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*A Study on the Impact of the Black Lives
Matter Movement on Public Programming
in American Museums*

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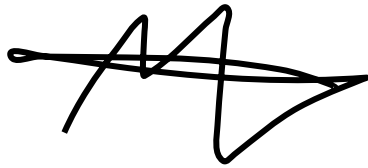
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Mimi Kim

• Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a horizontal line with a large, stylized 'M' shape above it and a long, sweeping tail extending to the right.

Date: 13/09/2024

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ACRONYMS / GLOSSARY

AAM - American Alliance of Museums

BIPOC - Black and Indigenous Person/People of Colour. “An attempt to centre the violence, systemic racism, and cultural erasure against Black and Indigenous people and how it is foundational to the United States”¹

BLM - Black Lives Matter

DEAI - Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion. Sometimes referred to as just DEI

ICOM - International Council of Museums

NAGPRA - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

NOMA - New Orleans Museum of Art

POC - Person/People of Color

Twin Cities - The combined metropolitan areas of the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in Minnesota. While they are two distinct cities with their own governing bodies, they are so close together that in most minds they are practically one.

¹ Kristen Mack, “BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and the Power and Limitations of Umbrella Terms,” January 9, 2023, <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/bipoc-lgbtq-power-limitations-umbrella-terms>.

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ABSTRACT

The Black Lives Matter movement was a key event for bringing attention to the subject of anti-racism in all different spheres of American culture, including museums. This paper seeks to understand whether the movement has had long-term effects on the programming of three American museums, the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Walker Art Center. By analysing the programs that each museum has conducted between 2019 and 2024, this study will determine if there has been a positive change towards including more anti-racist programming in museums. To give context to the analysis, the American museum system is discussed, as well as the history of Black Lives Matter, and the general state of decolonisation, participatory practices, and public programming in museums.

Keywords

Museum Education Public Programming Black Lives Matter Anti-
Racism New Orleans Museum of Art

Art Institute of Chicago Walker Art Center United States
Decolonisation Participatory Practices DEAI

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In May of 2020, white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, for using counterfeit money.² Videos of the arrest and murder went viral online and sparked protests calling for racial justice and the defunding of the police, both throughout the country and internationally. Uncertainty over the potential conviction of Chauvin and the complicitness of the other three police officers involved in the incident lit the fire for protest. Some of Floyd's last words, "I can't breathe," particularly drew people to the cause and became one of the most frequently used phrases during the protests. This was not the first or last racially charged murder in the United States, but tensions that were already growing came to a head with this incident. Protesters rallied around the phrase 'Black Lives Matter,' which was first coined in 2014 in response to numerous cases of Black people being killed due to police neglect and abuse. While many people immediately following the incident were protesting the delayed investigation and lack of repercussions for the officers involved in the murder, their actions grew into something bigger. The protests evolved into general complaints about police brutality, institutional racism and eventually helped found other movements against White supremacy. Personally, I attended the August 28 March on Washington, which was both the 57th anniversary of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic March (where he gave his "I Have a Dream" speech) and a protest in support of George Floyd and against police brutality. While there were other protests before this in DC (at least one of which protestors were corralled and tear-gassed by police), this march shows how important the murder of George Floyd is in the larger picture of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Even though the protests primarily took place between 2020 and 2021, the issues of police brutality and racial injustice are still extremely relevant issues.

Occurring almost four years ago now, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests led employees of leading museums to call for their institutions to handle these subjects better, and for better

² Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://academic.oup.com/book/46647>.

treatment of their POC employees. Examples of museums that faced backlash during this time included large museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Getty in Los Angeles, as well as smaller museums such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. Responses varied, but many of these museums acknowledged these letters and promised to do better.³ Some even fleshed out full, multi-point plans for improvement. National museum organisations like the American Alliance of Museums and the Art Alliance in the United Kingdom also released statements of solidarity and plans to create more resources for decolonisation and anti-racism in museums. In 2020, it was easy to be hopeful towards these promises for change and now, in 2024, we have the ability to see just how much of it was followed through.

The topic of this dissertation is how the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement has impacted the educational programming at three different museums in the United States. As a person of colour (POC), I have noticed that sometimes the ideas that an institution claims to champion are not always reflected strongly in practice, either with their treatment of POC employees or through diversity in programming. In the museum field, many institutions are pushing for decolonisation and more participatory practices, but sometimes this is only seen in the front-facing parts of the museum, not behind the scenes. The front-facing aspects of the museum, such as in their educational programming, can still key us into the changes that are occurring within. Although calls for changes in institutions in the US have been happening since the Civil Rights Movement, the murder of George Floyd in March 2020 and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests indicate a major shift towards addressing institutional racism in museums. By looking at the differences in programming in three museums pre-BLM and post-BLM, we can see whether there has been a significant move towards anti-racism in museums, or if the

³ Alex Greenberger Solomon Tessa, Alex Greenberger, and Tessa Solomon, "Major U.S. Museums Criticized for Responses to Ongoing George Floyd Protests," *ARTnews.Com* (blog), June 2, 2020, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/museums-controversy-george-floyd-protests-1202689494/>.

promises that museums made during this time were simply temporary bandages meant to appease the public until the world moved onto other issues.

This thesis will attempt to understand if and how museums in America have continued anti-racist practices in their museums. To do this I will use a variety of museums as case studies, primarily focusing on the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA), the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis. While each of these museums varies in size, they receive roughly the same number of proportional visitors to the size of their metropolitan areas. Within each of these areas (the Twin Cities, Chicago, and New Orleans) they also serve the same function for their populace and are not primarily aimed at serving tourists.

By analysing the programming and policies of these museums I would like to answer these questions: what were the museums' responses to Black Lives Matter? Has there been a noticeable change in anti-racist and decolonial programming since 2020? Do their programs feature POC voices? Have there been any administrative changes made in support of this work?

Because this is a desk-based study, I will also be heavily focusing on the background and historical context for these museums, institutional racism, and decolonization in museums. Lastly, I will look at how other events have impacted the anti-racist and decolonial work that was spurred on by the Black Lives Matter movement. In the years since the BLM protests, museums in America have faced many other challenges regarding institutional racism and the question of democratic practices. Because developments and new events can quickly change things in this field, it can be difficult to speculate on the future, but hopefully by analysing this process through the last four years, we can gain a better understanding of how we can expect it to continue.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Because the nature of this work comes with a wide variety of subject matter, all with vastly different scholarly backgrounds, I feel that it is necessary to break this literature review into sections to break down each of the most identifiable aspects of the research. These sections are generally understood as the historiographical and scholarly background of the Black Lives Matter movement, the theoretical background for participatory practices, decolonisation in museums, and the theory behind modern public programming in museums. The first section that will be addressed, the historiographical/scholarly background of the BLM movement, is important to address at this time because so much of the movement is about supporting theory for institutional change. While there is little to address the specific matter of museums and BLM, museums are still important aspects of society that have long worked as agents of colonisation and white supremacy. In fact, a large amount of the writing available contains suggestions for creating anti-racist communities, including working environments. For the next two sections on participation and decolonisation, their inclusion is on a similar premise. Although neither explicitly addresses the matter of BLM (as much of this research was conducted prior to 2020), these pre-existing theories led to smoother transitions for institutions looking to address BLM in their museums. This can be seen in the small amount of research that looks at case studies for BLM in museums, such as that of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American Culture and History.⁴ Participation and decolonisation each provides a basis for anti-racist work to be built upon, where the movement itself was the inciting incident spurring on the utilisation of these theories in practice. The last section of this literature review hardly needs explanation, as this research is focused on the public programs of museums. As I am primarily interested in the changes occurring in public programming, I will be looking at the background theory supporting public programming and the ways that it interacts with the rest of the museum and wider community.

2.1 Black Lives Matter

When reviewing the historiography of the Black Lives Matter movement, it is important to understand that this event (i.e. the murder of George Floyd) does not exist in a vacuum and is not an isolated event. When writers discuss George Floyd, they are writing within the context of the greater Civil Rights Movement, going back to the 1960s. Authors such as Barbara Ransby in “Making All Black Lives Matter”⁵ does this, as well as creating more detailed narratives of this fight against racial injustice between the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida and that of George Floyd in 2020. By connecting the ways that different inciting events have built on each other, leading to the major protests in 2020, we can understand that this movement created such strong reactions across the country because they are connected to specific instances that were already being protested in each area. These smaller movements were able to gain much momentum through the nationalisation of the Black Lives Matter after the murder of George Floyd. As previously stated, when looking at the history of the BLM movement, one could easily trace its origins back to the Civil Rights movement, or even following the American Civil War through the Reconstruction Era (the period of time immediately following the Civil War where previously enslaved Black Americans were able to reach unprecedented levels of success due to the fact that racially prohibitive legislation did not yet exist in the south), the Great Migration (the period where previously enslaved people mass migrated from former Confederate states to the north, hoping to escape the extreme racism still present in those areas. They primarily landed in major cities such as Washington D.C., New York City, and Chicago. These cities still have strong, historic Black communities due to the Great Migration), and Jim Crow (named for a set of prohibitive laws creating racial segregation in the southern United States. Their aim was to destroy the progress made by

⁴ Rod Clare, “Black Lives Matter: The Black Lives Matter Movement in the National Museum of African American History and Culture,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2016), <https://go-gale-com.ezproxy1.lib.gla.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=glasuni&id=GALE%7CA536396921&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&aty=ip>.

⁵ Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley, UNITED STATES: University of California Press, 2018), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=4711971>.

the African American community during Reconstruction). To do so would distract from the specific topic of research that I am exploring, but I would implore any reader who is unfamiliar with the history of race relations in the American context to explore the work of Christopher Lebron, especially “The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea.”⁶

Turning away from the history of BLM and looking at the impact of the movement, there is a growing body of literature dedicated to guiding the specific goals of Black Lives Matter. Since 2020, interest in this topic has cooled off, as other movements such as Stop Asian Hate and Indigenous Rights have taken on a larger presence in the public eye. As many institutions are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic as well, there has been a continued research interest in the social impact of the pandemic on museums that may have also drawn attention away from BLM. The previously named movements, and others, are still largely built on the resources created by BLM activists, which shows that they are still a relevant theoretical basis to be utilised by a wide variety of organisations and communities furthering the cause of anti-racism. An interesting example of this is a study published in the *Journal of Advertising* in 2021. In the article, the researchers are looking at “consumer reactions toward brand and influencer generated corporate social responsibility messages.”⁷ On the surface, this may not seem related to my own research but in the wake of BLM, many museums, including the ones which I am studying, put out corporate support messages such as those researched. For a few, the museums had to be pushed to make these statements due to public outcry of employees, which is one of the reasons why this question interests me. This study from the *Journal of Advertising* could definitely be applied in this case. In the study, the researchers found that individual Black influencers received the highest, most positive responses from the public. Whereas those made by corporate entities got the most negative feedback. For museums as well, this seems to be the case in reviewing the general responses to these messages. For

⁶ Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*.

⁷ Jeongwon Yang, Ploypin Chuentrawong, and Krittaphat Pugdeethosapol, “Speaking Up on Black Lives Matter: A Comparative Study of Consumer Reactions toward Brand and Influencer-Generated Corporate Social Responsibility Messages,” *Journal of Advertising* 50, no. 5 (October 20, 2021): 565-83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1984345>.

those such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the statements that they released in regards to BLM were met with a variety of responses, including those critical of the institution for not addressing the issue of racism in the museum sooner and those saying that a statement is not enough and that trust from the public needs to be proven with time and effort. This is one of the purposes of my own research. Although I will not be using the MET as one of my research subjects, I am trying to see if the type of work that was promised in these statements has actually been conducted and can be reflected through their public programs.

