

SUBLIME DISSONANCE:
ART, POLITICS, AND HISTORICAL RECORD ON A SAN FRANCISCO SCHOOL WALL

by

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Dedicated to my husband – for putting up with me this year, and every year, for his enduring
love, and his never-ending belief in me.

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The murals at George Washington High School, in San Francisco, California, present an exceptional opportunity to explore the metamorphosis of plaster, paint, and identity – both the material and the ideological. The research, news, reports, and journals concerning the site of inquiry fail to comprehend the dynamic nature of the art piece. This compelling project consists of two narratives, sixteen mural panels, and three time periods. Around the synergistic work at the center of my research, revolves a mercurial coalescence of social values, identities, nationhoods, ideologies, space, and time. This narrative begins with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) mural series, *Life of Washington*, which illustrates the exploits of first president George Washington over the course of thirteen panels, and was completed in 1936 by artist Victor Arnautoff (1896-1979). Almost forty years later, in 1974, a young Dewey Crumpler (1949-) contributed a response work – the three-panel, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)* mural series. His inclusion of social justice leaders, and cultures representative of the many peoples living in San Francisco during the late 1960s and early 1970s, metaphorically exhumes previously silent narratives and adds complexity to *Life of Washington*. However, scholarly

literature concerning this site treats the response murals as a footnote. My research reveals that such a myopic and cursory perusal of the work fails to fully grasp the magnitude of the combined panels' resultant significance. Previous research primarily concerned the thirteen WPA mural panels, with a brief aside regarding the three, considered mostly unrelated, panels installed four decades later. The flaw in this assessment sits with the lack of attention paid the response mural. Crumpler freely chose to include Arnautoff's original work; he *chose* to include - *to merge* - the first mural series with his own. Through this merger, what began as a WPA mural series, painted in 1936 by a Russian émigré in a California high school, evolved into a compound artwork in 1974, when, in the same California high school, at the height of the Black Power and Civil Rights movements, a young, African American artist painted a response mural to address the former. My research concerns *one*, complex and hyphenate, artistic piece – one that provides a springboard to further understand the impact of time, memory, and the historical record on art, and one that aids assessment of the epistemological hierarchy critics and scholars hold, which engenders segregation of the mural artform from those more in line with the canonical artworks accepted into the illustrious “White Cube.” This research reveals a work fraught with loaded emotions, affected by and affecting, multiple publics, with disparate views and interpretations of historical, political, and cultural memory. My research exposes a multivalent topic, which, due to length, this thesis only begins to address.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO A COMPLEX WORK



Figure 1. Victor Arnautoff (1896-1979), “Washington’s Early Years,” panel ¹/₁₃, *Life of Washington* mural series, 1936, fresco, George Washington High School (GWHS), 32nd Ave vestibule, south wall, San Francisco, CA.¹

After the artist completes an artwork, a hollow space supplants the tightly coiled emotions once instrumental to their artistic creation. Unstoppered feelings and memories – joy, sorrow, and anger – rush from the artist, into the artwork, and into the world. Cleansed, the artist may begin the creative cycle once more. Now it is the viewer who may enter into dialogue with the artwork; it is the viewer’s turn to add their emotions, and connect their memories and values, to the piece. Each viewer adds variance to the artwork’s mythology; they tear it apart, or raise it

¹ Asimov, Nanette. “Now You can Zoom in on the Entire Washington High Mural – Right Here.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Now-you-can-see-all-of-the-controversial-14308480.php?t=788a290b60>.

on a pedestal; they remake and unmake it, then make it anew again. These revisions may occur over several generations, or with each viewing by a single person. Neither people, nor art, is immune to the effects of time. Artistic mutability directly correlates with changes in viewer self- and societal-awareness, knowledge, and experience. In truth, artworks never finish their evolutionary path if there is someone to look at them.



Figure 2. Dewey Crumpler (1949-), “Latin and Native American Panel,” (left panel); “The Black Panel,” (center panel); “The Asian Panel,” (right panel), three-panel series, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)* mural series, 1974, acrylic on canvas mounted to Masonite, George Washington High School (GWHS), Administrative / Academic hall juncture, San Francisco, CA.²

² Robin D. G. Kelley, “We’re Getting these Murals All Wrong,” in *The Nation*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/arnautoff-mural-life-washington/>. Photo by Tammy Aramian and courtesy of the George Washington High School (GWHS) Alumni Association.

