

**Political uproar in the Black Arts Movement: A case study on the Black Emergency  
Cultural Coalition**



*Figure 1. Protest at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, January 16, 1969 (Cahan, 2016)*

Annabelle Jung (s2849585)

Bachelor Thesis International Relations and Organizations (BSc)

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. C. Jentzsch

Second Reader: Dr. J. Masullo

24-05-2024

Word Count: 7924

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## 1. Introduction

It was around 1:00 p.m. on Sunday January 12 when a group of people started walking circles around police barricades in New York city (Cooks, 2007, p. 3). They held up signs saying “Up from slavery? Not yet says Uncle Tom” and “The outsiders tell it like it is in Harlem!”, while handing out leaflets (Cahan, 2016, p. 71). This all was to protest what was behind those massive doors at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) in New York: the newly opened exhibition Harlem on My Mind, Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968. This activism was the work of the newly emerged Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC). Benny Andrews, together with others, formed the BECC for this exact goal: protesting the misrepresentation of Black people in the exhibition (Cooks, 2007, p. 22). This activism was not merely an important critique against the Met, it showcased that Black people disapproved of the status quo within art institutions.

This uproar happened within the prevailing Black Arts movement (BAM). This movement spread from poets to musicians, who all advocated for a Black Aesthetic to promote racial solidarity in the fight against racial social and institutional practices (Neal, 1968, as cited in Forsgren, 2015, p. 136). Conventionally, organizations within an arts movement are often groups of artists that create art and strive to make a difference through artistic innovation. While, on the other hand, politically engaged organizations strive to change the status quo through policy reform; they are set up to interfere with the socio-political situation. Therefore, when a politically engaged organization emerges within an arts movement, it diverges from expectation. Consequently, one might wonder why politically engaged organizations emerge within an arts movement. This research analyzes this through the case of the emergence of the BECC within the Black Arts Movement.

First, this research will give an overview of the existing literature on the topic of the BAM. Thereafter, the theoretical framework will explain the chosen cultural opportunity theory. This will be followed by a methodology section, which explains the techniques this research will use. Consequently, this research will conduct the analysis through the congruence procedure. After analyzing the variables, I will conclude the findings of this research. Accordingly, this research will strive to answer its research question: *Why do politically engaged organizations emerge within an arts movement?*

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter will give an overview on how arts movements, like the Black Arts Movement have been analyzed in the existing literature. Firstly, a broad overview will be given of how scholars have researched social movements in the last decades. Secondly, the literature on the BAM will be examined. Lastly, a gap in the literature will be identified, which motivates the approach of this research.

Generally speaking, academic literature on social movements has increased over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cromartie, 2018, p. 79). With the increase of social movements in the 1960s, academics naturally started producing more literature on this topic. Commentators even witnessed an “explosion” of literature on social movements (Morris & Herring, 1987, p. 138, as cited in: Della Porta & Diani, 2020, p. 1). Therefore, this topic worked as “growth industry” in social science academics in the United States (US) and Europe (McAdam et al., 1996). Social movement theory can be divided into categories. McAdam et al. (1996) states that movement scholars oftentimes emphasize three factors that explain the emergence and development of social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes (p. 2). Consequently, social science scholars often explain social movement phenomena through such theories.

This is in contrast with literature about other kinds of movements. The Black Arts Movement, for example, is often explained descriptively; scholars do not use theory to analyze certain phenomena. To showcase this fact, an overview of some of the available literature on the BAM is given below.

During the movement itself, authors of the literary branch of the BAM wrote about a range of topics. Some even analyzed the BAM itself. One major example of this is Larry Neal, who was part of the BAM and analyzed the movement while it was happening. In his essay “The Black Arts Movement”, Neal (1968) explains the Black Aesthetic and goes into detail about the ideology behind the BAM. The Black Aesthetic is an important concept during the BAM and will be further discussed in the context section of the analysis. Neal touches upon the ideology of the movement, which helps to understand its essence. However, the majority of his essay describes the storyline of multiple plays (Neal, 1994, pp. 190-198). This second part of Neal’s analysis corresponds with the nature of other scholars’ analyses on the BAM; oftentimes the focus lies on one aspect of the arts, including poetry, literature and visual arts, instead of an analysis of the BAM as a whole. Jarrett (2005) states that literature until the 1990s on the BAM

oversimplified the ideological and historical situation. After this period more balanced scholarship has entered the field (p. 1243). Examples of scholars that provide a more in-depth analysis are Smethurst (2006) and Clarke (2005) (Jarrett, 2005, p. 1243).

Some literature does contain research on the Black Arts Movement as a whole. Collins and Crawford (2006) published the book 'New thoughts on the Black Arts Movement', that contains a critical review of the nature of the movement. Moreover, the BAM has been compared to the Hip Hop Movement of the early 1970s and to the Feminist Art Movement in the United States (Collins, 2006; Cromartie, 2018). To be able to compare, the movement as a whole needs to be considered. The title of Collins' (2006) work 'Activists who yearn for art that transforms: Parallels in the Black Arts and Feminist Art Movements in the United States' suggests a comparison between the two arts movements. However, she views these movements as "wings" of the Black Power Movement and the Women's Liberation Movements (p. 729). Although she finds similar tendencies, tactics and goals among these larger movements, Collins' (2006) research lacks an in-depth understanding of the arts movements; she merely gives an overview of important figures.