There is an argument to be made here that connects democratic museum theory to BLM. One of the criticisms of representation in museums is the question of authenticity, which can be applied in terms of these statements as well. Although the authors of “Speaking Up on Black Lives Matter”⁸ do not strictly state this in their argument, it could be interpreted that a reason why individual responses to BLM had a more positive response is the authenticity of the message. When coming from a faceless entity such as a museum, especially one that does not have many visible BIPOC employees, there is little reason given for trusting a message of solidarity. To build trust with their community over matters such as this, institutions need to utilise democratic practices to prove the authenticity of their messages.

When looking at the effect of Black Lives Matter in other sectors, another semi-related article comes from a group that writes on the perspective of black women in academia in “Making Black Lives Matter in Academia.”⁹ As the title implies, the authors here are bringing to light the issues of intersectional activism in a professional academic environment. The main crux of the argument is that the BLM movement and other anti-racist activism work has long been thought to be an issue that did not need to be addressed in academia. This is something that I have struggled to recognise within the museum field as well. That, for the amount of research that has been conducted on bringing

⁸ Yang et al.

⁹ Myrtle P. Bell et al., “Making Black Lives Matter in Academia: A Black Feminist Call for Collective Action against Anti-blackness in the Academy: Gender, Work & Organization,” *Gender, Work & Organization* 28 (January 2, 2021): 39-57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12555>.

equity to museums and decolonisation in the curation of exhibits, there is a lack of awareness and acknowledgement that the current field needs to be doing more to address these issues within the inner workings of museums. Bell and her co-authors are addressing this issue in their own sphere of academia. They are making a direct point about the ways in which ‘liberal white supremacy’ plays a role in the lives of Black students and faculty. A major part of their arguments stands for the significant role that White allies play in counteracting these effects, which could also be relevant for anti-racist work in museums.

In a field more adjacent to museum studies, there has also been discussion over the impact of BLM on historical monuments. In “Imperatives of the Present: Black Lives Matter and the politics of memory and memorialization,” Brianne McGonigle Leyh discusses the way that BLM served as a spark that inspired people to take the argument over memorial statues into their own hands.¹⁰ While there have long been discussions over what to do with Confederate monuments,¹¹ Leyh names BLM as the reason for the removal of statues during protests, both domestically and abroad. While the movement started with the Confederate statues, it connected with many people across the globe who decided to do the same to statues of their own oppressors. Following this, more legal avenues have been opened for the removal of potentially offensive memorials that previously were not available. She ends by saying that “us in the human rights field must continue pressing for critical reflection and debate around racism and memory landscapes,” which includes museums.¹² Theoretical work in anti-racism studies, such as the examples given, can help support this same type of work being done in museums. They provide academic context for the type of work with communities that needs to

¹⁰ Brianne McGonigle Leyh, “Imperatives of the Present: Black Lives Matter and the Politics of Memory and Memorialization,” *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 2020): 239-45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0924051920967541>.

¹¹ Colin Dwyer, “Charlottesville Rally Aimed To Defend A Confederate Statue. It May Have Doomed Others,” *NPR*, August 14, 2017, sec. America, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/14/543471538/charlottesville-rally-aimed-to-defend-a-confederate-statue-it-may-have-doomed-ot>.

¹² Leyh.

be done and places an emphasis on representation as a key element in the long-term success of the goals laid out by these organisations.

2.2 Decolonisation

In the United States, there has been a strong push for decolonising museums since the 1990s. With the signing of NAGPRA into law, the U.S. became a world leader in creating legal avenues of support for decolonisation. NAGPRA, or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, was signed into law in 1990 and required all federal institutions and institutions receiving federal funding (most notably the Department of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution) to catalogue, research, and return any Indigenous remains and artefacts held in their collections. While the act was a historic moment for creating legal avenues for decolonisation, it has not been implemented without issue. While institutions are legally responsible for the return of these remains and artefacts, there was no timetable created for expected returns and no way to hold institutions accountable for not fulfilling this duty.¹³ This means that although a large number of artefacts have been repatriated, some museums still have a lot of these grave goods still unrecognised in their collections. Part of the difficulty also comes with how the law was written. Legally, only federally recognised tribes can receive repatriated objects. Currently, there are 574 federally recognised tribes in the United States, and which leaves a large number (Sources differ on just how many there are, one NPR article states over 200 and one Politico article states over 400) only recognised at the state level or not recognised at all that cannot request the return of their artefacts and remains. Some of these issues are now being addressed at the federal level as new revisions for NAGPRA require not only a full inventory of Native objects in their collections within the next five years, but that museums now need explicit consent from tribes to research or

¹³ Logan Jaffe et al., “America’s Biggest Museums Fail to Return Native American Human Remains,” *ProPublica*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.propublica.org/article/repatriation-nagpra-museums-human-remains>.

display their artefacts.¹⁴ These regulations do provide an exclusion for the Smithsonian, particularly the Museum of the American Indian, but it should be noted that they are choosing to comply with these new regulations anyway.

In a 2017 blog post, writer Sumaya Kassim discusses some of the intricate issues that can arise with decolonisation.¹⁵ Here, many of the issues that she discusses can relate to both decolonisation and anti-racism, such as tokenism and exploitation of the work of people of colour. One of the most important points she raises is that

It means institutions reflecting on their processes and practices critically. It means acceding privilege, and that is almost always painful. Decoloniality is also challenging because it is necessarily unreachable, necessarily indefinable. The legacies of European colonialism are immeasurably deep, far-reaching and ever-mutating, and so decolonial work and resistance must take on different forms, methods and evolve accordingly.¹⁶

Within this argument we can also see how institutions that do not dedicate themselves to self-analysis in the painful manner described, may not be able to successfully dedicate themselves to decolonisation.

In the post-NAGPRA museum sphere, it has become obvious that decolonisation in museums cannot be limited to just repatriation. While NAGPRA is extremely important to furthering the cause of decolonisation, there are other areas that need to be addressed as well that have been studied extensively. These are the areas that are more relevant to my discussion of Black Lives Matter and anti-racism, as oftentimes the same tactics can be utilised in both cases. The first area is addressing the history of museums as colonial institutions. As authors Soares and Leshchenko discuss in their ICOM-published work “Museology in Colonial Contexts: A Call for Decolonisation of

¹⁴ Karen K. Ho, “What the New Federal Regulations for Native American Ancestors and Sacred Objects Mean for Museums,” *ARTnews.Com* (blog), February 21, 2024, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/new-federal-regulations-native-american-ancestors-and-sacred-objects-natural-history-museum-1234696299/>.

¹⁵ Sumaya Kassim, “The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised,” *Media Diversified* (blog), November 15, 2017, <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/>.

¹⁶ Kassim.

Museum Theory,” the field still has quite a way to go to address the ways in which the colonial mindset still affects museum practice.¹⁷ As is discussed in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, the origins of the modern museum come from the age of the Enlightenment and came to the United States primarily as private enterprises.¹⁸ These private enterprises took on the goal of using museums to ‘better’ citizens. We can see how this mode of thinking has pervaded in modern museums, which emphasise educating, with the museum as the teacher and the visitor as the student. While some have adopted a more democratic approach as what was discussed previously, it can still be difficult for an institution to remove itself from this mindset that subconsciously prioritises White, Western ideals.

Where this first area is primarily concerned with the way that museums affect the public, the other area of interest for decolonisation is the way in which colonial thinking affects the inner workings of the museum. With the new additions to NAGPRA, it has become clear that some parts of the sector are not ready to address colonisation in this way. The long-standing argument for museums as protectors of heritage is an idea that is rooted in colonial thinking. There is a prioritisation for the Western standard of education over that of Indigenous modes of knowledge-sharing that causes Native methods to be perceived as unprofessional and amateurish. Because of that idea, it is difficult for museums to face the fact that they may not always know what is best when it comes to guarding cultural heritage. The recent changes to NAGPRA are forcing American museums to work with the Indigenous caretakers of cultural objects even if their preferences for how objects are cared for do not match the industry standards. Similar projects have been undertaken on smaller scales, such as the work the Horniman Museum in London undertook with their Benin Bronzes,¹⁹ but these have been largely voluntary on the museums’ part.

¹⁷ Bruno Brulon Soares and Anna Leshchenko, “Museology in Colonial Contexts: A Call for Decolonisation of Museum Theory,” *ICOFOM Study Series*, no. 46 (October 15, 2018): 61-79, <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.895>.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of the Public Museum,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 115-34.

¹⁹ “Six Objects to Return to Nigeria as Horniman Formally Transfers Ownership of ‘Benin Bronzes,’” Horniman Museum and Gardens, accessed July 3, 2024,

We have yet to see if the NAGPRA changes will create a larger impact on the general decolonisation of museums in the United States as they were only implemented in December of 2023. It could potentially create a larger movement of repatriation and consent by originating cultures as the original law did in 1990. Coming from the historical perspective of the American privatisation of museums, it is clear that there are many institutions in the U.S. that will not take these steps unless forced. With so many museums existing as individual entities, it can be difficult to understand the larger patterns of these changes and whether museums are actually undertaking them, which is why it is important to look at individuals within the larger picture. This work for decolonisation can only benefit the work of anti-racism, as often they are one and the same. Pushes for more and better diversity and agency of underrepresented communities in museums is beneficial for the museum system as a whole, even if it is difficult for professionals to defer their expertise.

2.3 Participatory Practices

Moving on from the topic of Black Lives Matter, one of the most important supporting theories for anti-racist work in museums is that of participation. Originating primarily from Nina Simon's seminal 2010 work *The Participatory Museum*, the basic theory of participation is that when visiting cultural institutions such as museums, people want to be engaged throughout the learning process.²⁰ Simon argues that rather than being a passive observer, visitors want to question and contribute to the subject matter presented in museum programming. She writes this work in response to research showing that in the late 2000s, visitorship at cultural institutions had declined due to the traditional method of conducting these programs.²¹ Of course, the core of Simon's work is not just about how to utilise participatory practices within the reader's own museums, but how to use them to further institutional goals. This

<https://www.horniman.ac.uk/story/six-objects-to-return-to-nigeria-as-horniman-formally-transfers-ownership-of-benin-bronzes/>.

²⁰ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, Calif: Museum, 2010).

²¹ Although I do have to wonder if the recession had a part to play in that as well. I'm sure it was addressed in that paper, but that's not what I'm talking about right now and it doesn't really matter.

work has had a major impact on the field as a whole. It has become a staple for many students pursuing museum studies or interpretation in their academic careers and is now understood as a baseline for engaging visitors. As it has been almost fourteen years since *The Participatory Museum* was published, a lot of work has followed in its wake.

Key to point out in relevance to my own research is the idea of the democratisation of museums. This takes Simon's theory of participation even further. Where Simon is interested in the ways that participation is used at the programming level, between visitor and educator, the idea of democratisation pushes for visitor participation at the institutional level. With Simon's theory, there still exists a divide between the institution and the visitor, and although the visitor is contributing to the experience, there is still a barrier between the 'professional knowledge' that is being 'taught' and the 'amateur' visitor that is receiving it, albeit in a more dynamic way. With democratisation, the visitor or outside community becomes integrated with that 'professional' knowledge. They are not only contributing to their own personal learning experience, but to that of the wider community by bringing perspectives that may not be present in the museum to the table. There is quite a lot of research dedicated to this idea of democratisation and it has proven to be successful at a number of small museums.