While many understand that cultural and societal changes affect aspects of lived-experience, individuals are seldom aware that these same factors affect the perceptions, associated meanings, and stature attached to an artwork. Often, history is seen as static points, while humanity is propelled forward on a conveyor belt of ever-changing perception, knowledge, and value. Art metamorphoses under the alterations of societal values – not in appearance, but in its linked quintessence. Significant alterations require sizeable cognitive negotiations on the part of the viewer and the community. When locked within ivory-towered museums, or insulated in private collections, art possesses a degree of immunity from the crucible of these ideological revolutions.³ However public art, such as a mural, inhabits a lower hierarchical level in connoisseurship's ranks, where often this visual idiom does not merit the same protection from societal onslaught. Both exterior and interior murals may suffer the ravages of age, weather, graffiti, or the whims of property owners to either paint over, or tear down, the walls on which the murals reside. New Deal-era mural art is often maligned with such adjectives as 'provincial,' 'naïve,' or 'propagandist.' Some New Deal artists lacked formal artistic training, a condition which somehow became synonymous with 'unskilled.' Later this descriptor increased from a few artists to a more general association with New Deal-era art.⁴ The art historian, Francis V.

³. See the Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, Source B1 (page 152).

⁴. "Legal Fact Sheet Part I," n.d., comp. by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) - Fine Arts Program Office and the Office of the Inspector General (Washington, D.C.: GSA.gov, Fine Arts Program): 3. Last updated February 26, 2019, https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/legal_fact_sheet_final_I.pdf. Artworks "created under the New Deal art programs are commonly referred to as WPA artworks. This classification proves misleading, as only one of the four programs, the Federal Art Project (FAP), operated directly under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). A more accurate classification of the works of art created under the federal art programs of the 1930s and early 1940s is New Deal artwork, as

O'Connor, was one of the first researchers of New Deal-era art and history. As early as 1966, O'Connor felt "New Deal art projects [had] been forgotten or ignored, and [that] what they achieved in art and cultural awareness [had] for too long been disparaged."⁵ And while O'Connor admits some murals "are of inferior quality," he also states that "a surprising number are good, some [even] great, and all are worthy of investigation as products of their times."⁶

This perceived paucity of artistic ability, combined with a dearth of proper maintenance, results in an epithet of impermanence, which underscores New Deal-era murals' lack of cachet in the artworld.⁷ This associated impermanence is a point of contention, cited on all sides of the political spectrum, during arguments for their protection, removal, and demolition. Regardless of the who or the why, the impression of murals as mere decoration, advertisement, and/or propaganda, rather than fine art, directly corresponds to their tenuous assurance of protection today. Ultimately this is an investigation into art's "affect," its ability to express and evoke emotions in others. Mural spaces are encoded in the varied emotions and perceptions of multiple publics. This visual embodiment of interior feelings and motivations, splashed across

they were created during the era of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal economic recovery programs." [The author will use "New Deal-era" or "New Deal" to refer to artworks in the collective oeuvre, and will specify specific programs when relevant.]

⁵. Francis V. O'Connor, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Artforum* 7, No. 3 (November 1968): 41, <https://www.artforum.com/print/196809/new-deal-murals-in-new-york-36582>.

⁶. O'Connor, "New Deal Murals in New York," 41.

⁷. Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October 15, 1964): 580, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-362X%2819641015%2961%3A19%3C571%3ATA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>. "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge or art: *an artworld*." [Addition of italics by author.]

brick and plaster, provides insight into “how individuals negotiate social and personal relations via complex interrelated structures of feeling and response.”⁸ In the introduction to the exhibition catalog for *New Horizons in Modern Art*, Holgar Cahill, the National Director of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Art Project (FAP), articulated the aesthetic impetus surrounding New Deal mural art:

During the painting the artists usually work in public places where people congregate. Mural painting is not a studio art; by its very nature it is social. In its great periods it has always been associated with the expression of social meanings, the experience, history, ideas, beliefs of a community.⁹

The mural site necessitates a nuanced pedagogical approach, one that “considers public feelings such as grief, gratitude, fear, shame, anger, and hope, and recognizes how discourses of personal and public experience shape and structure cultural meaning.”¹⁰ Roman murals, removed from their original sites, and at times altered at the pleasure of collectors, cast off the amalgam of geography and community.¹¹ Absent this auratic mixture, the mural is relegated to, and judged

⁸. Erika Doss, “Affect,” *American Art (Smithsonian Institution)* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1086/599051>.