Literature often analyzes the BAM descriptively. Scholars scarcely use theory to explain phenomena within the movement. Compared to literature on social movements, this difference in analysis is highly noticeable. Academics do not refer to the BAM as a social movement, which seems to be the reason for the absence of theoretical analysis. This leads to a gap in literature, in which arts movements are not analyzed through social movement theory. Although descriptive analysis of arts movements is crucial, it can be beneficial to analyze phenomena through existing theories to better understand why certain activities take place. This research hopes to contribute to the knowledge on the BAM, by analyzing a specific case through social movement theory. The chosen social movement theory will be explained below.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This research will borrow the logic derived from the political opportunity structure theory. However, it will use variables that McAdam (2000) has theorized into "cultural opportunities". The former will be shortly explained, whereafter the latter will be examined more precisely. For clarity, this research has named the combination of approaches the "cultural opportunity theory".

In simple terms, political opportunity theory argues that an expansion in political opportunities sparks collective action (McAdam, 2000, p. 255). Social movements can benefit from an

increase in political vulnerability, a change in how opponents receive actions and from the political system as a whole (p. 256). Political opportunities refer to the societal opportunities or constraints that can affect a movement. This concept is seen as most successful in defining properties of the external environment, when analyzing the development of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 17). Della Porta and Diani (2006) add one crucial detail that is relevant for this research; for action to emerge as a consequence of political opportunities, activists themselves must believe that the opportunities exist, that they can bring change and they must believe that the system is the source of the problem. It is important to keep in mind that political opportunities are merely a stimulus for action if the actors perceive them as such; otherwise they are solely political possibilities.

In literature there is a high range of variables that scholars allocate to the concept of political opportunity structures (Bloom, 2014; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Jenkins, 1995; Kurzman, 1996). Therefore, it is important to emphasize whose approach this research will use. One approach that differs from the mainstream political opportunity theory approach is McAdam's (2000) cultural opportunities. He adds cultural factors to the variables that can predict a stimulus to collective action. This research will use this sidetrack of the political opportunity theory for multiple reasons. First, previous research has strongly emphasized political, organizational and structural aspects of social movements, whilst ignoring cultural dimensions (McAdam, 2000, pp. 253-154). Therefore, it is important to give a platform to the cultural approach of the theory; this will contribute to the literature. Second, this research analyzes an arts movement, which is cultural in nature. Variables that consider underlying differences in culture or suddenly imposed grievances are likely to be more relevant for this movement than, for example, electoral instability. This is due to the fact that the BECC emerged within an arts movement. Thus, the context focuses on the representation of Black artists and Black beauty rather than political rights for Black people. It is therefore more straightforward to use variables from McAdam's (2000) cultural opportunity argument; as a typical case study requires the case to fit the theory.

Through analysis of literature on social movements, McAdam (2000) set up four ways in which cultural opportunities can expand: Ideological/Cultural Contradictions, Suddenly Imposed Grievances, Dramatizations of System Vulnerability and the availability of Master Frames. Each of these variables will be shortly explained below.

#### *Ideological or Cultural Contradictions*

This first cultural opportunity can be understood as a presence of a contradiction between a cultural value and a conventional social practice in society at a given time (p. 256).

#### *Suddenly Imposed Grievances*

This second cultural opportunity consists of striking, often unexpected events that alarm people of their disapproval towards a certain societal condition that was previously accepted (p. 257).

#### *Dramatization of System Vulnerability*

Another cultural opportunity can be a process or event that highlights the vulnerable position of one's political opponents (p. 257).

#### *The availability of Master Frames*

This political opportunity entails the existence of similar social movements that together provide a frame for emergence of action from a new group; this builds on the assumption that social movements oftentimes cluster around the same time because they affect each other (p. 258). Frame refers to shared assumptions that can categorize social movements into one packet (p. 253).

Together, these four variables form the Independent Variable (IV). The theory suggests that, if present, these variables will offer a structural potential for collective action; in other words, they will spark the emergence of a new organization or a formation of collective action. The Dependent Variable (DV) of the theory is therefore the emergence of collective action. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H: Cultural opportunities spark the emergence of collective action.

The next chapter will showcase how this theory will be utilized in the case of the emergence of the BECC, within an arts movement.

## **4. Methodology**

The methodology will discuss the research design, case selection, method of data collection, method of analysis and operationalization.

### 4.1 Research Design

To test the hypothesis set in the theoretical framework, this research will conduct a single case study. This section will explain the benefits of this research design and explain why it is beneficial to look at a typical case.