While there are varying levels of democratisation that can be utilised, there are many community museums that are built on this idea that the people that the museum serve should have a say in how it is run. An excellent example of this is the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington D.C. The goal of this specific museum is to serve and preserve the history of this specific DC neighbourhood, which is a historic Black community. This museum is the smallest within the Smithsonian museum system, reaching only 15,516 visitors in 2023 and less than 2,000 in 2021,²² ²³ and uses the model of democratisation throughout the museum. Many of their programs are aimed directly at the

²² Smithsonian Institution, "Visitor Stats," Smithsonian Institution, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/about/stats>.

²³ For context, just 15 minutes away on the National Mall stands the National Museum of Natural History, the most visited museum in the country, which garnered around 4.5 million visitors in 2023 and just under 1 million in 2021.

community that they are serving and include community organisers, like their February 2021 program “‘Knowing Our Past, Creating Our Future’ An Intergenerational Conversation about Youth Leadership in DC Activism.” Because it is a Smithsonian museum, the Anacostia Community Museum is paradoxically both a community museum and a national one. This seems to work to their benefit though, as there does not seem to be a national agenda that they must adhere to, but they still receive the funding benefits of being a Smithsonian institution.

For museums that serve larger, more diverse communities, such as those that I am researching, this level of democratisation can be difficult to replicate. But, this idea of democratisation can still be applied and there is research to support its success when utilised with tact. Much of the data that supports this theory discusses it in connection with representation of specific groups that are lacking in representation within the museums space, such as the elderly, autistic communities, a variety of physical disability communities, as well as diverse race, gender, and sexualities. Work such as Kery Downing’s “Reaching, Out, Reaching In: Museum Educators and Radical Transformation” show the vital role that educators, in particular, play in connecting museums to communities that the institutions are trying to reach.²⁴ Other research such as that of Corinne Flax in “Long-Term Positive Effects of Flexible Partnerships” show that although these relationships need to be tailored to the specific museum/community, they can be not only successful, but sustainable.²⁵ She does argue that the most successful model for such partnership relies on community groups that are self-sustaining, such as other types of non-profit organisations rather than voluntary groups or clubs. But, she does show that there are numerous benefits for everyone involved in the partnership.

While it can be difficult to carry out this sort of work if an institution has not engaged with communities in this way previously (such as with the Mütter),

²⁴ Kerry Downey, “Reaching Out, Reaching In: Museum Educators and Radical Transformation,” *Journal of Museum Education* 45, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 375-88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2020.1831793>.

²⁵ Corinne Flax, “Long-Term Positive Effects of Flexible Partnerships,” *Journal of Museum Education* 48, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 192-99, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1080/10598650.2022.2122266>.

it has been proven that these communities and the greater public are incredibly receptive to these methods. Even if a museum is not using these methods already, local communities can often feel a sense of ownership over the museum, which can be strengthened by the museum reaching out and creating a working relationship with these communities. By using participation, museums can avoid claims of inauthentic representation, and by creating real relationships, show that they are interested in supporting these communities beyond surface-level actions. For museums such as the ones that I am researching, these types of initiatives could have prevented the claims by employees that their organisations perpetuate institutional racism. Proving that they have done this type of work since 2020 can show that they are deeply committed to their Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion (DEAI) plans. Of course, it can be difficult to tell if there have been changes at this level, which is why it is important to analyse their public programming. Not only will I see if there has been an increase/decrease/plateau of anti-racist programming, but I can see the changes in types of programming offered. For these museums, this change seems to mostly be reflected in a greater number of artists invited to exhibit at the museums. Although this is a different kind of community collaboration to what was discussed earlier with democratisation, it still shows a move towards engaging their audience more with what is shown in the museum and providing authentic representation of minority voices in the museum space.

2.4 Public Programming

In my discussion of participatory practices I emphasised the importance of Nina Simon's *The Participatory Museum* to the museum field generally, but also touched on its particular use when considering educational practices in the museum.²⁶ In fact, much of the advice that Simon presents in the book is specifically aimed at general educational experiences that the museum presents, not just gallery learning and semi-formal learning for children. While

²⁶ Simon, *The Participatory Museum*.

most of the research around educational programming is aimed at either these types of learning or how to reach specific audiences,²⁷ it is clear throughout all types of this research that public programming is a key factor in the relationship that museums have between themselves and their audience. There has also been a variety of research showing that inclusive practices in educational programming leads to positive responses from different communities.²⁸ In a 2018 article for Slate Magazine, Ashton Lattimore discusses what inclusivity in museums means for the black community specifically.²⁹ She discusses the way that black tourists tend to avoid museums and cultural sites because they present a version of history that does not include their perspectives, and the ways that some of these institutions are changing their programming to consider this. Lattimore is saying that changing practices to be more diverse and inclusive “opens up space for [African Americans] to just *be*.” Personally, I have seen this reflected in my own museum, where a BIPOC visitor at an event led by two BIPOC guest speakers expressed that previously they had not felt welcomed at the museum, but now, after attending the event, they felt that the museum was much friendlier toward POC. These sorts of comments show the importance of not only having publicly visible POC employees, but of supporting programming that is anti-racist.

²⁷ I’m looking into this further to not make such a generalised statement. This section in general will see a lot of changes.

²⁸ Lani Florian and Kristine Black-Hawkins, “Exploring Inclusive Pedagogy,” *British Educational Research Journal* 37, no. 5 (October 2011): 813-28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096>.

²⁹ Ashton Lattimore, “How a Wave of Honest History Museums Is Changing Black Tourism,” *Slate Magazine*, May 8, 2018, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2018/05/black-tourism-alabamas-lynching-museum-the-smithsonian-african-american-museum-and-other-honest-tourist-attractions.html>.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As previously stated in my introduction, this is desk-based research. Although I believe it would be interesting to look at this research question through the lens of museum employee experience through an interview-based methodology, the scope of such a project would end up being much larger than can be covered in this dissertation. I believe that the method I have chosen is the best for gathering empirical data to address the question of how the Black Lives Matter Movement has impacted public programming in museums. By conducting desk-based research, my results will not be skewed by the personal perceptions that can cloud complicated situations such as this. While museum employee perspectives can be very insightful and necessary for addressing specific issues in museums, in trying to gain an understanding of the field more generally through these observations, including this method would become far too complicated. For interest in work of this type I would suggest reading “Does It Matter? Have BLM Protests Opened Spaces for Collective Action in Libraries, Archives, and Museums.”³⁰ In this 2022 study, the authors are particularly interested in the specific perspectives of employees and have gathered generic comments about workplace culture during this period and their perception of any institutional changes made due to BLM. Being published closer to when the protests occurred does provide a unique vision of that time that would likely have changed even just two years after this research was conducted.

Some notes about the American museum ecosystem are necessary to understand why I have chosen this type of art museum specifically. Museums in the United States suffer from the same individualisation that pervades our culture at large. Unlike many European museum systems where national museums are brought under the same umbrella, giving them official recognition and standardisation, the majority of American museums are independent organisations. While the American Alliance of Museums exists to try and bring some of that standardisation of practice to the U.S., museums do not need to

³⁰ Sumayya Ahmed et al., “Does It Matter: Have BLM Protests Opened Spaces for Collective Action in Libraries, Archives, and Museums?,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, Library and Information Studies and the Mattering of Black Lives, 4, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v4i1.168>.

seek accreditation with the alliance or follow its practices to be seen as legitimate organisations. Because of this, there can be a lot of disparity between the ways that museums here are run. Some museums defer to AAM, some prefer their historic methods of practice, and others will do whatever it takes to keep running. As long as a museum has enough money to run, it will continue working in its own unique way. Whether they are a small natural history museum on a college campus, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Most museums not being connected to a national museum network means that their reliance on other means of funding can put them at odds with current standards of museum practice. While many try to adhere to what is acceptable in the field, it can be difficult to adjust, especially when relating to social issues. Even when legally obligated, as under NAGPRA, museums may not be able to comply with new social standards as they could lose employees and/or their loyal visitor base. A recent example of this is the Mütter, a medical museum in Philadelphia, whose new director decided to change how human remains were displayed and discussed within the museum without informing their public.³¹ With a new focus on ethical practices, they lost the trust of their visitors and many employees quit in protest.³² The individuality of museums in the U.S. means that it can be difficult to group museums together for a study such as this.

There are three primary reasons I have chosen art museums specifically as my chosen subject. The first is that unlike other types of museums, such as science museums, it is easier to gauge what exactly the changes in programming were in regards to this subject (anti-racism). Art museums, especially large, well-funded ones such as these, have more frequent and relevant temporary exhibitions where the motivations for bringing in certain artists or types of artwork can be more easily seen. While science museums do keep up to date with contemporary topics such as diversity and decolonisation, art museums

³¹ This issue is much more complicated than can be discussed here. The museum did not inform their visitors before making drastic changes to the museum website, causing panic. Many disabled community members also felt betrayed by the changes, as they saw the Mütter as a place where they could relate to historical examples of people with disabilities.

³² Malcolm Burnley, "What the Hell Is Happening With the Mütter Museum?," *Philadelphia Magazine* (blog), September 24, 2023, <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2023/09/23/mutter-museum-ethics-controversy/>.

tend to present a greater quantity of perspectives that do not focus on objectivity. Compared to science museums, art museums can also have political motivations when planning exhibits, this is especially relevant with the ‘museums are not neutral’ conversations that have been happening in the field. Science museums are much more restricted in allowing political motivations to affect exhibits. A well-known example of this is when in 1995 the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum attempted to exhibit the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima at the end of World War II.³³ The original exhibit included perspectives by Japanese survivors of the bomb, to give a more nuanced interpretation of a difficult subject. However, the exhibit sparked outrage from veterans’ groups who insisted that the exhibit was too political, and that simply showing those perspectives was a condemnation of their actions. These groups called on Congress to remove or change the exhibit so that the dropping of the bomb could only be interpreted as a beneficial act. Congress relented, and because the Smithsonian receives Federal funding, they had to change their interpretation to include no perspectives and focus on the basic facts. From then on, the museum has stayed far away from including any interpretation that could be seen as political. To return to the justification for focusing on art museums, this is not to say that you could not conduct a similar study on, say, children’s science museums or natural history museums, but the differences in programming at art museums are more frequent and consistent. The programming also can more easily be tied to social issues because of the subject matter.

The second primary reason for choosing art museums is that most major cities in the United States have examples of this type of large, expansive art museum. Other examples not chosen for this study that fill a similar niche would be museums like Newfields in Indianapolis or the Detroit Institute of Art. While I believe this study could yield interesting results if I used history museums as another type with relevant subjects, unlike these major art institutions, the size and scale of history museums is not as consistent throughout the United

³³ Richard H. Kohn, “History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution’s Enola Gay Exhibition,” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (1995): 1036-63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2945111>.

