

***Constructing and Circulating Black Madonnas as Black Power: Charting
the Aesthetic and Cultural Influence of Shrine
of the Black Madonna, #1***

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ABSTRACT

From his pulpit, Albert B. Cleage Jr. weighed in on a controversy, boldly asserting, "Jesus was a Black Messiah born to a black woman. The pictures of the Black Madonna which are all over the world did not all turn black through some mysterious accident." This statement exemplifies the aesthetic perspective Rev. Cleage actively promoted during the 1960s and marks one aspect of his contribution to the Black Arts Movement: establishing a Christian icon as visual symbol for Black Power. Dialoging with Black Art Movement figures such as Amiri Baraka and Elridge Cleaver, Cleage and the Shrine of the Black Madonna remains absent from art histories, despite the fact that they were active participants in shaping this Black Arts Movement history.

INTRODUCTION

We feel that Christianity is basically the black man's religion, that we formed in African and Asia as evidenced in the Holy Bible...We have been told and shown through Italian Renaissance painters that Jesus was Aryan with blond hair and blue eyes. We are also led to believe that Christianity called on black people to do nothing about oppression, misery, discrimination and brutality in this world but to pray for a land of milk and honey. We reject these distorted teachings.¹

--Edward Vaughn, Heritage Committee Chairman, 1968

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Shrine of the Black Madonna, #1 worked "to recapture, record and relate the history and culture of black people in a positive manner."² Through the Heritage Committee, this church commissioned art and created spaces to promote a visual culture committed to Black Nationalism, Black Liberation Theology and Black Arts Movement principles.

This presentation will analyze the art activity and investigate the cultural work of black Madonna iconography the Shrine promoted. The Black Arts Movement initiated a period of cultural agency and redefinition that intended to engage in the postmodern, postcolonial strategy of decentering Western epistemologies with Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. The early art activities of this congregation in the spring of 1967, which featured a mural project and the subsequent photographic campaign suggests the Shrine of the Black Madonna, #1 served as a symbolic spiritual and ideological center that influenced and facilitated the development of the Black Arts Movement. This presentation will examine the activism and art backgrounds of the

¹ Rev. Albert Cleage, Edward Vaughn et al., History Draft of "Welcome to the Black Nation!: a Guide for Members of the Central United Church of Christ, The Shrine of the Black Madonna," the Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. Papers, Box 6, Folder 9, 3, Bentley Historical Museum, University of Michigan.

² Rev. Albert Cleage, Edward Vaughn et al. History Draft of "Welcome to the Black Nation!: a Guide for Members of the Central United Church of Christ, The Shrine of the Black Madonna," the Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. Papers, Box 6, Folder 9, 3, Bentley Historical Museum, University of Michigan.

central figures responsible for the inaugural mural commission. This group included the Pastor Albert Cleage; cultural activist Edward Vaughn; understudied activist-artist, Glanton V. Dowdell.

The Shrine of the Black Madonna's chancel mural is an important under-recognized artwork in the history of African American art. By reinterpreting racialized Madonna iconography, this mural represents a return to the iconography traditionally associated with cultural redefinition in African American communities, previously seen the New Negro Movement of the Harlem Renaissance.³ Moreover, Dowdell's *Black Madonna and Child* mural will be considered as an extension of mother and child iconography promoted by labor and socialist activists in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴ This presentation will conclude by briefly considering examples from the mural's circulation history as a catalyst for Black Art production, locally, regionally and nationally.

The Activists behind the Black Madonna and Child Mural

Since the purchase of the structure in the 1957, the predominantly African American congregation worshipped and lived with a stained glass window depicting the arrival of Plymouth Colony Governor, William Bradford on the rocky Massachusetts shore.⁵ This stained glass window remains in place under Dowdell's *Black Madonna and Child*.⁶ On March 24, 1967, the Shrine of the Black Madonna celebrated the completion of the mural, measuring eighteen foot tall and nine feet wide. This artwork represents the new philosophical and aesthetic concerns at the core of the Black Arts Movement in its conception, commission, execution and circulation.