A single case research design provides means to intensively examine one specific case (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 234). This research is based on a theory-guided case study. It will therefore use theory to explain a single historical occurrence (Levy, 2008). Case studies are a useful tool to examine the extent to which theory travels (Halperin & Heath, 2020). According to Levy (2008) some scholars argue that social scientists should merely construct and test generalizable theory and let historians research single cases (p. 4). However, the opposite is true; by utilizing theory, a social science approach can go beyond the descriptive archival research and explain key aspects of a certain case (p. 5). Single case studies can specifically contribute to testing whether theory works the same way on cases that are different from the cases they were initially developed for (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 236). That is exactly what this research will use the case for: utilizing cultural opportunity theory on the emergence of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) during an arts movement.

This research will conduct a typical case study, sometimes referred to as a representative case study, to compare theory to a case that is applicable to test with said theory (Seawright et al., 2014, p. 11). Subsequently, this research will investigate causal mechanisms that confirm or disconfirm the chosen theory (p. 9). The chosen typical case will be presented below.

#### 4.2 Case Selection

The case in question is the emergence of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) within the Black Arts Movement. This section substantiates the choice of this case on the basis of two criteria.

According to Geddes (2003) there are two important criteria to consider when selecting a case study (as cited in Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 236). First, the case should align with what the chosen theory can address. The cultural opportunity theory explains that cultural opportunities spark collective action (McAdam, 2000, p. 255). This fits the case; cultural opportunities are part of the wider context of the period and collective action can be found in the emergence of the BECC. Due to the strong connection between the case and the theory, this case acts as a typical case of the cultural opportunity theory. Second, the chosen case should differ from other cases on which the theory was based. Generally, academics test cultural opportunity theory cases within a social movement. Social movements are a social process, in which actors partake in collective action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). An arts movement, in contrast, can be described as a period in time that is defined by a certain tendency towards a philosophy or goal, that artists follow by creating art (Artchive, 2024). Although art movements can be shaped by

their cultural, social or political context, actors focus on art. This differs from social movement focus points; actors, who are not (necessarily) artists, partake in collective action to achieve societal or political change. Thus, researching the emergence of an organization in the context of the Black Arts Movement creates a different setting than an organization emerging within a social movement. Therefore, the context in which the emergence of the BECC takes place differs from mainstream organizations that have been researched in the past through cultural opportunity theory. Altogether, analyzing this theory within a new context can provide an interesting new approach, which at the same time tests the scope conditions of the theory.

#### 4.3 Method of Data Collection

This research will mostly use academic secondary sources. Subsequently, theory will analyze the historical reality as written by scholars. Some primary sources will be used for a comprehensive understanding of how people viewed the Black Arts Movement while it was happening in the 1960s. This includes writings by Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka and New York Times.

This research will analyze the data through qualitative methods, rather than quantitative methods, because the research question asks for an in-depth analysis. Historical data sources, that were mentioned to have an explanatory function, are highly relevant to analyze in this research. Therefore the data analysis reaches beyond social science scholars and includes (art) historians.

#### 4.4 Method of Analysis

This section will explain the congruence procedure that this research will use to systematically analyze whether the cultural opportunity theory applies for this case. This method of analysis looks for (in)congruence between the predicted variables by the hypothesis and the variables observed in the case itself (Evera, 2016, p. 58). This procedure will consist of a comparison between the theory and the case, to match the previously mentioned theory testing approach. This is done by first observing the values on the IV and DV of the case in line with the expected variables according to the theory. After observing, I will measure the congruence or incongruence between the theory's expectation and the observation in the case.

McAdam's (2000) theory does not clearly state a minimal strength that the correlation between the case and the theory needs to have. However, if the IV of the case logically explains the DV of the case, based on the requirements of the theory, then this indicates that the theory

successfully traveled to the context of art movements. Subsequently, it will be clear whether the cultural opportunities sparked the emergence of the BECC.

#### 4.5 Operationalization

To set this analysis in motion, it is crucial to operationalize the theory first. The four cultural opportunities that McAdam (2000) stated will be individually assessed to identify conditions that need to be met for the analysis of the case. For this a timeframe should be set. Due to the fact that this research looks at external circumstances that could help spark the emergence of the BECC, the socio-political situation of the United States needs to be considered. Therefore, the timeframe will start January 9, 1968, one year before the emergence of the BECC. The timeframe will last until January 9, 1969; measurements after that are not relevant when specifically researching the emergence of the organization.

##### *4.5.1 Ideological or Cultural Contradictions*

To discover whether or not this cultural opportunity exists, it is important to measure two phenomena: prevalent cultural values and social practices present within the timeframe (McAdam, 2000, p. 256). Henceforth, it can be assessed whether or not these phenomena intrinsically contradict each other. If the theory is not valid, this can be observed either by the phenomena aligning or the phenomena not substantially interacting at all. The latter can be the case when the cultural values do not touch upon the same issues as the social practices.

##### *4.5.2 Suddenly Imposed Grievances*

This cultural opportunity involves a striking event that happens within the timeframe (McAdam, 2000, p. 257). The presence of a suddenly imposed grievance can be measured by observing public opinion toward an event. A condition that needs to be met for this cultural opportunity to be argued as present, is the change of acceptance of the public toward a societal condition. A societal condition can be any state of reality present at that time. Moreover, visible discontent needs to clearly be triggered by the said event. If the event is separate from the public's disapproval, this cultural opportunity is not present in the way it was theorized.