⁹. Holgar Cahill, introduction to *New Horizons in American Art*, exhibition no. 52, catalogue compiled by The Museum of Modern Art (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 32, https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2942_300061904.pdf?_ga=2.118911116.407680015.1613525035-60651260.1611945927.

¹⁰. Doss, “Affect,” 10.

¹¹. Erin L. Thompson, *Possession: The Curious History of Private Collectors from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2016), 39. “To be sure, a few ancient sculptural works, including some masterpieces, have survived in good condition. ... But the pristine ancient statuary on display in museums and private collections today is almost all the result of intensive restoration work. And unlike our conception of

merely in, the aesthetic. In *New Horizons*, Cahill elaborated on the benefits of public art for the community:

[T]he Project ... proceeded on the principal that it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare, occasional masterpieces. The emphasis upon masterpieces is a nineteenth century phenomenon. It is primarily a collector's idea and has little relation to an art movement.¹²

However, what Cahill then viewed as a strength – the at times collaborative nature of art produced on assignment – today adds perceived weight to the argument that New Deal murals are of less importance as aesthetic objects than the murals of better-known artists, such as Diego Rivera, and less significant as historic artifacts than older mural iterations, such as Pompeian frescos.

minimalistic restoration, where the restorer has a good idea of what the original looked like and is able to seamlessly repair a few damaged or missing areas, antiquities are often missing such large portions that it can be impossible to ascertain their original subject matter.”

¹². Cahill, “Introduction,” 18.

staircase from the 32nd Avenue vestibule entrance. This visual biography begins in early adulthood, and continues for thirteen distinct chapters, read on both the left and right, until reaching its terminus at the school's main concourse, adjacent the second vestibule landing. Here the *Life of Washington* meets the 1974, three-panel, untitled response addendum – commonly known as *Multi-Ethnic Heritage* – painted by Dewey Crumpler. Added nearly forty years later, his murals reinvigorate the narrative; like a second act, his three panels pick up where Arnautoff's end, filling important gaps in the historical record, while adding nuance and more diverse representation. Historic figures from the Americas and around the world populate his trinity and stand in response to the depicted events from the life of President George Washington. *Multi-Ethnic Heritage* materializes the often unseen peoples and cultures of Africa and the African-diaspora, Latinx and Indigenous Americans / First Peoples, and Asia. The combined Arnautoff-Crumpler murals traverse a circular path, creating an immersive phenomenological experience, through the deployment of not only sight, but also sound and changing light. The fusion of narrative figuration and architectural elements reveal the personal links both artists have to Mexican muralism. This melding of space and narrative forms a cinematic encounter that is emphasized by its uniquely immersive and accretive sensibility. Together, this sixteen panel gestalt forms one, unified and cohesive, visual narrative.

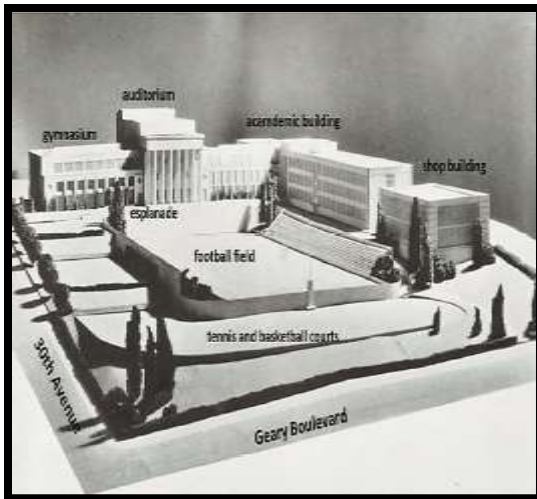


Figure 4. Architectural model for the GWHS campus.¹⁴

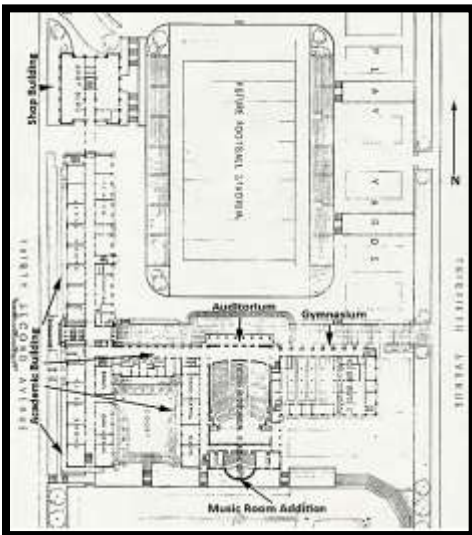


Figure 5. Master architectural plan for GWHS; Miller & Pflueger architects.¹⁵

¹⁴. HPC, Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), [Original source: Sawyer, "The George Washington High School," 11 (sans labels).], 7 (Fig. 9).