By the 1960s, the Rev. Albert Cleage established himself as a leading pastor, social activist, dedicated to improving the social condition and public image of the African American community. Leading up to this point, Cleage developed an interest in the visual arts throughout his lengthy undergraduate matriculation. Cleage attended Fisk University in the 1931-1932 academic year; one year after Aaron Douglas completed his famous Cravath Library murals. Although Cleage completed undergraduate studies over the course of thirteen years while practicing as a minister, he graduated from Oberlin College where he earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree with a major in religious education.⁷ Cleage developed an interest in film and visual communication, during his tenure as interim pastor of Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco.⁸ He briefly pursued a doctoral degree in visual education in University of Southern California's Cinema Department.⁹

The 1930s and 1940s era of "race films" such as Warner Brother's *The Green Pastures* (1936) and African American director Spencer Williams *The Blood of Christ* (1940s) may have prompted Cleage to consider how new technologies could visualize a religious paradigm, specifically for African Americans.

The cultural leadership of Edward Vaughn was the organizing force behind the commission and the media campaign that ensured broad visibility the *Black Madonna and Child* mural. Vaughn was a Fisk University Graduate who settled in Detroit after military service.¹⁰ He went

³ The frontispiece of the *New Negro Anthology* features an illustration of a modern mother and child pair entitled *Brown Madonna*.

⁴ Melanie Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Stacy I. Morgan, *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature, 1930-1953*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁵ Dillard, 288.

⁶ Kristen Cleage, "Sermon—Advent 1966," Finding Eliza archival website, <<http://findingeliza.com/archives/20994>> (Accessed: May 19, 2016).

⁷ Pan Orthodox African Christian Church, "A Chronology of the POACC: Building a Nation Fifty Years in the Making and Still Counting," the Rev. Albert Cleage, Jr. Papers, Box 4, Folder 41, 3a, Bentley Historical Museum, University of Michigan.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "State Representative Edward Vaughn, Biography," *House Biographical Sketches*, <<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/Publications/manual/1999-2000/1999-mm-0289-0289-vaughn.pdf>> (accessed:

on to establish Vaughn's Bookstore in 1962, earning the historic role of being Detroit's first black owned bookstore.¹¹ The Rev. Cleage and Vaughn turned to the local community of artists-activists to materialize their theological and historical perspective.

Detroit-born artist-activist, Glanton V. Dowdell secured the commission to paint the large scale chancel mural at the age of 44. Dowdell credited his grandmother with sharing her artistic talent with him in his elementary years.¹² Following his time in reform school for robbery during his teenage years, Dowdell pursued art education at the Society of Arts and Crafts (Detroit) in 1943 and the Chicago Art Institute in 1944.¹³ But by 1949, Dowdell began serving a twelve year and ten months sentence in Michigan's Jackson State Prison for second degree murder.¹⁴ Newspaper accounts described this crime as stemming from "a slaying growing out of a street argument."¹⁵ While incarcerated, Glanton Dowdell advanced and refined his skills in oil painting and gained a criticality that led him toward activism upon his release in 1962.¹⁶

In December of 1959, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reviewed a one-man show at Grand River Art Gallery featuring Dowdell.¹⁷ During the 1950s and 1960s, Glanton Dowdell developed a visual vocabulary that employed figuration and explorations in color and value as a means to critically engage and address the human condition and African American identity. In a rare interview conducted during his imprisonment, he said the following: "I think each man having suffered long is entitled to a message to future generations. My function then is to send that message."¹⁸ This is one of the few written accounts of Dowdell articulating his artistic philosophy. Following his release from prison in 1962, Glanton Dowdell contributed his art and social activist skills toward the African American labor movement in Detroit. By 1966, Glanton Dowdell is listed as a member of the League of Black Revolutionary Workers.¹⁹ He also opened his own art exhibition space, the Easel Gallery in 1966.²⁰

In the fall of 1966, Dowdell, alongside his friend and fellow activist General George Baker, was stopped by police near the site of the Kercheval Incident—the three day racial disturbance.²¹ Baker and Dowdell were arrested for concealing several weapons, including a loaded 1.45 Caliber Colt Auto pistol.²² After further investigation, police accused Dowdell and Baker having a role in the Kercheval Incident.²³ The following year, while awaiting for sentencing, Dowdell began the

June 2, 2016).