##### *4.5.3 Dramatization of System Vulnerability*

When a process or event showcases the vulnerable position of the political opponents, this cultural opportunity is present (McAdam, 2000, p. 257). To research this, firstly the political opponents need to be identified. Thereafter, the political opponent's potential vulnerability can be assessed. It is crucial to measure the impact of their vulnerability on the emergence of the

BECC; if the activists do not pay attention to the position of their political opponents, then there is no correlation.

#### *4.5.4 The availability of Master Frames*

Three conditions need to be met to prove the presence of this cultural opportunity. First, an assessment of social movements present during the timeframe needs to be done. Second, the ideology and goals of these social movements need to be evaluated. Finally, shared assumptions between the movements must be explored to evaluate whether they are part of the same frame. Indicators for overlap can be in the case of actors that are active in both movements, similar goals or comparable tactics. If movements occur at the same time, but the new movement does not borrow any characteristics from the other movements, the theory does not explain the case.

### **5. Analysis**

This section will analyze the emergence of the BECC within the BAM. First, an overview of the context will be given, to obtain basic knowledge about these two types of collective action. Subsequently, the analysis will continue with an assessment of the case, through analysis of the variables. Finally, the discussion will connect the empirically present cultural opportunities (IV) to the emergence of the BECC (DV).

#### 5.1 Context

The following section will first explain the essence of the BAM, whereafter it will give a short overview of the emergence of the BECC.

##### *5.1.1 The Black Arts Movement*

The Black Arts Movement officially started in 1965, when Black artists started the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) in Harlem (Smethurst & Rambsy Ii, 2011, p. 407). This was a reaction to the assassination of Malcolm X; it motivated the founders to seek “Blackness” and persist in respect of Malcolm (Baraka, 2011, p. 25). When Amiri Baraka, Rolland Snellins, Charles Patterson, William Patterson and Larry Neal came together for the BARTS, they thought of the more general terms of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic (Smethurst & Rambsy Ii, 2011, p. 407). The Black Aesthetic, according to Larry Neal (1968), is a set of artistic choices that consists of Black cultural tradition (p. 2). Moreover, the Black Aesthetic subconsciously strives to destruct white ideas of looking at the world. This aesthetic existed before the term was invented. However, the Black Aesthetic, just like the Black Arts Movement, caught on after the BARTS invested in new music, theater, and poetry, according to Amiri Baraka (2011)

himself (p. 27). He further explains that Black artists wanted Black art to be identifiably Black American, popular among masses and revolutionary (pp. 28-29). These goals all contributed to their ideological practice.

Before the BAM, Harlem was already an important city in New York. In the 1920s and 1930s, after the start of the Great Migration, Harlem was the center of creativity among Black people (Beach, 2003, p. 116). This period, often referred to as the Harlem Renaissance, was a time in which Black writers, musicians and artists flourished (p. 117). Although not all key figures of the Harlem Renaissance lived or came from Harlem, the city was the source of change in the lives of Black people in the US (Mitchell, 1994, p. 3). This is why more than 30 years later, it was no coincidence that the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) emerged in Harlem.

### *5.1.2 The emergence of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition*

January 9, 1969 was the day a group of Black artists came together to plan demonstrations against Harlem on My Mind and form the BECC (Cahan, 2016, p. 69). Some of them had been in prior contact with the director of the Met Thomas Hoving about the exhibition. Although these meetings were not documented, it is clear that the Henri Ghent, Cathy Aldridge, Romare Bearden and Edward Taylor were not satisfied with the outcome (p. 69). The primary goal of the BECC calls for representation of Black artists and Black curators in the art museums (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, n.d.). As one of the co-founders Benny Andrews explained:

“[The BECC was organized] for the purpose of making sure there would be no more Harlem on My Mind exhibitions foisted on the public, both black and white.” (Arts Magazine, 1970, as cited in Cooks, 2007, p. 37).

Therefore, a few dozen members of the BECC demonstrated when the massive doors of the Met opened on the night of January 16, 1969, for the grand opening of Harlem on My Mind (Cahan, 2016, p. 31). They handed out leaflets that informed and urged the public to boycott the exhibition (p. 70). A second demonstration followed on January 14, when the Met held a press conference about the exhibition. The news article ‘Museum Pickets Assail Hoving Over Coming Harlem Exhibition’ described protesters holding signs reading “That’s White of Hoving” and “Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Photography” (The New York Times, 1969). In addition the BECC handed out the leaflets demanding the museum to appoint Black curators and policy-makers. Lastly, these leaflets urged the Met to reach out for a better relationship with the Black community. These demands advocate for structural change in the status quo,

instead of merely promoting a new art form. Therefore, this research considers the BECC as a politically engaged organization. Benny Andrews himself argued that BECC should act politically:

“We’re certainly not in this thing just to make sure black artists get their paintings sold. Social truths, injustices that are being committed need to be exposed on a very deep level. The black artist can do this. The organization needs to move in a political direction, to link up to all other human rights movements.” (Whatley, 1972, as cited in Lennon, 2006, p. 106).