¹⁵. HPC, Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), [Original source: Sawyer, "The George Washington High School," 10.], 6 (Fig. 8).



Figure 6. The GWHS Academic Building (façade), 1936.¹⁶



Figure 7. GWHS Academic Building (façade), primary entrance, 1936.¹⁷

However, the connection between these two extends further than the school walls – spanning time, geography, and influence. In the 1960s, Arnautoff’s mural faced destruction; today the hyphenate Arnautoff-Crumpler mural similarly stands in the crosshairs. This site-specific artwork provides a unique opportunity to better understand cultural and historical memory. Far more than mere facile figuration, the murals concretize the politics, societal views,

¹⁶. HPC, Resolution 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), [Original Source: San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), Photo ID# AAD-4913.], 52 (Fig. 81). The photographer for this image is unknown.

¹⁷. HPC Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), [Original Source: SFPL, Photo ID# AAD-4911.], 52 (Fig. 82). The photographer for this image is unknown.

and artistic styles of the interwar 1930s and the 1960s/70s civil rights movement. Though the two artists never met, their murals continue a dialogue across generations with barely a semi-colon marking the space between. Paint and plaster, protest and new beginnings, intermingle across the decades, breaking the surface of national consciousness at hardly a less prescient moment. This paper investigates the depicted subjects within the murals, the cultural and social conception of the mural form, and the events from both periods of mural execution, and then situates those elements in conversation with the present day. Through formal analysis, connections in the artist biographies, interviews, and historical accounts, this paper identifies and establishes the existence of one, cohesive and historically relevant work of art in the combined Arnautoff-Crumpler mural at George Washington High School.

CHAPTER 2

DIRECTIONAL MOVEMENT AND A CINEMATIC ARCHITECTURE



Figure 8. Sargent Claude Johnson (1888-1967), *Athletics* (partial view), 1942, frieze, cast-stone [12 x 185 ft (cast in 6 x 14 ft sections)], GWHS Football Field, behind the south endzone, San Francisco, CA.¹⁸

George Washington High School sits atop a prominent rise in San Francisco's Outer Richmond District, bordered by Geary Boulevard to the north and Balboa Street to the South. Renowned Bay-area architect and interior designer, Timothy Pflueger, designed the school in the *Streamline Moderne* style. Inspired by the slick, aerodynamic lines of industrial design, Streamline Moderne architecture projects a feeling of speed and dynamic movement through

¹⁸. HPC Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), 46 (Fig. 70). Photo taken by Amanda Law in August of 2016.

rounded corners, flat roofs, and an emphasis given to stretched, horizontal lines, like those seen in luxury ocean-liners and locomotives at the time. The distinctive look of motion interrupted, as seen in such buildings, like George Washington High School, the San Francisco Maritime Museum, and the Alameda Theatre (also designed by Pflueger), is often repeated in these buildings' frequently attendant murals.¹⁹

Combining multiple chapters or scenes in a tableau, the muralist assembles vignettes which command the viewer's eyes – and eventually legs – along a desired narrative sequence. The Mexican muralist, David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896 -1979) said, “murals are to be seen with the legs.”²⁰ In this statement, Siqueiros enunciates those qualities which separates an exceptional mural from the humdrum – namely attention to detail and design consideration given to the significant factors of architecture and audience movement within a space. The architectural layout directs the viewer's physical movements through a site, while the architectural features interject and constrain the mural canvas. The unenlightened muralist paints a picture on a wall, while in the skilled hands of the enlightened muralist, carefully chosen imagery, shade, hue, and placement conduct the viewer's physical, intellectual, and emotional progress, while architectural articulations seamlessly integrate with the artist's imagery, metamorphosing into functional aspects of the mural.

¹⁹. See the Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Images A1 and A2 (page 142).

¹². Heather Becker, *Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive- and WPA-Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904-1944* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002), 9.