¹¹ Sam Pollard, interview with Edward Vaughn, 6 Jun 1989, *Eyes on the Prize Interviews*, as republished by Washington University Digital Gateway Texts
<<http://digital.wustl.edu/e/iiweb/vau5427.0309.166edvaughn.html>> (Accessed: May 19, 2016)

¹² "Negro Painter Wears Away in Prison," *Atlanta Daily World*, Sept 22 1956, Black Power Movement Collection, and Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 8: 515, and Library of Congress Microfilm Collection.

¹³ "Negro Painter Wears Away in Prison," *Atlanta Daily World*, Sept 22 1956.

¹⁴ "Prisoner Painter Teaches Art to Fellow Inmates" Unidentified Publication, n.d.

¹⁵ "2 Get Probation in Gun Arrests" *Detroit Free Press*, 5 Sept 1967, Black Power Movement Collection, and Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 5: 409, Library of Congress Microfilm Collection.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Strickland "Glanton Dowdell...Artists and Ten-Year Prisoner," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 Dec 1959, Black Power Movement Collection, and Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers. This exhibition included almost thirty-five paintings, all housed in private collections

¹⁸ Ibid. The pair was leaving the headquarters of the Afro-American Youth Movement.

¹⁹ Ibid. and received the Trade Union Leadership Council Award for Excellence in Art

²⁰ "2 Get Probation in Gun Arrests" *Detroit Free Press*, 5 Sept 1967, , Black Power Movement Collection, and Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 5: 409, Library of Congress Microfilm Collection.

²¹ Richard Bragaw, "2 in Kercheval Race Case Get 5-Year Probation Terms" *Detroit Free Press*, 6 Sept 1967, Black Power Movement Collection, Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 5: 409, Library of Congress Microfilm Collection.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Black Madonna mural with General George Baker as his assistant. Between 1966 and 1968, the Rev. Cleage and Dowdell enjoyed “a short-lived alliance” in activism.²⁴

Detroit: I Do Mind Dying offers a characterization of Glanton V. Dowdell, in the years before and after the completion of the mural. In this labor history account, Dowdell is described with these words:

He has fled the United States after being charged with forging \$65,000 worth of government bonds. One of his co-defendants had been murdered in Detroit, others had pleaded guilty, and there had been attempts on Dowdell’s life. Like Malcolm X...[and] Elridge Cleaver, Dowdell had a criminal background. His specialty had been armed robbery, and much of his political career involved being in charge of security. Dowdell was also a gifted artist and an articulate politician...Dowdell had been active in physically removing drug pushers from around some black high schools, and he was rumored to have been the inspiration for the armed robbers who preyed on after hours clubs owned by the mafia and black racketeers.²⁵

Here, Glanton Dowdell is heroically hailed as a renegade leader in Detroit, committed to institutionally and physically reforming African Americans environments. Dowdell fled the U.S. for Stockholm, Sweden where he lived remainder of his life with his family as an activist working toward the mission of the League of Black Revolutionary Worker until 2000 when he died at the age of 77.²⁶ Cleage, Dowdell, Vaughn and Baker are historicized in the archives as male activists grafting symbolic meaning onto the Black female body. Perhaps alternative oral histories, yet to be captured, will reveal the role women played the definition and critical reception of the mural among black female visual artists, activist and feminists.²⁷ Nikki Giovanni stands out as one of the few female artists to address the Black Madonna mural in her poem “The Great Pax Whitie.” She asserts:

In the name of peace
They waged the wars
ain’t they got no shame

In the name of peace
Lot’s wife is now a product of the Morton company
nah, they ain’t got no shame

Noah packing his wife and kiddies up for a holiday
row row row your boat
But why’d you leave the unicorns, noah

²⁴ Citywide Community Action Committee (CCAC) Flyer,” not dated, Black Power Movement Collection, Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 8: 515, and Library of Congress Microfilm Collection; Georgakas and Surkin, 193. For example, Cleage and Dowdell were elected co- chairs of Citywide Citizen Action Committee.