States. Most history museums in the United States are not large museums like the art museums listed. They are often small and focus on singular subjects, such as key historical figures, specific eras of history, or the specific history of the city in which they are situated. The most comparable would be house museums or living history museums, but it would be difficult to find museums across the country that represent the diversity of interest in different regions of the US. Historical museums as well tend to focus on specific topics that would be difficult to equate to each other across various cities. Some cities such as New York and Chicago do have larger historical museums for their city's particular history, but this is not the norm. Many of these small history museums are also not independent organisations like the majority of American museums. Instead, most areas have small museums that are run either by local, volunteer-led historical societies or by the state/federal parks service. When these types of museums are run by historical societies they are often overly reliant on donations for operations, and when they are run by the parks system, they have to share limited resources with the rest of the wide-reaching organisation. Funding in this case can be even less reliable as state and federal governments change frequently and new leadership can de-prioritise park services.³⁴ Smaller budgets lead to less information available about programming and policy changes, especially online. The art museums chosen for this study are all run by private nonprofits organisations, have access to more funding, and have a large amount of data concerning their museum accessible via the internet.

My third main reason for choosing art museums is that they are the museums that were most consistently targeted in the backlash from the BLM protests. Relating back to the first reason, the cultural and political implications of art museums mean that they are more visible when discussing topics such as anti-racism in museums. The public is more aware of the relationship between art museums and these topics than science or history museums. Again, an argument could be made for historical museums, but it can be more difficult to relate the specific topics of those museums to

³⁴ An example of this would be in 2016, with the incoming Trump administration, the Department of the Interior saw a major reduction of their budget (the Department of the Interior manages the National Parks Service).

contemporary issues, whereas art as ‘universal’ can be made relevant to many different issues. Art museums can also be sites of protest themselves. As Aruna D’Souza describes in *Whitewalling: Art, Race, and Protest in 3 Acts* the issues of white supremacy and colonisation are not just subjects presented in art museums but have been publicly involved in these issues in ways that other types of museum have not.³⁵ D’Souza’s three acts each centre around an instance where statements about Black lives were made from a position of white privilege, whether that be by an individual artist or an institution. The examples that she focuses on, of institutions prioritising White art about Black bodies and the ensuing controversies about these examples, show how art museums relate to anti-racism in their own, unique way. Arguments can be made about historical memory in historical museums, or representation in science museums, but other museums simply do not have the same level of complex relationship with these issues as art museums.

It is important to my study that I use museums from across the country because due to the different regions' history and politics, there was a variety of reactions to the murder of George Floyd and the BLM protests.³⁶ The context that each museum exists in means that it might have had a different response to the events and different levels of commitment to promises of anti-racist work. The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and ICOM both have long-standing commitments to DEI work, but this has mostly been interpreted through the creation of resource libraries to assist museums looking to better their situations. AAM did commit more deeply in their 2022-2025 strategic framework, but this has yet to see fruition or these museums could be compared to their suggested plans.³⁷ It is important to understand the international perspective on this issue, but the context within the United States is so different from the international situation that it would be too much for a project of this size to dive too deeply into it. Understanding the regional

³⁵ Aruna D’Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* (Badlands Unlimited, 2020).

³⁶ While I have chosen two museums from the Midwest, the history and culture of Chicago and the twin cities (Minneapolis-St.Paul) is so different that I believe they should be represented separately. NOMA was chosen to represent the southern U.S. but is also very important because of its deep roots in African American Culture.

³⁷ “2022-2025 Strategic Framework” (American Alliance of Museums, November 16, 2021).

differences within the United States is already a large undertaking and it would simply be too much to add international museums in the mix.

I will acknowledge that a lack of insight as to the particular workings of each museum can be interpreted as a folly of my work, but I think that it actually represents an interesting opportunity to understand how these policy changes can be perceived by the public. If a museum has been working on their DEAI issues internally but there is no outward reflection of these changes, then one could argue that there has not been effective change. As such, the best way to measure these responses is through empirical, quantitative methods. If I were looking more closely at employee diversity and satisfaction, I think that qualitative research would be the way to go, but as stated, that would be a much larger project. As I am interested in the impact on local communities, I think that trying to understand from an outside perspective is the best way to move forward with this research. Considering that perspective, looking at the public programs is the best way to understand this view. The public programming is something that is very visible to the museum visitors and can send a message regarding the institution's inclusivity.

The research paradigm that I have worked within is the constructivist paradigm, which states that human behaviour is complex and cannot be predicted by predefined probability. I used this paradigm because, like human beings, museums are complex systems that rarely behave in the expected fashion. This is for many reasons, such as differences in size, funding, number of employees, and the preferences of museum leadership. Museums in the United States can be particularly unpredictable due to the lack of a formalised national museum system. Unlike many European museum systems, such as those in Germany and France, the vast majority of museums in the U.S. function as independent institutions. There are exceptions of course, such as the Smithsonian Institution, and the considerable number of museums and heritage sites managed under the Department of the Interior or within individual state parks systems. While the American Alliance of Museums does serve to function as an organising body for American museums, membership or adherence to the organisation's policies and recommendations is not necessary to establishing an institution's presence as a 'museum.' There are little ramifications for those

that do not want to follow the AAM, and the American public has little awareness of this. Unlike many museums in the rest of the world where the ICOM debate over the definition of the word ‘museum’ could hold actual ramifications, for institutions in the U.S. the bearing of that debate is different for each museum. For most of the public, a museum is a museum, whether it is part of the Smithsonian or one of the many Bigfoot museums (sometimes multiple per state). Because of the simply massive amount of unique museums in the U.S., it is impossible to predict there, or their employees, behaviour. As such, I believe that the data that I have collected will yield different results based on each museums’ unique circumstances. This is why I have chosen the constructivist paradigm to work within.

For my data collection, I have collected the data as follows. First, I decided which museums I will be analysing (New Orleans Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis). These museums were chosen because they are all prominent institutions in each of their cities and represent the diverse regions of the United States. Although the museums are not all the same size, their visitor numbers to metropolitan population density are roughly equitable to each.³⁸ Each of these museums are also the most significant museums for each of these cities and hold a lot of value for local visitors. Being such, their programming is more aimed towards the local community. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was removed from consideration for not adhering to this reasoning, as its main visitor-base is from out-of-state. Although the museum incentivises local visits by giving pay-what-you-want prices where non-New Yorkers pay \$30 a ticket, the programming does not seek to include local artists or work as a community gathering place the same way as the other museums. The museums chosen also have similar amounts of programming per month, as well as a similar number of new exhibitions put on each year. Other museums, such as the J. Paul Getty Museum of Los Angeles, were originally considered but were removed due to disparities with this fact. The Getty had a significantly lower amount of monthly programs

³⁸ For Minneapolis this includes the greater population of the Twin Cities, meaning both Minneapolis and St. Paul.

and it was deemed that such a small amount of data could not be analysed in the same way as the other museums.

I would like to note that, as an objective observer, I am not from any of these cities, nor have I ever visited them or any of these museums. This means that there may be some aspects of their unique situations that I am simply unaware of and would only be aware of if I were physically there. This may also impact my understanding of each city's relationship with the Black Lives Matter Movement, even as I have tried to gauge how it affected each individual city. To keep the balance with my subject matter, I have removed from consideration case studies where I am more intimately aware of the situation, such as with museums in Washington D.C., my hometown. As mentioned previously, I have also attended anti-racist rallies in DC and am more familiar with the status of local anti-racist and decolonial movements in the city. While these types of events often reflect and are related to issues throughout the whole country, they still have their own particular norms and history that I am aware of on a level that is not equal to any of the other cities used. The majority of museums in DC have also been removed as they are primarily national museums, even if they would otherwise fit the criteria discussed, as the National Gallery of Art or the Smithsonian American Art Museum would.

Information regarding each of the chosen museums' public programming will be collected from publicly available records on their websites. Programs between January 2019 and May 2024 will be recorded in an Excel spreadsheet to be analysed. This period of time was chosen to gain an understanding of how programs were conducted prior to the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and how they have evolved since. Specifically, May as the end-date was chosen as the anniversary of the murder, and to not hinder the timeframe in which I am drafting this thesis, which would disallow data collection through the end of 2024. This information gathered includes each program's name, month/year conducted, whether that particular program can be considered anti-racist or not, and any additional notes concerning the program e.g. if it was cancelled or postponed.

Now, the consideration of whether something can be 'anti-racist' is not something to be taken lightly, so I have constructed some defining factors to

guide this analysis. The Cambridge dictionary defines ‘anti-racism’ as “opposed to or preventing racism,” which when applied in this case may seem quite vague but makes for a good starting point.³⁹ By looking at the University of Oxford’s anti-racism resources, we can gain a better understanding of what this could look like in programming.⁴⁰ In 2021, the university’s anti-racism working group created seven points to follow, they are:

Educate yourself, be open to alternative views and experiences, put yourself in the shoes of those that are underrepresented, listen to those who look and sound different to you, involve people of colour in decision-making, advocate for those from marginalised groups, and understand your privilege.⁴¹

These seven points can direct us towards a clearer idea of what might then qualify a program as anti-racist. This article makes for a good starting point as it is specifically talking about anti-racism in the institutional sense rather than personal or community-based work. I have created the following criteria based on these points for marking programs as anti-racist: does it feature non-dominant cultures? Is it led by POC curators or guest speakers/artists? And, is the subject one that disproportionately affects people of colour?

This last point may need a bit of explanation. Through my preliminary research I have found that although some programs may not fall within the first two criteria, they may still disproportionately affect people of colour and may support activist work that includes anti-racist actions. For example, in July of 2020 the Anacostia Community Museum held a discussion on food insecurity during COVID-19, which on the surface does not explicitly feature a POC speaker or is about a non-dominant culture. However, considering the complex systems of racism in America, I came to the conclusion that this discussion can be considered an anti-racist program because food insecurity disproportionately affects black and brown communities and can be used as a tool of oppression

³⁹ “Anti-Racism,” June 12, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/anti-racism>.

⁴⁰ “Anti-Racism Resources October 2021: What Is Anti-Racism?,” accessed May 20, 2024, <https://www.dpag.ox.ac.uk/work-with-us/equality-diversity-inclusion/anti-racism-working-group/anti-racism-resources-october-2021-what-is-anti-racism>.

⁴¹ “Anti-Racism Resources October 2021.”

and colonisation. Each program does require its own consideration as there can be nuanced arguments either way, this is why it is important for me to go through each museum's programs and make this determination.

Programs that are noted to be anti-racist will usually have to fulfil two or more of the listed criteria.⁴² There will be some cases where a program may fulfil one piece of the criteria but upon further investigation does not qualify as anti-racist. Some examples of this would be a yoga session led by a person of colour, which if focused on the tradition and spirituality of yoga could qualify but these types of programs are usually westernised versions of yoga that focus on bodily well-being, or a white curator giving a gallery talk on 18th century Japanese art.

Unfortunately, because this is such a new topic of research, there is not much precedent for conducting it. The American Alliance of Museums has been working on this though, and does have some basic information for how museums can become anti-racist institutions. The AAM has had a DEAI working group since 2016, but has only more recently started to make headway with this mission. It was re-established in the 2022-2025 Strategic Framework that the issue of DEAI needed to be re-committed to,⁴³ as by that time the only work that had been completed by the group was the establishment of an online resource library and a single publication: "Facing Change: Insights from AAM's DEAI Working Group."⁴⁴ This report lays out the 'current' state of things in the field and next steps for the group. By the time this was published in 2018, there was awareness that these issues existed in the field, it was not yet a priority to address them realistically in museums.