Figure 9. Arnautoff, “Washington’s Early Years,” panel $\frac{1}{13}$, *Life of Washington*, 1936.²¹



Figure 10. Crumpler, “The Black Panel,” panel $\frac{3}{3}$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974.²²

²¹. HPC, Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), [Original Source: SFPL, History Center, Photo ID# AAA-5413.], 74 (Fig. 94). Photo taken by an unknown person on June 8, 1936.

²². Michael Cabanatuan, “Black leaders in SF Support Saving Controversial George Washington High School Mural,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Black-leaders-in-SF-support-saving-controversial-14284972.php>. Photo taken by David Randolph, of *The Chronicle*, in 1974 (*The Chronicle* later became *The San Francisco Chronicle*).

In 1936, the Federal Arts Project (FAP) commissioned artist Victor Arnautoff to paint thirteen fresco panels depicting the life of President George Washington at the nascent George Washington High School, in San Francisco. The murals cover approximately 1,600 square feet and took ten months to complete. Under the stewardship of the WPA, the FAP, one of the five New Deal (1933–39) cultural projects collectively known as *Federal Project Number One*, not only got people back to work, but engendered faith in American governance and pride in a carefully crafted national image. In these programs, artists were viewed as workers, making meaningful contributions to their communities through dignified, waged employment. During its tenure, the WPA spent \$12 billion, and provided 9 million jobs. Approximately three-fourths of these jobs went to building and infrastructure construction. When criticized for the job percent allotted artists, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) responded in disbelief: “Why not? ... They’re human beings. They have to live.”²³ In 1936, the same year *Life of Washington* was completed, FDR gave his famous speech, “A Rendezvous with Destiny,” before the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. In it he takes up the emotional mantle of the people, and issues a mandate of care and citizenship to the nation:

We are poor indeed if this nation cannot afford to lift from every recess of American life the dread fear of the unemployed that they are not needed in the world. We cannot afford to accumulate a deficit in the books of human fortitude.²⁴

²³. Elizabeth Broun, “Are Artists Workers?,” foreword to *1934: A New Deal for Artists*, authored by Ann Prentice Wagner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Museum of American Art, in association with D. Giles Limited, in London, 2009), 7.

²⁴. Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), “A Rendezvous with Destiny,” speech, Democratic National Convention, Philadelphia, PA, June 27, 1936, Prof. of History Emeritus (retired), L. Patrick Hughes lecture page, Austin Community College, Austin, TX, paragraph 32, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.austincc.edu/lpatrick/his2341/fdr36acceptancespeech.htm>.

The advertised function of other government arts projects, such as the *Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration* (FAP; 1935–43), the *Public Works of Art Project* (PWAP; 1933–34) of the *Civil Works Administration* (CWA; 1933–34), and the *Treasury Relief Art Project* (TRAP; 1935–39), were primarily economic in nature – providing financial relief to independent artisans and laid-off workers. For artists working in these programs, wages were between \$38 and \$46.50 per week.²⁵ The *Section*, as it is commonly called, was the Treasury Department’s second relief project. From the construction funds allotted for every new government building constructed, the Section set aside one percent for art – a precedent frequently practiced today. By employing artists, both academic and untrained, the New Deal federal projects aspired to employ Americans, maintain or provide artistic skills during the Great Depression, boost morale through employment, and dot the national landscape with a particularly American style of art and architecture. Post offices were a common site for murals. Artists secured these commissions through national competitions, and typically installed their works on a small section of wall above the postmaster’s door.²⁶ Their intent was to bolster town morale through representational art in communal spaces. Between 1934 and 1943, the Section succeeded in sponsoring 1,116 murals. The community typically suggested themes – rural and agricultural themes more often

²⁵. “Public Works of Art Project,” in *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing Press: Article ID: WHEBN0002331265, n.d., accessed May 2, 2020, http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Public_Works_of_Art_Project.