²⁵ Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 121.

²⁶ “Sweden Rejects U.S. Bid to Return Accused Black,” *Jet Magazine*, 1 Jul 1971, <<https://books.google.com/books?id=qDcDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA5&dq=glanton%20dowdell&pg=PA4#v=onepage&q=glanton%20dowdell&f=false>> (Accessed: December 10, 2015); “Glanton V. Dowdell, August 9 1923- January 19, 2000, Memorial Program,” Black Power Movement Collection, Part 4: The League of Black Revolutionary Workers, Series 8: 515, Library of Congress Microfilm Collection.

²⁷ Nikki Giovanni, “The Great Pax Whitie” from *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment*. Copyright © 1968, 1970 by Nikki Giovanni. <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/177829>> In the summer of 1967, Edward Vaughn and Cardinal Karamo invited fellow Fisk graduate Nikki Giovanni, then a rising poet in the Black Arts Movement, to attend the Second Annual Black Arts Convention (also Conference).

Huh? why'd you leave them
 While our Black Madonna stood there
 Eighteen feet high holding Him in her arms
 Listening to the rumblings of peace
 be still be still ²⁸

Black Madonna and Child as an Early Black Arts Movement Icon & Catalyst

The Black Madonna and Child chancel mural depicts the divine mother and child pair as monumental icons defined by dark tones and interlocking forms. By conveying the Black Messiah as a newborn infant, prior to his revolutionary identity, this mural constantly reminds the congregation and viewers of the regenerative continuity of the Black Nation. The placement of the Black Messiah in the foreground, mediated by the Madonna's arms, spatially articulates the proselytization facet of this mural which intends to bring viewer to the Black Nation through the Black Messiah.

The Madonna stands on the light grey and tan stones, with her feet hidden under her layers of white and blue garments and shroud. Perhaps visually referencing the Western Medieval and Byzantine images of Mary and Christ, the pair subverts naturalism by not casting a shadow on the rocks as to articulate divine status. The aerial component of the mural recalls Aaron Douglas's signature design strategy of communicating light through subtle value change that is emphasized through line seen in his popular mural cycles such as *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934).

The Madonna's garment creates a diagonal implied line that directs the eye to a cityscape rendered in black. The Black Madonna and Black Messiah are visually linked to the black nation through chromatic unity. Thus, the color black establishes the conceptual and compositional foundation of this mural. Black takes on symbolic and ideological significance in this chancel mural during the same time that artists such as Roy DeCarava and Faith Ringgold are examining the potential of black in the emerging Black Aesthetic.²⁹

As early as 1962, *Negro Digest* published Black Arts Movement poet Harold G. Lawrence's poem entitled "Black Madonna" that offers philosophical and visual cues for Dowdell's rendering of the Madonna in the chancel mural.³⁰ In the first stanza, Lawrence describes the Madonna as an "apparition" emerging from the "Rocks of Rhodesia, Kush Ethiopia."³¹ Following a stanza

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Roy DeCarava and Langston Hughes, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955). Roy DeCarava, *Thru Black Eyes*, (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1968); Faith Ringgold, Michele Wallace, et al., *American People, Black Light: Faith Ringgold's Paintings of the 1960s* (Purchase: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2010); Lisa E. Farrington and Faith Ringgold, *Faith Ringgold*, (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2004) 33. As early as the 1950s, Roy DeCarava experiments and becomes a master of centrally situating dark tones in his photographic practice. This point is illustrated throughout the untitled photographs that accompany Langston Hughes's texts in *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*. Faith Ringgold systematically examines the color black in her *Black Light Series*, which she executed between 1967 and 1969. According to art historian Lisa Farrington, "Through *The Black Light Series*, Ringgold investigated ways in which to use black pigment as a metaphor for race, or as she said, as 'a way of expressing on canvas the new "black is beautiful" sense of ourselves" In this series, Ringgold extended her college research into color by replacing the chiaroscuro method of using white pigment to create 'light' with a system that utilized black pigment to the same end." Examples from *The Black Light Series* include: *Man* (1967, oil on canvas, Collection of the Artist) and *The American Spectrum* (1969, oil on canvas, Chase Manhattan Bank Collection).