With 2020 and the Black Lives Matter Movement making these issues much more public, museums and the AAM became more motivated to progress their DEAI initiatives. We see these next steps take a more solid shape with the group's 2022 report "Excellence in DEAI."⁴⁵ Here, they finally make more solid

⁴² In the cases where just one criteria is filled, the case is usually more plain, such as an author talk featuring a POC author.

⁴³ "2022-2025 Strategic Framework."

⁴⁴ "Facing Change: Insights from the American Alliance of Museums' Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group" (American Alliance of Museums, 2018).

⁴⁵ "Excellence in DEAI" (American Alliance of Museums, 2022).

recommendations for institutions looking to improve their diversity practices. This report is made up of four parts: 1. Changes in tactics by AAM, 2. Core concepts and key indicators, 3. Excellence in DEAI going forward, 4. Conclusions and next steps. The section which we will focus on is the second, core concepts and key indicators. Here, the authors define core concepts as “overarching themes of excellence in DEAI” and key indicators as “tactical practices indicative of progress in each core concept.”⁴⁶ Within this section they list four core concepts each with two key indicators: “DEAI is the responsibility of the whole organisation, DEAI is an ongoing journey without a fixed end point, DEAI demands an ongoing commitment of resources, and DEAI work must be measured and assessed.” The main purpose of this document is to guide museums that want to start/continue DEAI work at their institutions. It was written with the inherent understanding that the process for each museum’s DEAI journey will be quite different, thus seeking to create a fundamental basis for the work. Unlike the previous report, which sought only to understand the current state of the field and made no recommendations, this report can help museums create a basic framework for increasing diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

Although this report does not give specific recommendations for conducting research of this sort, I have looked to it as a guiding factor for the purpose of my research. My research relates heavily to the last two core concepts listed (“DEAI demands an ongoing commitment of resources, and DEAI work must be measured and assessed”).⁴⁷ I aim to see if the institutions chosen have committed those long-term resources through my own measurement and assessment. In explaining this core concept, they stress that to create equity, research supporting diversity must name differences in treatment, rather than shy away from them in the name of ‘equality.’ They go on to explain that by conducting research in a way that treats othered experiences the same as that of the dominant culture, researchers can actually end up covering up those differences of experience that are crucial to address. My research seeks to

⁴⁶ “Excellence in DEAI.”

⁴⁷ “Excellence in DEAI.”

address this by explicitly labelling programs as anti-racist so that we can see whether these programs are conducted on a level equitable to those that are not and whether this has been affected by the Black Lives Matter Movement. The other core concept related to my research is the idea that DEAI demands an ongoing commitment of resources. I believe the most important aspect of my research past measuring whether Black Lives Matter affected museums, is measuring whether that affect has been sustained or if it has waned over the last four years. As the AAM says, DEAI work is an ongoing process, and it can be difficult to tell whether museums have stayed committed to this work, or if their statements given in the fall of 2020 were simply superficial. While there are other areas of the museum that are certainly affected by these shifts (notably many museums committed to more diverse hiring practices and increasing board diversity), as stated previously, this area is the most public and has the possibility of creating the most external impact on their communities.

So, while there has not been much other research in the museum field to use as a basis for my own, by utilising methods from other types of research mixed with the theoretical background of anti-racism created outside of this sphere I hope that the work I am doing will show as complete a picture as I can create. Using the methods that I have outlined I have gathered data from each of the three museums and will present it in a mix of analytical statistics and background information also gathered through publicly available online resources such as annual reviews and press releases. In this way I will answer my three main questions: what were the museums' responses to Black Lives Matter? Has there been a noticeable change in anti-racist and decolonial programming since 2020? Do their programs feature POC voices? Have there been any administrative changes made in support of this work?

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Before showing my findings for each individual institution, I will share my general observations gathered from this study. To answer the specific questions I have laid out as previously stated, I will present each of my case studies with the background information gathered stating their responses to the murder of George Floyd, the analytical data that I have collected throughout this study, and any information regarding related structural changes that have occurred since 2020. Each museum has a unique response to the Black Lives Matter movement, thus needing to be understood within their own individual contexts. They also need to be understood as representing deeper currents of movement happening within the museum field in the United States which is why the general observations section is important. It may not give specific insights as the individual assessments do but can widen the lens through which we are viewing.

4.1 General Observations

In addressing the first of my research questions, I will say that the information gathered regarding it is best left for the individual responses section. As to the second of my questions, i.e. whether there has been a change in the level of anti-racist programming among the museums studied, I will say that generally, yes, there has been an increase. This increase varies by size between each of the museums but it exists nonetheless. It is only observable when looking at the number of anti-racist programs in proportion to the total number of programs offered by each museum. This way of understanding the data does need some nuanced understanding attached to it however, as there was another event that occurred in 2020 that drastically affected the number and frequency of programming in museums; the Covid-19 pandemic. The exact implications that the pandemic had on programming is difficult to judge, as I cannot account for any staff and funding changes that may have occurred.⁴⁸ At the very least the data collected shows an immediate cut of all programs during

⁴⁸ If any. Many museums underwent drastic changes to their internal structures during and after the pandemic.

the individual lockdown period until museums' could implement early versions of their digital programs. Each museum had a different amount of time that they stayed fully closed and/or started online programming. All museums returned to semi-regular operations (meaning the physical space was re-opened even if at a reduced level) by July of 2020 at the latest. I say 'semi-regular' because even now, over four years after the pandemic began, museums have not returned to the same level of operations as prior to the pandemic. In the period following the re-opening of physical spaces, most programs were still not run to discourage large meetings, but by this point they were supplemented by some online programs. This trend continued through 2021 and program numbers only started to recover in 2022 (see fig. 1 and 2). Only since the beginning of this year have any of these museums implemented the same amount of programming that they were pre-pandemic. This is evident not just in the numbers, but in the types of programming and the frequency of new exhibits. It is also clear that the pandemic presented museums with new opportunities to change and/or expand their programming. Each of the museums seemed to use this large gap to look at and restructure their regular programming. At least one of these museums, the New Orleans Museum of Art, also used this opportunity of restructuring to address the issue of diversity in their programs, which will be discussed further in the individual findings.

Generally, I have found that it can be extremely beneficial for museums to audit their past programs in this manner. Although in the framework of this study I have not spoken to the education departments directly at any of these institutions, I know from my own personal experience speaking to a large variety of museums during my studies (e.g. Heritage Malta, the University of Tartu Museum, the National Gallery London) that most institutions do not have the time or resources to dedicate to this sort of study. But, I also know that it is something that may not have occurred to museums to consider before. Education departments are lacking in structural database management and rely heavily on the personal memory of employees for reference to past programs.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Except of course program materials such as lesson plans, which tell us nothing of how often the program has been conducted, how long it has been implemented, or how frequently it has been used.

In my preliminary research for this study I discovered a lack of resources available for this type of research. In an inquiry with at least one extremely prolific and well-funded museum, I was told that the department does not keep a catalogue of their past programs and that my best bet would be searching their calendar function which did not allow outside access to past calendar events. For obvious reasons, I had to remove this museum from my research pool. As I continued my research, I found that there were many other museums that also did not keep a strict record of their programs, but at least their calendar's allowed for viewing past events. In viewing these past programs, I observed many interesting trends that I believe could be useful to the museums. It is difficult to identify and describe these trends without expending more time and energy on subjects that do not relate to my research, such as the frequency of certain programs, the types of programs related to exhibits, and the way the programs have evolved at specific museums more generally.

4.2 Individual Findings

For this section I will be discussing each of the museums chosen for this study in-depth by first showing their initial responses to the BLM protests, then analysing the data I have collected, and finally looking to see if there have been any updates concerning their DEAI work since that initial reaction. When looking at the individual responses to the Black Lives Matter Movement by each of the museums included in this study, it should bear in mind that although each of these museums is of a similar type and fulfils a similar function within their metropolitan area, they were all founded for different reasons and have been governed in different ways, which gives them different priorities when it comes to operations and the type of content that they are producing and promoting. This becomes especially clear when looking at their programming, as we can see not only the variety of programs produced, but the exhibitions that they are attached to and the supplementary material created for them.



Mutante, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Front of NOMA, 2011

4.3 New Orleans Museum of Art - NOMA

The New Orleans Museum of Art is a historic institution in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana and was founded in 1911. It was created by the city of New Orleans with funds given by local philanthropist Isaac Delgado. The museum is the oldest fine arts institution in the city and has been accredited by AAM since 1972.⁵⁰ During its long tenure, the museum has survived budget cuts, hurricanes⁵¹, and at least two pandemics⁵² to become a staple of the city. Their collection includes works from all over the world, but the primary focus of the permanent collection is work by local Louisiana artists. A major feature of the museum is the Besthoff Sculpture Garden, where many of their public events take place. Their mission is that they are “committed to preserving, presenting, and enriching its collections and renowned sculpture garden;

⁵⁰ “Museum Timeline,” New Orleans Museum of Art, accessed August 10, 2024, <https://noma.org/about/welcome/museum-timeline/>.

⁵¹ Most notably, Hurricane Katrina, which decimated the city in 2005 and caused 6 million dollars in damage to the museum and caused it to be closed for seven months.

⁵² The influenza/Spanish Flu of 1918 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

offering innovative experiences for learning and interpretation; and uniting, inspiring, and engaging diverse communities and cultures.”⁵³ The section of their website that includes their purpose, vision, and mission also includes a statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how important that concept is to the culture of the museum. This commitment to DEI was added to the site after they published their Agenda For Change in 2020.

Almost a month after the murder of George Floyd on June 24, 2020 a group called #DismantleNOMA published an open letter accusing the New Orleans Museum of Art of supporting institutional racism and creating a toxic work environment for both its BIPOC and LGBTQ+ employees. The letter cites examples of explicitly racist behaviour towards staff by higher level employees, micro aggressive language used in exhibits, and a work culture that has a lack of BIPOC employees in positions of power. With strong words, the letter claims that the museum has a “plantation-like culture behind its facade.”⁵⁴ This letter was signed by a large number of former staff, as well as others in the arts and museum-adjacent fields across the country in solidarity. Complaints in the letter include:

General refusal to reward or promote Black staff into new roles...attempts to enforce gender and racially motivated dress code violations, such as the suggested removal of dreadlocks for black employees...inequitable adherence to guidelines for paid leave including both funeral and sick leave for Black employees vs. their white counterparts...wage disparity for entry to mid-level staff - where nearly all of NOMA’s Black employees are found...with no opportunity for meaningful raises.⁵⁵

Even though the petition is called #DismantleNOMA, it does not actually call for the destruction of the museum but instead is calling for the dismantling of the racist systems used by them. The writers give a number of demands including

⁵³ “Mission Statement,” New Orleans Museum of Art, accessed August 10, 2024, <https://noma.org/about/welcome/mission-statement/>.

⁵⁴ “#DismantleNOMA - COLLECTIVE STATEMENT,” accessed July 24, 2024, <https://sites.google.com/view/dismantlenoma/collective-statement>.

⁵⁵ “#DismantleNOMA - COLLECTIVE STATEMENT.”

stopping “all forms of performative allyship, Black tokenism, and virtue signalling,” a public apology from the museum to their former staff, the removal of specific high-level administrators that were identified as the most harmful, increased diversity in higher levels of museum management including the curatorial departments and museum board, formal investigations into past complaints that were ignored, and including anti-racism as a part of the museum mission.