## 5.2 Case

This part of the analysis will compare the variables from the theory to empirical evidence, following the congruence procedure explained in the methodology. The structure is based on the four variables of the cultural opportunity theory.

### *Ideological or Cultural Contradictions*

To measure whether there is empirical evidence of an ideological or cultural contradiction, two steps can be taken. First, prevalent cultural values between 1968 and 1969 need to be identified. Second, the analysis needs to assess whether these values contradict with societal practices.

A crucial cultural value that the BAM advocated for was creating art that showcased Black culture (Poets, 2014). Neal (1968) explains that the BAM promotes art “that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America” (p. 1). In this way the art showcases Black people’s experiences with racism in the US. This involved promoting the Black Aesthetic. The motivation behind the Black Aesthetic is destroying the “white ways of looking at the world” (p. 2). This can be done by firstly producing art and secondly by showcasing it. The former an sich was not a barrier during the 1960s. The latter, on the other hand, was not as feasible. This was due to the reality of the art world at the time, which will be described below.

Black artists were mostly absent from the art world until the late twentieth century (Cahan, 2016). Segregation of the art world can be found in multiple institutionalized forms, including: the exclusion of Black artists in art survey texts, art criticism based on racial biases and the absence of art by Black artists in galleries and museums (Lennon, 2006, p. 93). There lies an enormous power in the hands of museums; they decide whose art is shown on their walls and therefore whose art is seen as important (p. 92). Edward Spriggs, artist during the Black Arts Movement described museum programs to be created by and for a small group, while merely

fostering the needs of the white middle class (Spriggs, 1971, as cited in Lennon, 2006, p. 93). Although there were around a dozen examples of Black artists' work exhibited in museums throughout the US before 1967, this of course an extremely low number of exceptions (Cahan, 2016, p. 1). In the 1960s, people that evaluated art and decided on the content of exhibition often believed in the natural quality mechanism of art; merely "good" art was shown, so if Black artists did not manage to break through, it was because of the lack of quality in their work (p. 5). Major museums argued that it was not a matter of discrimination; it was rather a series of individual examples of Black artists not being as "good" as White counterparts (p. 6). In reality, this meant that Black artists were often dismissed based on lack of quality, derivativeness or ignorance of mainstream trends. This struggle for visibility of Black artists in museums was the reality of the art world. It can be viewed as a social practice that was widely accepted.

When comparing the cultural values of the BAM with the social practice of the art world, a contradiction can be observed; what the BAM wanted (showcasing art by Black artists) was counter to the way museums operated: consciously excluding Black artists from their exhibitions. Due to the fact that museums are the main agent in showcasing art, it is crucial for Black artists to have museums on board with their cultural values. However, the reality of the art world intrinsically contradicts the cultural value. Therefore it can be stated that this cultural opportunity was present during the time of the emergence of the BECC.

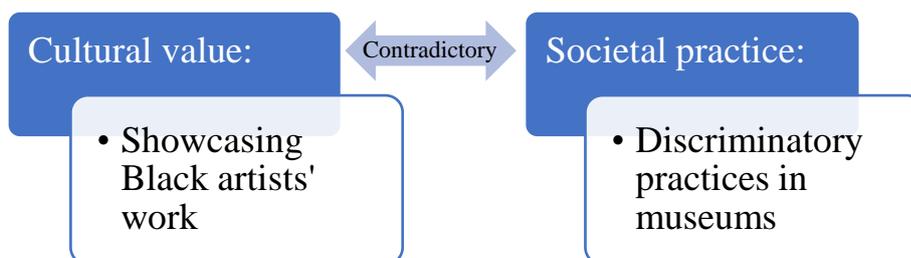


Figure 2. Visualization of the cultural opportunity "Ideological or Cultural Contradictions"

### *Suddenly Imposed Grievances*

This section will evaluate whether there is an empirical example of an unexpected event that alarmed people of their disapproval towards a (previously accepted) societal condition (McAdam, 2000, p. 257). Within the chosen case there is one pivotal moment that opened people's eyes about the present reality: the Harlem on My Mind exhibition held at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969. Firstly, the exhibition will be analyzed. Secondly, the controversy around the exhibition and the discontent will be evaluated. Lastly, the response will be examined, which will clarify the presence of this cultural opportunity.

In 1967 Allon Schoener, visual arts director at the New York State Council on the Arts, pitched his idea to have an exhibition on Black culture (Jung, 2015, p. 4). The new director of the Metropolitan Museum of Arts (the Met), Thomas Hoving, saw this idea as an opportunity to respond to the ongoing social and political events at the time (Lennon, 2006, p. 104). Hoving's aim was to alter the museum's role as connoisseur of special objects into a more participatory role in the cultural debate. He explained this in the preface of the exhibition's catalogue in August 1968:

“To me Harlem on My Mind is a discussion. It is a confrontation. It is education. It is a dialogue. And today we better have these things. Today there is a growing gap between people, and particularly between black people and white people. And this despite the efforts to do otherwise. There is little communication. Harlem on My Mind will change that.” (as cited in Cooks, 2007, p. 5)

This shows how the exhibition was created with the intention to increase communication between Black and White people (Cooks, 2007, p. 7). However, at the time it was odd for a fine arts museum, that focused largely on artistic knowledge, to create a socio-documentary exhibition about Harlem (p. 8). Once realized, the exhibition consisted of a few hundred enlarged photographs, taped interviews, recordings and texts based on newspapers (Cahan, 2016, p. 80; Lennon, 2006, p. 105). Divided into chronological sections, the exhibition was a pictorial record of Harlem's different decades, that could be experienced as viewing a film. In short, it was a historical interpretation of the Black neighborhood as a cultural center, showcased through multimedia installation techniques (Jung, 2015, p. 1).