³⁰ < <http://umichbsu-blog.tumblr.com/post/3472045969/harun-kofi-wangara-formerly-known-as-harold-glyn>> (accessed: March 19, 2016) Poet and activist Harold G. Lawrence (1928-1989) would later change his name to Kofi Wangara. In 1962, Wangara's article on pre-Columbian African exploration in the New World was published in *The Crisis Magazine*. Wangara was revered as a pioneering historian and educator in Detroit and throughout the Midwestern United States.

³¹ Harold G. Lawrence, "Untitled (Black Madonna)," *Negro Digest* (June 1962): 52.
 <<https://books.google.com/books?id=WmDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA97&dq=harold%20G.%20Lawrence%20mad>

lamenting how Renaissance masters “wiped [Mary] white,” the poem concludes with a passage that describes the black Madonna as an upright figure that bears the chromatic complexity of the color black:

Now again we sense your
 Sensitive beauty, smiling, black
 Turban crowned, robed, straight backed,
 Very black—and brown and beige too
 Sing strong songs of Negritude
 Through coffee lips your vibrant blues.³²

Lawrence’s poem was accompanied by an illustration of a Black Madonna by Detroit muralist and illustrator, LeRoy Foster.³³ Diverging from Foster’s approach, Dowdell seems to draft his composition according to the chromatic spirit of Negritude by investing cultural symbolism in black Madonna iconography. It should be noted this also marked a reinscription of Black Madonna iconography that visually extends back to Harlem’s New Negro Movement with art activity by Marcus Garvey and Alain Locke’s commissions. James Allen Lattimer’s *Madonna and Child* (c. 1930 and published on the cover of *Opportunity Magazine* for the December 1941 edition.

In November 1962, *Negro Digest* published an extensive feature article on the evolution of Detroit’s African American art scene. Although Dowdell was not included in the article, a reproduction of a sculpture entitled *Yom* by poet, actress and sculptress, Florence Pate Sampson was featured. This inclusion is important as the caption described the sculpture as “an African Madonna.”³⁴ *Yom* is an important predecessor to the Dowdell’s Madonna design as the reproduction reveals an attention to mass, light and value. Beyond the formal commonalities, *Yom* also indicates the notion of a black Madonna of African descent was a popular motif in the Detroit art community. Whereas Sampson’s African Madonna is pregnant with child, Dowdell’s *Black Madonna and Child* advanced this local art narrative by rendering the newborn Black Messiah protected, reiterating the notion of hope expressed in *Yom*.

An aesthetic development of color and value at the heart of the *Black Madonna and Child* mural is evident in the design stages of this mural. A photograph of a sketch aptly titled “The Spacial Face of God Memory (in crude replica),” seen in the upper left image, is included among the archival photographs of Dowdell painting the mural in the Rev. Albert Cleage Papers. The

onna&pg=PA53#v=twopage&q&f=false> (Accessed: April 24, 2016). This corresponds with the *Black Madonna*’s monumental scale as well as her positioning on a rocky shore.

³²Harold G. Lawrence, “Untitled (Black Madonna)” *Negro Digest*, June 1962, <<https://books.google.com/books?id=WtMDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA97&dq=harold%20G.%20Lawrence%20madonna&pg=PA53#v=twopage&q&f=false>> (accessed: May 23, 2016).