The museum released an action plan on July 17, 2020, along with a statement stating their dedication to doing better in the future starting with addressing some of the complaints listed.⁵⁶ Specifically, they promised to increase board diversity by 25% over a period of three years, create an internal task force dedicated to inclusivity, increase staff diversity, create an independent role for addressing administrative complaints, and publish progress reports. They also committed to spending the rest of their art acquisition funds on work by BIPOC artists. This statement also acts as a public apology to “our staff, the community-at-large and #dismantleNOMA for any hurt we have caused.”⁵⁷ Although they do not directly address many of the issues brought forth by #DismantleNOMA, their acknowledgement of the issues that are facing the museum is legitimate and the response that they give shows promise for creating a more anti-racist environment. This statement also does not explicitly mention the Black Lives Matter movement as the reason for which these issues were brought to the table in the first place. While #DismantleNOMA states that the upheaval in the country over race issues makes it the right time to demand change, NOMA itself does not speak to it nor have they released any other statement about the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests.

In their statement, the museum briefly discusses the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic affected the museum and its operations. This museum is one in which I think it is clear that the pandemic was used as an opportunity to invest in these changes rather than ignore them. By taking the time to respond

⁵⁶ David Johnson, “Our Agenda for Change,” New Orleans Museum of Art, July 7, 2020, <https://noma.org/our-agenda-for-change/>.

⁵⁷ Johnson.

(nearly a month) and publishing an action plan by which they can be held accountable, we can see the intention of following-through on their words. So too can we see it reflected in their programming between 2019 and 2024. We can see that although the number of anti-racist programming does not seem to change much throughout the years (Fig. 1), the extreme amount of programs that were cut due to the pandemic means that the overall percentage of anti-racist programs has increased by about 14%, going from 19.61% of total programs in 2019 to 33.74% in 2024. While there was a substantial increase between 2019 and 2020, which then dropped in 2021, then rose again in 2022. Since then, the numbers seem to have plateaued, keeping the overall number of anti-racist programs as about a third of the total. In the figure below we can see this represented in 2022 with 46 out of a total 141 programs (32.6%) being deemed anti-racist, and 49 out of 149 (32.9%) in 2023, and 55 out of 163 (33.7%) in 2024 (as of May).

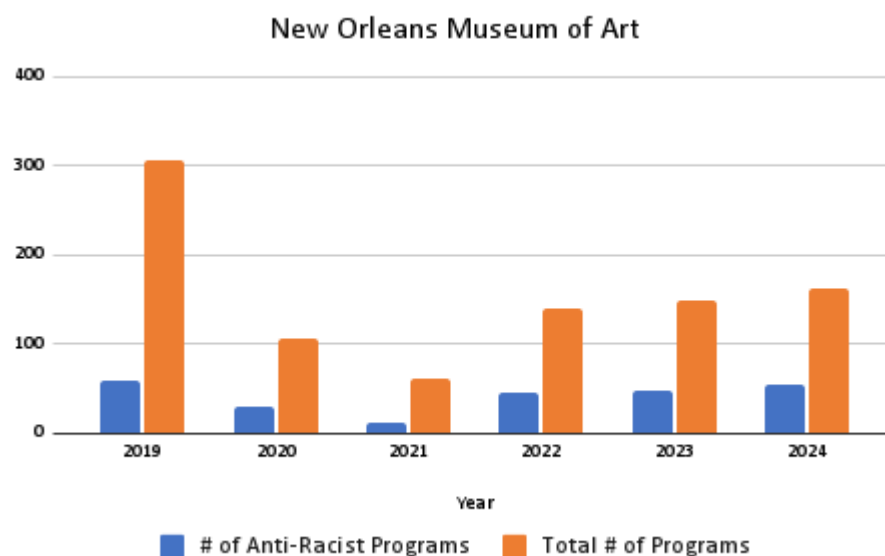


Fig. 1 Total Programs and Anti-Racist Programs at the New Orleans Museum of Art 2019-2024

Prior to 2020, examples of programs deemed anti-racist are primarily about nondominant cultures, related to the *Bondiye* exhibit, or are talks given by African Art curator Ndubuisi Ezeoluomba. These include programs such as “A Night of India,” “Small Talk: Portrait of a Free Woman of Color,” and “Activation of Wafaa Bilal’s 168:01 with Guest Speaker Kristina Kay Robinson”

(Appendix A). After 2020, once the museum started to return to normal operations, programs feature more POC guests, like “Artist Talk with Wang Qingsong” in 2023, and especially musicians during night and garden events like “Music in the Garden Featuring Amine Boucetta” (Appendix A).

While the amount of anti-racist programs recorded in 2019 was low, it was not shockingly low nor appeared to be the result of deliberate exclusion. A large part of this is thanks to an exhibit mentioned in the open-letter, *Bondiye: Between and Beyond*, which featured the work of Tina Bouchard who works with themes of religious and cultural exchange in Haiti.⁵⁸ Without this exhibit, the numbers would have been much lower. Looking more closely at the data collected, it can be determined that the increase is primarily in the number of programs that could easily be adjusted to include more BIPOC speakers or performance artists. As we see prior to 2020, the number of POC guests invited to host programs or perform is much lower than would expect from a city such as New Orleans, which has such a strong connection to black history and culture. Events such as their regular “Friday Nights at NOMA”⁵⁹ and the yearly “Music in the Garden” series begin to almost exclusively feature POC artists and musicians post 2020 (Appendix A). The museum has also created events to celebrate African American holidays⁶⁰ such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Juneteenth⁶¹, and Kwanzaa⁶², and they have consistently run these events since 2021. In addition to these improvements, it is also noted that the museum created new events in cooperation with local community organisations to promote solidarity and build relationships with the community. One interesting

⁵⁸ The open letter also states that although they were happy to see Haitian representation in this exhibit, there were also issues with the curatorial sides of it including misrepresentation of Haitian artists and the inclusion of a piece of Haitian Vodou flags created by a white artist.

⁵⁹ This program was replaced with “First Fridays at NOMA” then discontinued in 2023.

⁶⁰ Described as such because although MLK Jr. Day and Juneteenth are now national holidays, they were only made so relatively recently and are not celebrated at the same level as other national holidays such as the Fourth of July or Memorial Day. For example, Juneteenth is not a mandatory bank holiday and most businesses will not give employees time off to celebrate it.

⁶¹ Juneteenth is a holiday celebrating the end of slavery. Specifically, the enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas. Although slavery was ended at different times in different states, Juneteenth has been adopted by many as a celebration of liberation.

⁶² Kwanzaa is an African American holiday created during the Black Power movement as an alternative to Christmas.

example of this was a program from July 2022 titled “Funerary Traditions in Ancient Egypt and New Orleans,” where a local, historic Black-owned funeral home was invited to speak in conversation with their curator of African art (Appendix A). This program was given in relation to an exhibit on the ancient Egyptian queen Nefertari. The museum also hosted multiple event nights in their cafe featuring a contemporary Egyptian chef for this exhibit. By connecting this historic subject with contemporary practitioners in a thoughtful manner, the museum shows that authentic engagement with diverse subjects can breed successful programs that relate to POC visitors.

In my investigation, I have found that although the allegations of racism are strong, and I am sure that the former employees involved felt very passionately about their mistreatment, NOMA has done an excellent job improving themselves along these lines, at least from what is visible on the outside. What is clear from #DismantleNOMA’s petition is that much of what was happening was behind-the-scenes, so it is difficult to see whether improvements have been made solely through their programming. Through that lens of programming there has been a definite improvement in creating more inclusive programming. Behind-the-scenes as well, NOMA did follow through on publishing updates regarding their inclusivity initiatives until August 2022, when the most recent update was published.⁶³ These updates include the fact that they created an internal staff equity committee, hired a consultant to help with staff equity, re-committed themselves to funding BIPOC artists, and contracted a DEI partner. Although there have been no updates since 2022, the ones published previously do show promise for changing the internal work culture at the museum.

In a more troubling update, in September 2023 the NOLA Project announced that they would be ending their long-standing partnership with NOMA.⁶⁴ The NOLA project is a theatre company that has staged their

⁶³ “DEI Progress Report,” New Orleans Museum of Art, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://noma.org/about/dei-progress-report/>.

⁶⁴ Doug MacCash, “NOLA Project Theater Company Ends Relationship with New Orleans Museum of Art,” NOLA.com, September 18, 2023, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/arts/nola-project-theater-splits-with-new-orleans-museum-of-art/article_34c26baa-50cb-11ee-a791-2bfbb1fac981.html.

performances at NOMA since 2011. NOLA is another organisation that underwent major changes due to the Black Lives Matter movement alongside NOMA. Nola News⁶⁵ reported that the decision to stop working with NOMA stemmed from communication issues between the two organisations over the staging of their new play “The Colored Museum.”⁶⁶ They report that according to NOMA, they “asked to defer the timing of the production so that the museum could develop additional programming to be presented alongside the production,” and that the theatre company did not want to wait. Nola news cites that the NOLA project’s decision to end the partnership was due to the museum not being open to negotiation about the delay. In their statement on the situation in their ‘Commitment to an Anti-Racist Theater’ NOLA says:

As a part of this effort, we recently proposed a production of George C. Wolfe’s THE COLORED MUSEUM to be presented at NOMA. For the first time in our partnership history, our proposal was rejected. This and other actions taken by NOMA prompted us to reevaluate how this association affects our potential to continue making meaningful changes. In order to ensure we are able to honor the commitments we have made to the artists and patrons of our community, we have decided to end our 12-year relationship with NOMA.⁶⁷

Without actually seeing the correspondence between the two organisations it is difficult to determine which story is closest to the truth, or if neither are, and there was truly grievous miscommunication happening. Nola News points to each of the organisations’ changes for more diversity and inclusivity as a point where this strain might have been built. They imply that each organisation underwent these changes in different ways, where the NOLA Project almost immediately increased the diversity of their company so that almost half of their cast are POC, where NOMA has not made improvement that strong or visible. They specifically point to a matter where NOMA recently (as of 2023) hired a white curator as head of their African Art department as a possible

⁶⁵ Although they share the same name these are unrelated organisations. Nola is a general acronym standing for New Orleans, LA (Louisiana).

⁶⁶ MacCash, “NOLA Project Theater Company Ends Relationship with New Orleans Museum of Art.”

⁶⁷ “Our Commitment to an Anti-Racist Theatre,” The NOLA Project, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.nolaproject.com/communitycommitment>.

reason, which the NOLA Project denied as having any part in their separation. It should be noted that in their page about the production, it is found that they did find another venue for the production, the New Orleans African American Museum. This split between NOMA and the NOLA Project can be hard to parse, and likely we will never know what happened behind-the-scenes to cause it, whether it is simple communication errors or whether there is a deep-rooted issue that emerged between them. If the latter, it could hint at further issues concerning diversity and racial equity occurring within NOMA as it has undergone the changes of the past few years. At least on the surface, we can see from their programming information that the improvements have stabilised in a pattern that furthers diversity and anti-racism in their programming.



ajay_suresh, [CC BY 2.0](#) , via Wikimedia Commons

Front of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2021

4.4 The Art Institute of Chicago

The Art Institute of Chicago is one of the oldest and most iconic art museums in the United States. It is a research institution that works in coordination with an active university, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. As such a large, historic institution it has a very esteemed reputation

both locally and internationally. The way that they hold themselves can be seen in their mission statement:

The Art Institute of Chicago shares its singular collections with our city and the world. We collect, care for, and interpret works of art across time, cultures, geographies, and identities, centering the vision of artists and makers. We recognize that all art is made in a particular context, demanding continual, dynamic reconsideration in the present. We are a place of gathering; we foster the exchange of ideas and inspire an expansive, inclusive understanding of human creativity.⁶⁸

In this statement a few aspects should be highlighted as what I deem to be the most obvious priorities for their museum; their international reputation, and the emphasis on the history of art. This last point is further emphasised in their values statement which points to “fostering a progressive understanding of our past.” Their international reputation as well seems to be a key aspect of how the institution is run. While the museum does not strictly appeal to tourists as some other major art museums, such as the MET and Getty do, the Institute has been aware of this aspect of its running since at least 1893 (the museum was founded in 1879), when a new building was created to coincide with the World Columbian Exhibition in Chicago that year.

