "university studio art and art education courses are still taught primarily from a Euro-centric skills-based or formalist perspective that tends to exclude multiple perspectives and indigenous epistemologies" (p. 213). Practicing mindfulness and critical self-reflection contributes to more conscious decisions inside and outside the work environment. How has one's background affected their perception of other groups, and are those insights, positive or negative, present in the messages generated by the museum? As a white, cisgender, straight, women, I must reflect often on my educational methods and understand how my privilege and background affect practices and language I use as a museum educator. How can I write about African objects if I do not reach out to those with primary knowledge about African creations, people, and culture? As a straight person, how can I assume or define what is "normal" in the LGBTQ community? As a white person, how can I fully understand offensive language directed toward people of color? While I may not be able to completely empathize with people from backgrounds unlike my own, I can work every day to take myself out of my comfort zone and learn about and feel the struggles of others. Researching and discussing difficult topics is not meant to make privileged people feel guilty for the past. Instead, becoming aware of the multiple voices in history encourages one to be more aware of their surroundings and the missing voices unheard today. During this study, I forced myself to approach difficult subjects such as segregation and police brutality from the 1940s, but through this historical investigation I found similarities with

these in contemporary society. I became more aware of the necessity for additional change in our society today in terms of the mistreatment of minority groups. There are similar trends of discrimination against the LGBTQ community, misrepresentation of trans people, and the still present police brutality against non-white people. Museums educators may contribute to difficult conversations surrounding these events present in society today. When so doing, people who work in museums should be aware of their positions of power and carefully consider all the words they write and speak.
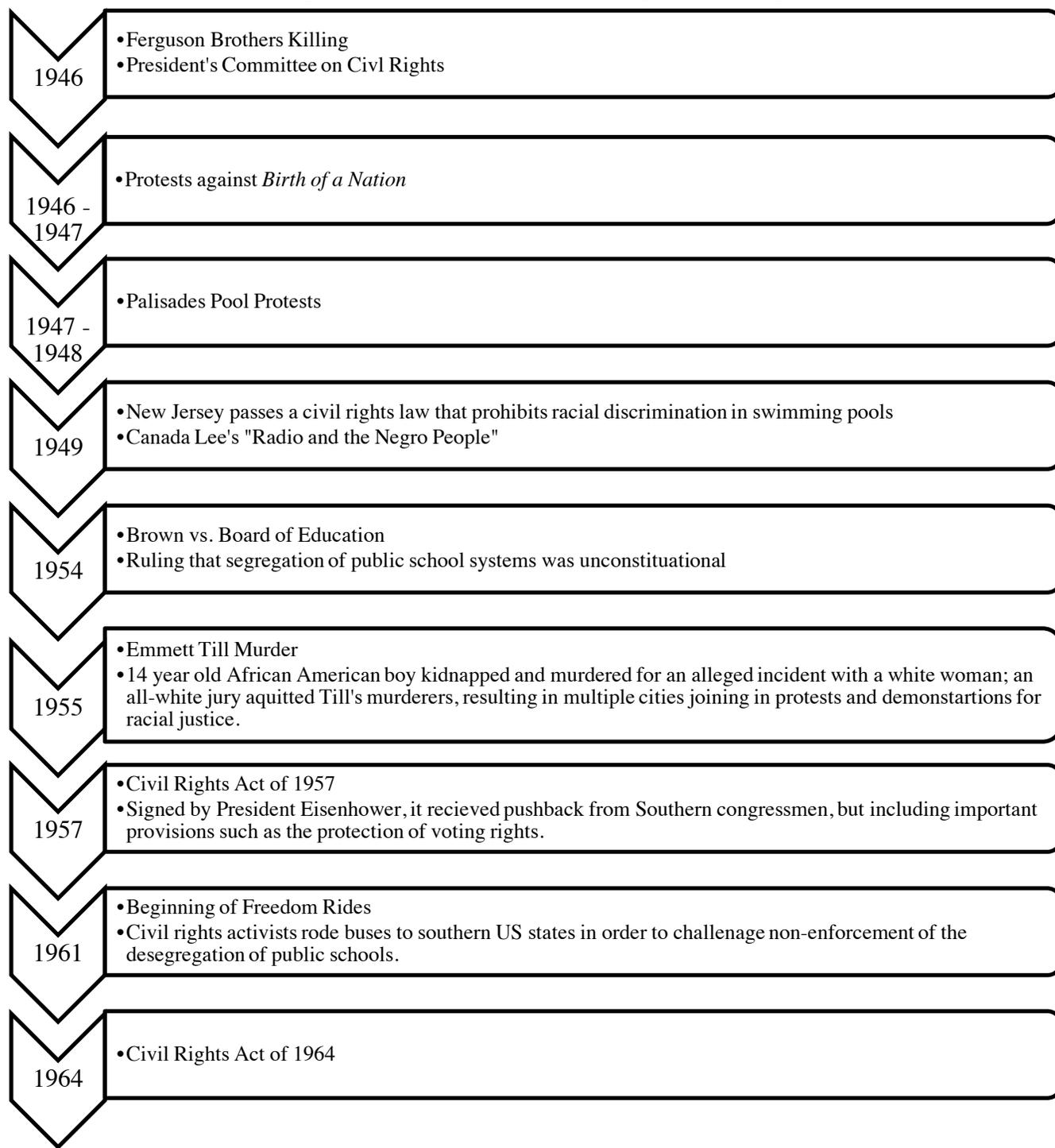
Appendix A

Krippendorff's list of indicators in content analysis

- The *presence* or *absence* of a reference or concept is taken to indicate the source's *awareness* or *knowledge* of the object referred to or conceptualized.
- The *frequency* with which a symbol, idea, reference, or topic occurs in a stream of messages is taken to indicate the *importance of*, *attention to*, or *emphasis on* that symbol, idea, reference, or topic in the messages.
- The *numbers of favorable* and *unfavorable characteristics* attributed to a symbol, idea, or reference are taken to indicate the *attitudes* held by the writers, the readers, or their common culture toward the object named or indicated.
- The kinds of *qualifications*—adjectives or hedges—used in statements about a symbol, idea, or reference are taken to indicate the *intensity*, *strength*, or *uncertainty* associated with the *beliefs*, *convictions*, and *motivations* that the symbol, idea, or reference signifies.
- The *frequency of co-occurrence* of two concepts (excluding those that have grammatical or collocational explanations) is taken to indicate the *strength of associations* between those concepts in the minds of the members of a population of authors, readers, or audiences.

Appendix B

Timeline of significant events before and during the Civil Rights Movement

1946
- Ferguson Brothers Killing
- President's Committee on Civl Rights

1946 - 1947
- Protests against *Birth of a Nation*

1947 - 1948
- Palisades Pool Protests

1949
- New Jersey passes a civil rights law that prohibits racial discrimination in swimming pools
- Canada Lee's "Radio and the Negro People"

1954
- Brown vs. Board of Education
- Ruling that segregation of public school systems was unconstituational

1955
- Emmett Till Murder
- 14 year old African American boy kidnapped and murdered for an alleged incident with a white woman; an all-white jury aquitted Till's murderers, resulting in multiple cities joining in protests and demonstartions for racial justice.

1957
- Civil Rights Act of 1957
- Signed by President Eisenhower, it recieved pushback from Southern congressmen, but including important provisions such as the protection of voting rights.

1961
- Beginning of Freedom Rides
- Civil rights activists rode buses to southern US states in order to challenge non-enforcement of the desegregation of public schools.

1964
- Civil Rights Act of 1964

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