³³James Prigoff and Robin J. Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals*, (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000); Alma Forest Parks, “A City Survey: the Arts in Detroit” *Negro Digest*, Nov 1962, <<https://books.google.com/books?id=WToDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA88&lpg=PA88&dq=negro+digest+LeRoy+Foster&source=bl&ots=WZS8Oj85jI&sig=sB952dOcallu1RpnS5jOi0Ftswk&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiZ3cshOnNAhUGHD4KHclvBo0Q6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=negro%20digest%20LeRoy%20Foster&f=false>> (accessed: May 22, 2016). LeRoy Foster was a popular African American painter and illustrator, practicing in Detroit during the second half of the twentieth century. He attended the Society for Arts and Crafts. As early as 1962, *The Negro Digest* recognized Foster alongside Hughie-Lee Smith as one of Detroit leading African American artists. Foster was an integral figure in the development of a black arts community in Detroit as evidenced by his founding membership in Contemporary Arts Studio, one of the early spaces dedicated to fostering and exhibition art by African Americans. Foster’s art was exhibited in both Michigan’s statewide annuals art exhibiting as well as black artists’ shows at the Detroit Art Institute of 1969 and the early 1970s. In 1971, he completed his mural *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* for the Detroit Public Murals Program. That same year, his drawing of a young black boy was used as a frontispiece for Gwendolyn Brooks’s Broadside Press publication, *Aloneness*.

³⁴Parks, “A City Survey: The Arts in Detroit,” *Negro Digest* (November 1962): 84. <<https://books.google.com/books?id=WToDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA91&dq=detroit%20Yom&pg=PA84#v=onepage&q=detroit%20Yom&f=false>> (accessed April 20, 2016).

author of this document is not indicated on the object or in the record. Between text and design, this document demonstrates the consideration given to how space and value facilitates the religious experience. Moreover, this schematic rendering of God is one of the most profound and overlooked spiritual and aesthetic contributions of this religious community.

The flattening of form articulated through value variations, guided Glanton Dowdell's rendering of the chancel mural's model, Rose Waldon, seen in the upper left hand corner. Waldon was characterized as a young mother from the local neighborhood early in new coverage of the mural. But by 1970, *Ebony Magazine* recognized Rose Waldon as one of Detroit's top black fashion models.³⁵ According to the artist, a sense of gender solidarity was at the heart of this project. In Ellen Goodman's 1967 *Detroit Free Press* article, Dowdell relates the mural in his personal experiences, stating, "[The Black Madonna mural] is me...I can't divorce the Madonna from black women. I don't think that any of the experiences of the Madonna were more poignant or dramatic than those of any Negro Mother."³⁶

Circulating Black Power: Assessing the Impact of the Black Madonna Mural After-Image

Although it is not located in exterior public spaces like the walls of respect and dignity of the 1970s, the mural and its circulation christened the use of murals as a Black Arts Movement art medium.³⁷ One day before the mural unveiling, *The Detroit Free Press* featured a cropped photograph of the artist next to the mural in progress, thus initiating a photographic circulation of the icon that would persist through the 1970s. The featured photograph was captured by Detroit Free Press photographer, Tom Venaleck, and accompanied an article penned by staff writer Ellen Goodman, entitled "Black Madonna Stirs Empathy of Negroes." Goodman describes Dowdell's Madonna as "a weary earthmother," which signals an association with Mexican muralist Diego Rivera's indigenous spiritual figures in his *Detroit Industry Murals* (1933) at the Detroit Institute of Art.

An August 1967 edition of *Jet* magazine featured a full length photograph of the *Black Madonna and Child Mural* with Black Arts Movement dramatist Val Gray Ward engaging "the Shabazz kids," the children of Black power visionary Malcolm X.³⁸ The instructive gestures of

³⁵ "Have Black Models Really Made It?" *Ebony Magazine*, (May 1970): 156, <<https://books.google.com/books?id=xxaD9f5RxN4C&pg=PA156&dq=rose%20waldron&pg=PA156#v=onepage&q=rose%20waldron&f=false>> (accessed: March 20, 2016).