Contrast to the tumultuous journey that NOMA has undergone in the last four years is the Art Institute of Chicago. Unlike NOMA, during the Black Lives Matter protests the Art Institute was not the recipient of a call to action by the general public or former employees. Even so, being such a prolific institution and existing in a city with a high population of POC citizens, the museum did release a responsive statement on June 3rd, 2020.⁶⁹ This statement was also quite different to the response that NOMA gave, in that, it is more a statement of solidarity rather than an actionable plan for the future. Instead of listing specific points that they want to address in the future, their statement shows an understanding of museums as historical tools of colonisation and white

⁶⁸ “Mission and History,” The Art Institute of Chicago, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://www.artic.edu/about-us/mission-and-history>.

⁶⁹ James Rondeau, “Our Commitment to Racial Justice and Equity” (The Art Institute of Chicago, June 3, 2020), <https://www.artic.edu/articles/841/our-commitment-to-racial-justice-and-equity>.

supremacy. One of the positive aspects of this statement is that the museum, or current director who penned the statement, directly references George Floyd and Black Lives Matter as the reason for it. They state:

Institutionally and personally, we condemn and grieve the violent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the countless black people before them who have lost their lives in racist acts, including so many in our own city. While these tragic events have rightfully ignited protests across the world, we know that there are countless other incidents of racism—that are not caught on video, that do not end in such profound tragedy—enacted daily on black bodies and minds. As a civic institution literally and figuratively embedded in the heart of our city, we stand firmly and resolutely in opposition to all forms of systemic, institutionalized racism and oppression. Black lives matter.

The recent atrocities compound the disproportionate toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on communities of color, amplifying inequitable hardship and losses. While so many of us are saddened and outraged, we acknowledge, with respect and empathy, that this pain and anger is particularly acute in black communities across Chicago and the country. Our compassion and support is with these communities, particularly in Chicago, and especially with our own black staff members.

However, this cannot simply be a time for words. Museums are contested sites; we are not neutral. We have the ability to play a constructive role in civic discourse. This is a time for self-reflection, a time for us to thoughtfully understand the best ways to advance racial justice. We recognize both the specific limitations of our authority as well as the boundless potential of an art museum to give shape and structure to new narratives. Grief will transform into action.

As we reflect on our past, we are accountable for our museum’s legacy of white privilege and exclusion, not only in the representation of artists of color in our collection but also of those in our community who have historically felt unwelcome in our spaces. That legacy is antithetical to the museum we aspire to be. We have been investing resources, and will extend those commitments, to create meaningful change.⁷⁰

Where they fail, is their denying the inclusion of modes of accountability for the goals that they list. In stating their vague goals for increasing diversity and creating a welcoming atmosphere, they do not state the specific ways in

⁷⁰ Rondeau.

which they will do these things nor any bodies such as a DEI officer or committee that will oversee their completion. Where NOMA lists “developing an internal task force,” a measurable goal, the Art Institute lists goals such as “foster employee engagement and trust” or “elevate artists and histories that have been marginalised.” There is also a complete lack of explanation as to how these goals will be achieved beyond the “investment of resources.”

Two of the vague goals listed in their statement are directly related to the museum’s education department: “develop programming that is diverse, challenging, and impactful,” and “reinvent educational programming to reflect current social discourse and inspire students from wide-ranging backgrounds.”⁷¹ Although they stated these goals and said they would dedicate resources to attaining them, from the data collected, we can see little achievement of them thus far. While the Art Institute did show the most significant increase in the number of anti-racist programs in the year immediately following the statement (almost 20%), the years that followed see a drastic drop (Fig. 2). In fact, in 2022 and 2023, the numbers fell below the starting percentage of 21.31%, with both years hovering around 14%. As of 2024, the number has risen back above the starting percentage and was recorded at 29.41%, which is still significantly lower than that of 2021, which was recorded as 43.33%. 2021 also saw the lowest number of overall programs, 120 compared to 488 in 2019, 190 in 2020, 275 in 2022, 298 in 2023, and 221 by May 2024. While the number of anti-racist programs stayed relatively stable, at 46 in 2020, 52 in 2021, 41 in 2022, 44 in 2023, and 65 in 2024. By looking closer at the data, we can see a few reasons for the volatile shifting of the percentages. One of the reasons we can see is that although the Art Institute implemented new programs in 2021 for Black History Month and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, they discontinued these programs in the subsequent years.

⁷¹ Rondeau.

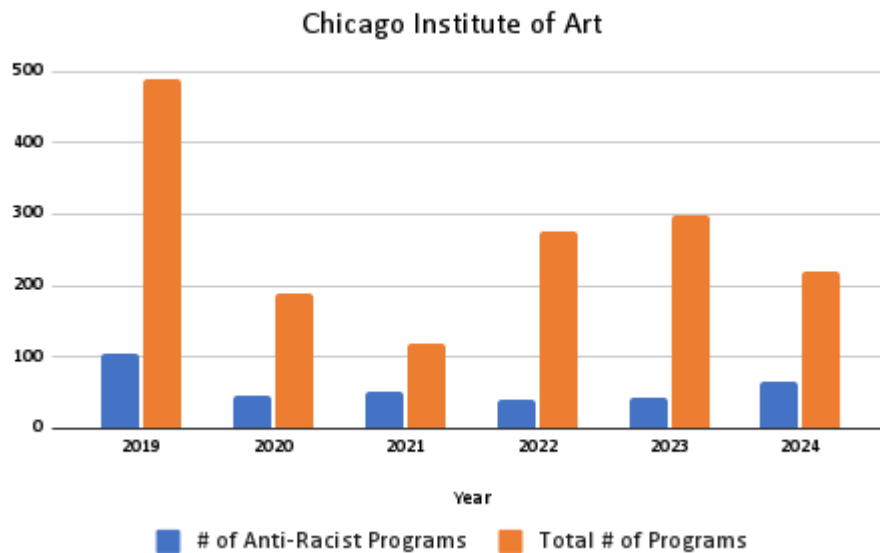


Fig. 2 Total Programs and Anti-Racist Programs at the Art Institute of Chicago 2019-2024

The most obvious reason for the 2021 increase is that in June through August of that year, the Art Institute was the first museum, as part of a national tour, to host the Obama presidential portraits. As the hometown of First Lady Michelle Obama and the city where the couple first met, the Art Institute seems a fitting venue to kick off the tour (Appendix A). As the first Black President and First Lady, their portraits were painted by Black artists Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald. It makes sense that for an exhibit that is so visible on the national scale and could impact the Institute’s reputation on a larger level, they would choose to implement a wide range of programs for the portraits that include Black voices. The museum was also still primarily utilising virtual programs at this time, so they were able to get a wide range of speakers to give lectures on the portraits. Some examples of these programs include: “Portraits in the Park with Avery R. Young and De Deacon Board,” “Virtual Conversation: Portraits of Women, Created by Women,” and “Virtual Conversation: Michelle Obama and Amy Sherald” (Appendix A).

When programs saw an increase in 2021, there was not a related increase in the number of exhibits that featured BIPOC artists or subject matter. Because of this, it was likely much more difficult for the museum to create anti-racist programs that related to current exhibitions. This also supports the theory that anti-racism was not in the museum’s long-term interests, or we would have

seen a shift to more of these types of exhibits as there was at NOMA. This is where it becomes clear that the Art institute simply has other priorities as an institution which does not include making long-term changes to their operations in favour of DEAI. In looking at the total list of programs between 2019 to 2024, we can see clear patterns in the type of programming implemented by the museum. For instance, as an institution that is split between the museum and the still-active art school, the majority of their programs focus on the more technical aspects of artmaking. For example, a February 2023 program titled “Slow Looking: Representing the Body in Color” or the July 2021 program “Virtual Family Portrait: Art of the Portrait” (Appendix A). Unlike the other museums studied, the artist talks at the Art Institute are more about inviting experts to speak about certain artists, not inviting contemporary artists to speak on their work. Of course, the occasional program did that as well, but many of their exhibits featured historical subjects, so it was not possible for them to be as frequent as at someplace like NOMA. Through their programs and exhibits it becomes clear that the Art Institute is primarily interested in upholding an idea of art that is rooted in the historical museum, as was discussed in the literature review. They are attached to the idea of the museum as having the duty to teach the public using an extremely Western, white, colonial standard. Even when they proclaim values of diversity and anti-racism, the institution can never be considered such until it addresses the deeper-rooted issues in how the museum is run. The timeline for the data shows that anti-racism was clearly not a long-term goal for the museum, who only bolstered their anti-racist programming when it was a subject of national discussion. Once the heat on the subject died down, so did their interest in continuing to bolster their anti-racist programs.

As we can see from the programming, the Art Institute of Chicago has not made great strides in promoting anti-racism in their museum. They do generally have more POC artists featured on their website, but in other regards, there has been very little noticeable improvement. Unlike NOMA, they also have not published any data concerning changes within the institution. They have not published any data relating to potential improvements in something like an annual review, nor have they made any statements regarding this matter

since 2020. In some areas of their website, they claim to be making headway with some of the goals mentioned in their initial statement, but again there is no reference to specific points where there has been improvement. If they have any data to support these statements, they are actively choosing not to share it with their public, instead relying on their reputation as a historic institution to support their lack of detailed information. I do not think that they should be exempt from this sort of investigation however, and as a historic institution, they need to be held accountable for failing to address the problematic aspects of their museum beyond surface-level solidarity.

In a 2019 study concerning the museum, authors Embrick, Weffer, and Dóminguez determined that the Art Institute of Chicago is a “White Sanctuary.”⁷² By ‘White Sanctuary’ they mean it “provide[s] an uninterrupted haven that not only promote[s] white supremacy, but also provide[s] a relatively “safe” space in which whites are able to reify their racialized understanding of their world.”⁷³ While they determined the Art Institute to be a ‘White Sanctuary’ before the BLM protests of 2020, I do not think that the museum has provided any evidence to suggest that this has changed. If anything, the analysis that the museum purposefully regressed to the pre-BLM standard of programming after the initial uptick in anti-racist inclusion in 2021 proves that they are actively prioritising this space as a ‘White Sanctuary.’

⁷² David G. Embrick, Simón Weffer, and Silvia Dóminguez, “White Sanctuaries: Race and Place in Art Museums,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 39, no. 11/12 (January 1, 2019): 995-1009, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-11-2018-0186>.

⁷³ Embrick, Weffer, and Dóminguez.