Before the public had the chance to view the opening of the exhibition, criticism on the misrepresentation of Black artists in Harlem on My Mind was voiced (p. 6). The first point of controversy concerned the focus on photography. Before Harlem on My Mind, the Met had never showcased a photography exhibition (Cahan, 2016, p. 33). As one of the Met's director's employees stated:

“Here it was [an exhibition] at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but it ignored African American art. [...] I remember thinking how stupid we were to ignore art when, here,

that's the medium that we're theoretically the most interested in." (Harry S. Parker III, as cited in Cahan, 2016, p. 33).

Telling the story of Black artists from a sociological perspective, instead of a focus on art, shows the rejection of the Met towards art by Black artists (Cooks, 2007, p. 17). An important detail is that photography was not seen as art at the time (p. 25). Members of the artist group Spiral shared their concerns that the exclusion of art was an issue of racial inequality (p. 22). Years later, Schoener replied that he specifically created a documentary exhibition, with an absence of original art (Schoener, 1995, as cited in Cooks, 2007, p. 22).

During the creation of the exhibition Schoener did meet with several people to discuss the substance and execution of Harlem on My Mind, which leads to the second point of contention. Firstly, two years before the opening, Schoener constructed an advisory committee consisting of three people who worked in the field of history or politics of Harlem and lived there: Hutson Regina Andrews, a board member of the National Urban League, Jean Blackwell Hutson, curator at the New York Public Library in Harlem and John Henrik Clarke, a cultural and political activist in Harlem (Cooks, 2007, p. 17). Secondly, five researchers were employed to work on the exhibition. Lastly, Schoener reached out to the Harlem Cultural Council, a Black advocacy group that was prominent in Harlem. However, these efforts were not sustained; the members of the advisory committee did not have an actual say in the exhibition, even though they put effort into the committee. Which led to a withdrawal of support from the committee and the Harlem Cultural Council. Furthermore, criticism by Harlem artists was expressed towards the research staff, which did not consist of a single Harlem resident. (Cooks, 2007, p. 18) One of the members of the advisory committee John Henrik Clarke expressed his concerns:

“The basis of the trouble with this project is that it never belonged to us and while a lot of people listened to our suggestions about the project. Very few of these suggestions were ever put into effect.” (as cited in Cooks, 2007, p. 18)

Although some intentions of the Met might not have been to diminish Harlem's Black artists, it is crucial to realize that structural racism was woven into institutions at the time. Moreover, the theory used in this research considers what activists view as opportunities. This means that the interpretation of an event by the public is most important when looking at its power to spark a reaction.

To conclude, all these concerns show that leading up to the exhibition it was already clear that Harlem was misrepresented in the exhibition. It can be determined that there was a significant

discontent present, concerning the lack of Black art and exclusion of opinions from Harlem. Due to the large expectations of the seemingly progressive exhibition, the disappointment of its failure was pronounced. This enlarged the public awareness on the issue of misrepresentation of Black artists. Therefore, a suddenly imposed grievance was not only present; it had a major effect on sparking the emergence of the BECC.

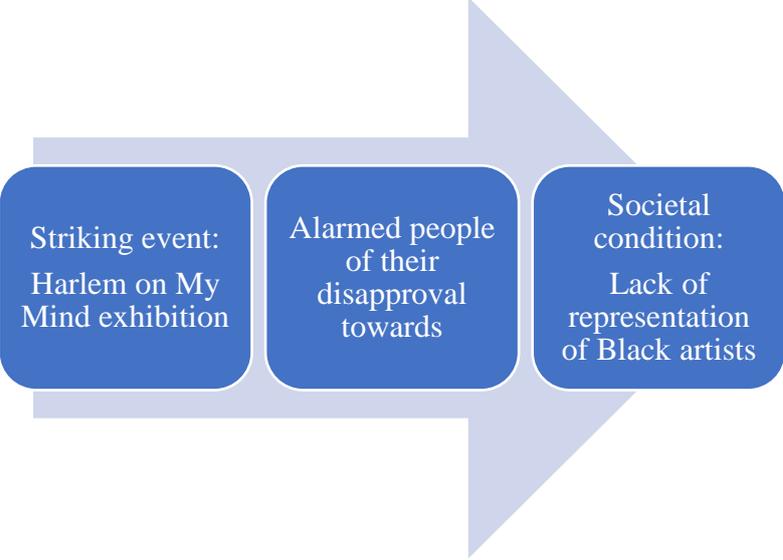


Figure 3. Visualization of cultural opportunity "Suddenly Imposed Grievances"