³⁶ Goodman, "Black Madonna Stirs Empathy of Negroes," *Detroit Free Press*, 25 Mar 1967. A critical consideration of gender and agency must be engaged when considering a group of men grafting meaning onto the female black body. Both art historians Lisa Gail Collins and Kristin Ellsworth have diligently recorded the strategies of Black female artists such as Carolyn Lawrence and Faith Ringgold in subverting the notion of black women as "baby-makers" promoted by Black Nationalist leaders including Ron Karenga and Molefi Asante.³⁶ While this patriarchal narrative is a factual element of the *Black Madonna and Child* mural, recent analysis of the mural interpreted the mural as a "counterpoint to the League's often sexist texts."³⁶ *The Black Madonna and Child* mural occupies a transitional role in the development of African American public mural history. Because the site was used as a space for public meeting, a broad audience viewed the mural.

³⁷ Jeff Donaldson, "The Rise and Fall and Legacy of the Wall of Respect Movement," *International Review of African American Art* 15 (1998): 26. The inclusion of the Rev. Cleage in Chicago's *Wall of Respect* confirms the influence he accrued philosophically in developing new black-centered theologies.

³⁸ "National Report: Prof. Notes Negroes Gifts at Detroit's Confab," *Jet Magazine* (3 August 1967): 4-5.

<<https://books.google.com/books?id=trkDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA4&dq=val%20gray%20ward&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q&f=false>> (Accessed June 30, 2016). *Ebony Magazine* reproduced the *Black Madonna* mural five times. In 1969 Poinsett penned the seminal essay on Black Christ iconography under the title, "The Quest for the Black Christ: Radical Clerics Reject 'Honky Christ' Created by American Culture-Religion."³⁸ The article closes with a photograph that shows Cleage as Black Arts patron and aesthetic collaborator as he discusses sketches of monumental figure. (Figure 33) Of equal import, this *Ebony* feature introduced a national audience to Glanton Dowdell, as one of the artist shaping Black Christian iconography. In fact, he is the only artist whose image is reproduced in this article. On April 4, 1969, *New York Times* contributor Edward B. Fiske revisits to Cleage and the *Black Madonna and Child* mural to represent the impact of Black power ideologies on African American religious practice.³⁸ In this layout, the photograph of the Rev. Cleage and mural is juxtaposed with views of the Blue Hill Soul Center in the Roxbury section of Boston to illustrate the spectrum of Black Theology. (Figure 33) In Jack Manning's photograph of Cleage, he is represented as a facilitating black power through posing critical

Ward reveals additional aspects of maternal rearing embodied in the Madonna as a symbol of black motherhood. In this way, this photographic introduction of the *Black Madonna and Child* mural in Johnson Publishing outlets emphasizes the regenerative symbolism of the chancel mural as well as the dynamism of black motherhood. Akin to the Black Christ, the Shabazz children visually represent the future of Black Nationalism. Both *Ebony Magazine* and *The New York Times* published photographs of the mural at least four times from 1968 through the 1970s. In the “Black Revolution” issue of *Ebony Magazine*, LeRoi Amiri Baraka was photographed before the *Black Madonna and Child* chancel mural.

The history of the circulation of Glanton Dowdell’s oil mural housed at Detroit’s Shrine of the Black Madonna, #1 reveals how this specific mural was accessible to American artists and influenced future generations. By the end of the 1970s, the Shrine of the Black Madonna expanded to Atlanta where they commissioned Detroit artist, Carl Owens to paint an acrylic on wood mural of a Black Madonna and Child.³⁹ Houston’s Shrine of the Black Madonna represents the apex of the mural tradition with a multi panel mural cycle. As the Shrine of the Black Madonna churches made the Black Madonna and Child mural its signature icon of Black Christian Nationalism, highly visible African American artists continued to explore formal and interpretive significance of the theme thru the 1980s as exemplified across these artworks that represent an enduring thematic legacy. As demonstrated in this presentation, the revisionist visual program of the Shrine of the Black Madonna permeated every facet of image production during late 1960s and 1970s.

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questions, with hand and brow risen. The gaze and gestural aspects of *Black Madonna and Child* reproductions convey the cultural work this art was commissioned to execute.

³⁹ The mural remains intact and the church sells reproductions of Owens’s studies. In 1977, a little know Houston muralist, Olu, completed a massive seven panel mural program featuring a contemporary afro-crowned Black Madonna and child, perhaps a rendering of Black Christ with a shepard’s staff.