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Front of the Walker Art Center, 2015

4.5 The Walker Art Center

The Walker Art Center, like the two previous museums, is an historic institution. It was created in 1879 by Thomas Barlow Walker, who opened the galleries in his home to the public. Eventually, Walker gave his collection and a plot of land to the city of Minneapolis to create a museum. During the early 20th century, the museum was bolstered during the Great Depression by New Deal funding and created work for the Works Projects Administration.⁷⁴ Eventually they shifted their focus away from the past to centre the collection more on modern art. Their mission is that “the Walker Art Center empowers people to experience the transformative possibilities of the art and ideas of our time and to imagine the world in new ways.” This idea of the Walker being

⁷⁴ This is significant as it represents a shift in the culture of the museum away from prioritising private, upper class art to more public, accessible, contemporary art.

created for the people of Minneapolis and evolving with the times is one that is pervasive in the culture of the museum.

As expected for a museum in the city that was the home of George Floyd, the Walker had a fairly strong immediate response to his murder. Almost immediately following the event, the museum posted multiple statements on their Instagram page. First, they posted a statement of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement and the BIPOC community of the Twin Cities,⁷⁵ then, on June 3rd they posted an announcement stating that effective immediately, the Center would terminate their agreement with the Minneapolis Police Department until drastic changes to the department were made, including demilitarisation.⁷⁶ Following this, the museum also promoted multiple interviews and articles that featured activists connected to the BLM movement. It is important to note that the museum had already hosted an exhibit on Black Lives Matter before the murder of George Floyd, back in 2015. With their already strong support of the movement, it is not surprising that their initial reaction to the murder of George Floyd was so swift and strong. They followed through these shows of solidarity by making institutional change, as is shown in their 2020-2021 Annual Report.⁷⁷ In it, we can see clear advancements made to address institutional racism at the museum, especially regarding increasing the diversity of their board and increasing the funding available for purchasing art by BIPOC artists. For increasing their board diversity, the museum used the system previously discussed that was published by the American Alliance of Museums in 2018. Although the Walker made no specific promises to the community in the statements that they published, such as those made by NOMA and the Art Institute, it is clear by analysing the subsequent reports that this idea of increasing diversity and supporting anti-racism in their institution has been continually present in the operations of the museum.

⁷⁵ Walker Art Center (@walkerartcenter), #GeorgeFloyd, Instagram Photo, May 29, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CAx107sBQsA/?hl=en>.

⁷⁶ Walker Art Center (@walkerartcenter), #GeorgeFloyd #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd #BlackLivesMatter #Minneapolis, Instagram Photo, June 3, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA-utARBv0U/?hl=en>.

⁷⁷ Walker Art Center, "Walker 2020-2021 Annual Report" (Walker Art Center), accessed July 27, 2024, https://s3.amazonaws.com/wac-imgix/cms/dev2021Annual_Report_fy2021_web.pdf.

Now, when looking at the data collected during this study, it might be surprising to learn that although they publicly address BLM and have made institutional changes, that the change in the percentage of anti-racist programs is the lowest of the three museums studied. Between 2019 and 2024, there is only about a 4% increase in the number of anti-racist programs provided by the Walker (Fig. 3). Compared to the 14% increase at NOMA and the 9% increase at the Art Institute, this number could be interpreted as a failure on the part of the Walker. I must return to the fact that the data set compiled for 2024 is not complete and is subject to change for the rest of the year, but does give significant understanding as to how the first half of the year has played out and the final percentage may not change much.

Looking closer at the numbers we can see a possible reason why this increase is so low. The fact is that the museum was doing so well with anti-racist programs prior to 2020, that there was not much room for growth in this area. In fact, it is impressive that they managed even the small increase that they did. For 2019, the percentage of anti-racist programs at the Walker (38%) was already significantly higher than the 2024 numbers for the other museums (33.7% and 29% respectively). There is also the fact that due to the nature of their programming, they were able to better adapt to the pandemic conditions. Many of their programs are film screenings, which they were able to easily adjust to a virtual environment, even as other types of programs had to stop for at least two weeks. This means that their programming numbers stayed more stable during the recovery period of 2020 to 2023. Looking at the differences in percentages, the anti-racist programs did seem to take a bit of a hit during the pandemic period, but are on their way to recovery. In 2019, 38% of the total were anti-racist, in 2020 it dropped to 30.7%, then started to rise again at 34% in 2021, 35.3% in 2022, 41.5% in 2023, and finally 42.2% in 2024.

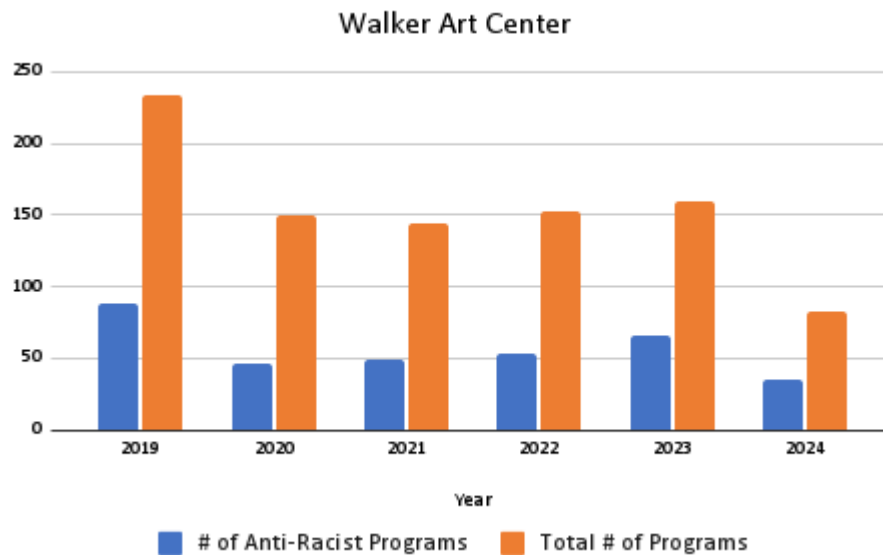


Fig. 3 Total Programs and Anti-Racist Programs at The Walker Art Center 2019-2024

By looking at the programs themselves, we can again see other reasons as to why the total increase was so low. As stated previously, there was not much improvement that could be made by the museum. This is because the majority of programs deemed not anti-racist were either ‘regular’ museum programs such as gallery tours or family event days⁷⁸, or were focused on other aspects of DEAI such as sensory inclusive days or ASL (American Sign Language) tours. It is also clear by looking at the exact programs that other cases of programs not being anti-racist is not exclusion on their part, as it feels when looking at programs, such as the Art Institute’s. In a way, it feels quite the opposite, where the Walker is presenting art in such a way that it cannot be disconnected from the individual artist and their specific context. It would feel rather ingenuine if, for example, they had brought in American BIPOC guests to speak on an exhibit by a German brutalist photographer. In that case (and many others), most of the related programs are led by or distinctly about the artist themselves. Some examples of these programs are: “Citizenship Series Fall 2019: Filling the Void,” “Conversations in Equity and Design: Majora Carter on Talent-

⁷⁸ There were a number of these that were deemed anti-racist, but the majority were generic family programs.

Retention in Low Status America” (November 2021), and “Opening Night: Sadie Barnette’s The New Eagle Creek Saloon”(Appendix A).⁷⁹

This way of approaching what is or what is not included in the museum (although I think you would be hard-pressed to find a perspective not represented here) is quite different from the approaches taken by the other two museums. As can be interpreted by their creation of a Black Lives Matter exhibit five years before the murder of George Floyd, the Walker already had an interest in anti-racist subjects which has likely helped it a great deal in adjusting their programming and internal structure to better support anti-racism. The museum’s general attitude towards creating a genuinely welcoming and authentic place of expression is something that has made them open to this idea of change. In previously advocating for the ways that participatory practices and democratic institutions can create more inclusive and diverse museums, I think that it is clear that these approaches are being used successfully by the Walker. They have shown a keen interest in not just presenting a diverse artistic world, but promoting the voices of the underrepresented without claiming higher knowledge on the subjects. This is a clear example of letting art (and artists) speak for themselves rather than using the old mode of the museum as the teacher and the public as the receiver. Like the other museums, the Walker is only just getting to a point where their operations can be considered ‘back to normal’ after the Covid-19 pandemic, and it will be interesting to see how each of them does or does not continue with anti-racist work in their institutions.

⁷⁹ For the Walker, many of their programs cannot be distinguished as anti-racist by name alone, but all included helpful program descriptions and information about guest lecturers/artists was found online.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

When looking at the results of all three studies, we can see that the answers to my original research questions are quite nuanced. Each museum had a different type of response to Black Lives Matter, and each museum has continued with their anti-racist work in different ways. In analysing the data, I think that it is clear that two of the museums studied, NOMA and the Walker, have made viable, long-term commitments to anti-racism in their museums. The different ways in which this was achieved in each institution provides diverse examples for how this work can be achieved. For NOMA, they went from an institution that had a basic interest in the subject and only rudimentary representation in their programming, to an institution that has a deeper connection to the local BIPOC communities and has invested in their participation at the museum. At the Walker, they already had a strong investment in anti-racism, but, did whatever they could to improve conditions, even if these changes are not as visible to the public. For both, they show that it is possible to make these changes even for museums with different priorities and in different contexts. For the Art Institute of Chicago, this study serves more as a cautionary tale. Through their results, we can see that without visible measures of accountability, anti-racism or other similar social issues, can quickly become de-prioritised. The issues with the Art Institute may stem from deeper sources though, as a museum that not only has a disinterest in authentic anti-racism, but actively prioritises its status as a 'White Sanctuary.'

By looking at all three case studies comparatively, we can also see just how important the ideas of participation and democratisation are to implementing anti-racist programming. The most successful example of implementing anti-racism, NOMA, did so because they started to use more participatory practices. Where the Art Institute tried to create anti-racist programming just through a representative lens, NOMA, and the Walker both utilised a deeper ingrained idea of programming. By not just creating programs with more POC leaders, but inviting more POC artists to create exhibits and developing a deeper involvement in the program creation, these museums not only created more representation, but did so in a more authentic manner. This

method of democratisation also means that it was more difficult for these museums to backslide into how operations were prior to BLM. Using these methods, NOMA and the Walker were able to strengthen the trust with their POC visitors as well as cementing their interest in anti-racism. Although their methods had some issues, they carved a path forward by creating accountability measures to ensure that the work continued in the long-term.

Overall, this study was a success. This proved to be an effective method for tracking how museums have committed to anti-racism in their institutions. For future study, using this method might prove difficult for tracking programs over longer lengths of time as it can be quite an intensive method of research. It would be interesting to continue this conversation through a study of how museum employees' perception of their DEAI policies has tracked alongside the public commitments such as were studied here. As stated previously, this method could be applied in other cases as well for museums looking to self-analyse their programs.

Although there have been many other issues that museum researchers have been giving their attention to, I think that continued study of effective anti-racism in museums is imperative. As stated in my literature review, many other types of social justice work stems from that created to fight racism. Constant vigilance and actions of accountability need to be taken for all museums to ensure that they continue their dedication to anti-racism. Attention to this issue cannot fall to the wayside or the field risks sliding back into its previous state as a tool of white supremacy.

APPENDIX 1: TITLE

Using the below link, please find the spreadsheet used to catalogue the programming data gathered from my three primary study subjects (NOMA, The Art Institute, and the Walker)

[BLM Dissertation Data KIM.xlsx](#)

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