²⁶. “List of United States Post Office Murals,” in *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing Press: Article ID: WHEBN0044679, n.d., accessed March 7, 2020, <http://self.gutenberg.org/article/WHEBN0044679867/List%20of%20United%20States%20post%20office%20murals>. Muralists were chosen through competitions open to all artists in the U.S. All told, approximately 850 artists were commissioned to paint 1,371 murals. Within the sea of white male artists, a mere 162 women and 3 African Americans made the cut.

than industrial, and required the approval of the postmaster.²⁷ Patricia Raynor, former collections coordinator for the National Postal Museum, provides insight into the Section's manipulation of United States ideology through mural subject matter. Though New Deal-period murals are influenced by Mexican muralism, which sprang forth out of revolutionary sentiments and a desire for social change, in the United States "the hard realities of American life are not illustrated on post office walls. Scenes of industrial America, for instance, avoid tragic portrayals of industrial accidents. Social realism painting, though popular at the time, was discouraged. Therefore, the very real scenes of jobless Americans standing in bread lines are not to be found on post office walls."²⁸ Of course, once the town selected the theme, the final artistic rendering often carried the influence of its artist in its brushstrokes. While some artists managed to sneak

²⁷. "Victor Mikhail Arnautoff Mural: 'The Last Crop'," Linden, TX Tourism, Linden Economic Development Commission, Linden, TX, December 2, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131202224421/http://www.lindentexas.org/tourism/?id=47;c=11>. In 1938 Arnautoff won his first post office commission – a small mural for the town of Linden, Texas. Linden, a primarily rural community located a few hours east of Dallas, is extremely proud of their mural, which is displayed in its original spot above the postmaster's door. The work, entitled *The Last Crop*, was painted on canvas in Arnautoff's San Francisco studio. This practice was not uncommon. New Deal artists who won Section commissions were paid one lump-sum. They were not paid for meals, accommodations, travel, assistants, or even art supplies. What was left after covering these fees belonged to the artist. In order to save money, artists often painted murals on easily transportable canvas fabric that they could roll up and place in a tube for transport upon completion. This limited artists' travel to, and operational expenses at, the mural site; See the Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, Sources B1 and B2 for additional information (page 152).

²⁸. Patricia Raynor, "Off The Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals," in *EnRoute* 6, issue 4 (now *Postmark*), National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., October-December 1997, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/off-the-wall-new-deal-post-office-murals>.

their creative and ideological touches into the canvas, on occasion a mural, when revealed, so deviated from the prescribed mores of a town, that upon completion, it was refused.²⁹

The Federal Arts Project, under the auspices of the WPA, also commissioned murals – some 2,500 of them across the nation between August of 1935 and April of 1943. TRAP, the Treasury Relief Art Project, operated from July 1935 to about June 1939, with the Section supervising its projects' scopes, and the WPA/FAP providing funds. These funds also paid for, and supplied artist assistants. TRAP, which primarily added art and murals to existing government buildings, commissioned approximately 78 murals across the U.S. during its tenure.³⁰

Though commissioned by different groups, in different states, across a wide swath of years, New Deal-era murals exhibit a unifying artistic theme-cum-style known as the “American Scene.” This umbrella term relates to two artistic movements: the more rural “American Regionalism,” and the urban-centered, and politically-oriented, “Social Realism.” On their own, the two component styles possess well-defined formal and thematic qualities, yet upon copulation, their progeny, the American Scene, is less explicit and its qualities remain ambiguous. Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood are two stand-out examples of American Regionalism. Benton and Wood both trained in Paris, but after they returned to the U.S., both rejected the siren song of the abstract expressionist movement when it made an appearance at the 1913 New York Armory Show. In contrast, their paintings project a romantic idealism, and take

²⁹. See the Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Image A3 (page 143).

³⁰. O'Connor, “New Deal Murals in New York,” 42.

their subjects from rural life, both its people and its settings, and from regional tales – an American mythology-cum-historical record.³¹ Pomona College professor emerita of art history, Frances K. Pohl, in her exhaustive study of American art, cites a 1984 study of New Deal-era post office murals, which documents a clear tension between the competing messages of nationalism and regionalism on display in their iconographic program. In the murals, the study discerned the presence of a “national program consciously promulgating national ideals,” entwined with an inserted idealism, enrobing the values of “regional pride, local concerns, and grass roots participation.”³² Mural themes, selected by local and national administrations, were calculated; far from simply aesthetic, New Deal motifs attempted to engender pride in a nationally sanctioned image of American life and collective identity.

Outside the post office, these themes continue throughout the era’s artistic output. Cahill viewed art as an attractor of people to a public space – a place to gather and acknowledge shared hopes for the future with members of the community. A social function of art as opposed to institutional, these murals were accessible to all. Murals remind viewers of the art all around them, bright spots of beauty in periods darkened by the twin demons of “Ignorance and Want.”³³

³¹. “American Scene Painting,” in *The Art History Archive*, accessed June 3, 2020, <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/americanscene/>.

³². Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1984), quoted in Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art*, 3rd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2012): 394.