*Dramatization of System Vulnerability*

For the Dramatization of System Vulnerability cultural opportunity to be present, a process needs to expose the vulnerable position of a political opponent (McAdam, 2000, p. 257). To measure whether this is present in the timeframe of this research, political opponents need to be assessed. However, within literature, there is no specifically identified political opponent of the Black people who fought against the injustices of the art world, in other words the members that would form the BECC. Therefore, this cultural opportunity is not present in this case and its effect will not be further assessed in this analysis

*The availability of Master Frames*

When there is an availability of Master Frames, this means that social movements provide a frame for the emergence of action within another movement. Therefore, other movements will be compared to the Black Arts Movement, in which the BECC emerged. First, the movements need to be identified. Next, their ideology or goals will be shortly explained, which determines

whether they are applicable for the last assessment. Finally, the shared assumptions between the BAM and the movements will be evaluated.

Considering the timeframe there are multiple movements that were happening at the same time in the US: the American Indian Movement, the Chicano Civil Rights movement, the Women’s Liberation Movement, the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement. A short description of their general ideology will follow. First, the American Indian Movement was founded in 1968 with the purpose to help Native people that had been displaced from their cities by the US government (Britannica Academic, 2020). Second, the Chicano Civil Rights movement, El Movimiento, in the 1960s and 1970s promoted Mexican Indigenous cultural values, critiqued racism and fought for better labor conditions and a return of territory (González, 2019, p. 1). The movement also morphed into a strong artistic branch and led to the Chicano Arts Movement (p. 3). Third, the Women’s Liberation Movement fought for socio-political change in the reality of women’s subordination to men (Offen, 1988, p. 151). Fourth, the Civil Rights Movement lasted from the 1950s until the 1960s in the US: fighting against racial segregation, opening up opportunities and enfranchising Black people in America (Newman, 2004, p. 1; Smethurst, 2006, p. 76). Last, the Black Power Movement, focused on liberation and self-determination of Black people (Smethurst, 2006, p. 76).

<b>Movements present 1969-1969</b>	<b>Fought for the rights Black people in the US</b>
American Indian Movement	No
Chicano Civil Rights Movement	No
Women’s Liberation Movement	No *
Civil Rights Movement	Yes
Black Power Movement	Yes

*Table 1. Movement Overview*

\* The position of women in society definitely concerned Black women. However, during the timeframe of this research, White bourgeois women dominated the Women’s Liberation Movement (Schulz, 2017, p. 2). Therefore, the movement did not fight for Black women’s rights; intersectional feminism was not advocated yet between 1968 and 1969.

As becomes clear from the table, the target groups of the movements differ from each other on the basis of identity. Only the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement are concerned with the rights of Black people, which matches the target group of the BECC. Therefore, these movements will be further considered in the analysis.

Comparing characteristics of the BAM with the Black Power Movement, showcases similarities between the movements. First, the Black Power's call for self-determination echoed through to the artistic realm (Lennon, 2006, p. 93). The idea of self-determination within the Black Power movement goes beyond the fight for integration; organizations needed to serve the interest of Black people. During the BAM, people took over this idea and demanded art museums respond better to the needs of the Black community (p. 93). Second, leading figure Larry Neal stated the connection between the movements in his writing. As part of the Black Arts Movement himself, Neal (1968), wrote that "this [Black Arts] movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (p. 1). He directly connects the two movements on the basis of ideology. Neal further explains that there is a need for arts that fulfill the aspirations of Black America. To achieve this, he argues, there needs to be a radical reorganization of the (then) current western aesthetic. This indicates that Neal wants to fulfill Black Power ideals through art. The fact that a prominent actor within the BAM states this, shows an interconnected relation between the movements' ideals. Besides Neal, there are more authors that refer to the BAM as the cultural wing of the Black Power movement (Collins, 2006, p. 729; Smethurst, 2006, p. 76). Last, there is an overlap in actors among the movements; Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka and Haki Madhubuti were part of the BAM, whilst being important Black Power leaders (Smethurst, 2006, p. 76). This overlap in actors showcases how together these movements provided a frame.

The Civil Rights Movement is not linked to the BAM as much as the Black Power Movement. This is due to where the focus of the Civil Rights Movement lies. Until the mid-1960s the Civil Rights Movement in the United States was associated with a legal fight against *de jure* segregation (Hamilton, 1986, p. 242). The emphasis of the movement had laid on restructuring constitutional rights for Black people and establishing legal grounds to stand on (p. 243). This is showcased in the most important development of the Civil Rights Movement that occurred within the timeframe. After Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.), protests pushed the passing of the Fair Housing Act. The legislation of the act made it illegal for landlords to refuse clients on the basis of their skin color. This partially overlaps with the BAM's fight, because it is a step towards recognition of equality among the American population. However, the substantial focus differs from the BAM's emphasis on cultural institutions.

Besides comparing the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement directly to the BAM, it is crucial to understand the turbulent character of the 1960s in the US; a peak in activism took place in this decade (Heale, 2001, pp. 4-7). McAdam (1988) argues that the major

movements in this period did not emerge independently (as cited in McAdam, 2000, p. 258). They all arose from the same source: the Civil Rights Movement. This argument showcases the activist community present at the time. Living in a period in which people fight injustices, can work as a stimulus for collective action. Although it is difficult to state with certainty which aspect of a movement influenced another movement, it is clear that the environment of the 1960s created a fertile soil in which movements could easily emerge.

The Civil Rights Movement did not share specific assumptions with the BAM. Thus, the availability of Master Frames mostly sourced from the Black Power Movement. However, the Civil Rights Movement was an important factor in creating a larger frame.



*Figure 4. Visualization of the cultural opportunity "The availability of Master Frames"*

## 5.2 Discussion

The analysis has observed the empirical case and compared them to the cultural opportunities of the theory. This section will first assess whether the three cultural opportunities within the case explain the emergence of the BECC (DV). Next, this section will put forth the findings and examine the hypothesis. Last, the research question is examined and the scope of the research is mentioned.

First, the Cultural Contradiction variable was clearly present. The cultural value of showcasing Black artists' work contradicts the societal reality of discriminatory practices in museums at the time. The frustration of this contradiction activated people to create the BECC. This cultural opportunity therefore sparks the emergence of the BECC, and therefore provides a partial explanation for the research question.

Second, I found the Suddenly Imposed Grievances variable in the case. It first consists of a striking event: the Harlem on My Mind exhibition. Second, it consists of the public's reaction to the societal condition of the lack of representation of Black people in cultural institutions.

This lack of representation of Black artists is one of the core values that the BECC fought for. I therefore argue that this cultural opportunity sparked the emergence of the BECC.

Last, the availability of Master Frames was present, but the existence of this variable in the case was weak. Merely the Black Power Movement shared assumptions with the BAM and therefore belongs to the same frame. The BECC emerged within the context of the BAM and was therefore strongly influenced by its circumstances. The frame that brought together the Black Power Movement and the BAM thus influenced collective action on a smaller level: the emergence of the BECC. Therefore, this discussion concludes that the availability of a Master Frame helped spark the emergence of the BECC.

Overall, the cultural opportunities provided by the cultural opportunity theory were found in the empirical case. Moreover, the discussion showcased that those empirical cultural opportunities influenced the emergence of the BECC, in the same way that the theory predicts. Therefore, congruence between the theory and the case exists. This shows that the theory was well applicable to the case. Moreover, the findings support the hypothesis; cultural opportunities spark the emergence of collective action. Subsequently, the theory has helped answer the research question; politically engaged organizations emerge within an arts movement because cultural opportunities spark their emergence. However, this answer is based on a single case study. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other cases. One crucial contribution of this research is the testing of a social movement theory on an arts movement; this research tested the scope of the theory. I conclude that the theory can travel to the Black Arts Movement.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter will conclude the research by providing a short summary, addressing limitations and suggesting ideas for future research.

### **6.1 Summary**

In short, this research has examined the emergence of politically engaged organizations within an arts movement. After an examination of the literature, this research conducted a single case study on the emergence of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1969 within the Black Arts Movement in the US. To find out why this emergence took place, the cultural opportunity theory was applied to the single case. Through the congruence procedure the theory was compared to the empirical case. The analysis found that the cultural opportunity theory

explained the case well. Consequently, the analysis concluded that the BECC emerged within the BAM, because there were three cultural opportunities that sparked this emergence. The cultural opportunity theory, traditionally applied to cases within social movements, successfully traveled to the context of an arts movement.

## 6.2 Limitations and further research

While conducting this research, I encountered several problems; three limitations will be discussed below. Looking back at the theoretical explanation of the availability of the Master Frames variable, the operationalization of this variable focused on assessing each movement individually. However, during the analysis I noticed that the wider culture of the 1960s should have been taken into consideration. Therefore, the individual cases that were not considered, due to their different target group, could have contributed to a Master Frame. Moreover, I dismissed the Dramatization of System Vulnerability variable, due to an absence of political opponents of the BECC. However, one could argue that people who voiced their opinion against Black people in general acted as political opponents. It is crucial to consider this racist environment of the 1960s. However, the scope of this research could not extend to the consideration of this societal reality as a political opportunity. Lastly, the generalizability of this research is limited, due to the single case approach. Therefore, I can only conclude that the cultural opportunity theory is applicable to the Black Arts Movement. It is possible that this is an exception to the rule, as the BAM in itself has a political element to it. To find out whether the theory can be applied to other art movements, future research is needed. Another suggestion for further research would be to apply other social movement theories to this case. This way, alternative explanations for the emergence of the BECC could be explored. The last suggestion I have for future research is to conduct a comparative case study between the Chicano Arts Movement and the BAM. As shortly mentioned in the analysis, the Chicano Civil Rights Movement had a cultural branch ranging from literature, to theater, to fine arts (González, 2019, pp. 1-3). It was a crucial development, much like the Black Arts Movement. The two movements happened around the same time, therefore a comparison would make for interesting research.

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