³³. Charles Dickens, “Stave Three: The Second of the Three Spirits,” in *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, ed. by Michael Patrick Hearn (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004): 123 (5th para. from the end). “Ignorance and Want” is a reference from *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens. In Stave Three, Ebenezer Scrooge notices a movement

They broadcast the hidden, or unspoken, problems affecting the nation, but also the *seemingly* simple pleasure and resilience crafted into American identity politics. The George Washington High School collaboration included artists, such as Ralph Stackpole, Lucien Labaudt, Gordon Langdon, and sculptor Sargent Johnson, who was one of the first African American artists working in California to attain national attention.³⁴ Taken in as a collaborative creation, it seems appropriate that future artists add and participate with the enfolded narratives. New Deal murals promoted a hard-scrabble, industrious national present, and promised a future free from want – the American Dream. However, the murals often depicted a sanitized and White populace, which presented unspoken inequalities within the national framework, and unconsciously reiterated exclusion upon each viewing. The public nature that Cahill praised for its ability to engender community, anathematized those not pictured as “Other” – as not part of the national dream.

from beneath the robes worn by the Spirit of Christmas Present. At his inquiry, the Spirit pulls back his robes and reveals two sickly – ‘wolfish,’ yet ‘prostrate’ – children clinging to his legs. Similar to the ills Roosevelt voiced in his speech, “A Rendezvous with Destiny,”* Dickens personified the faults of society through the juxtaposition between the Spirit and the children. The Spirit, as Dicken’s mouthpiece, identifies the fount from which spring these ills:

““They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. ‘And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!’”
[*See Note 14, p. 32]

Annotation note #94, on the same page, states that “their fathers” is a synonym for ‘Mankind.’

³⁴. HPC, Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), 1.
<https://commissions.sfplanning.org/hpcpackets/George%20Washington%20HS.pdf>.



Figure 11. Johnson, *Athletics* (detail), 1942.³⁵

Dewey Crumpler speaks in a calm, moderated timber. His words are carefully chosen, and while he isn't reciting rote lines, the words have the weight of repetition. He transmits patience in his words – a quality only acquired through practice and time, which at seventy years he has obtained. Crumpler says, “memories reside in the shadows.”³⁶ He's right. Time affects the past, leaving shadows – blurry images of events that codify as memory, and therefore a personal truth. One can either look back at the shadows, with the dispassionate clarity of an archaeologist, arriving at conclusions before allowing emotion to flood the senses, or one can skim their periphery, searching for something to justify, or blame, the/their present condition, creating a

³⁵. Marc James Léger, “Save Our George Washington High School Murals,” *Blog of Public Secrets*, July 7, 2019, <https://legermj.typepad.com/blog/2019/07/save-our-george-washington-high-school-murals.html>. Photo by Tammy Aramian and courtesy of the GWHS Alumni Association.

³⁶. Dewey Crumpler, interview with the author (interview recorded via Zoom.us), video recorded interview (in possession of the author), April 16, 2020.

post-facto history. The shadows make memories unclear, but within there are stories waiting to be told.

An artistic chameleon, Crumpler explored muralism at a time when figurative art took a backseat to abstract expressionism and pop art. Out of several proposals, the Black Student Union at GWHS selected Crumpler, at a mere nineteen years, to create a response narrative to Arnautoff's *Life of Washington*. Crumpler was already well known in the San Francisco-area art community. He moved to the Bay-area with his family at two weeks of age, and resides there to this day. A recent academic retiree of the San Francisco Institute of Art (SFAI), the same alma mater as Victor Arnautoff, Crumpler does not lack for energy. A 2018 exhibition of his recent paintings, titled *Collapse*, opened at Seattle University's Hedreen Gallery, guest curated by Professor Sampada Aranke, a former associate from SFAI.³⁷ Following this successful show, Aranke, now a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, intends to curate another exhibition soon.³⁸ Prior the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Richmond Art Center, in Richmond, California, announced plans for a fifteen-year survey of Crumpler's œuvre, and to include over 120 works by the artist.³⁹

³⁷. Dewey Crumpler, "Collapse in Conversation: Artist Dewey Crumpler and Curator Sampada Aranke," by Sampada Aranke, Hedreen Gallery, Seattle University, WA, April 12, 2018 (uploaded to Vimeo.com by ARTS@SeattleU on May 9, 2018), MP4, 1:22:41, <https://vimeo.com/268812141>.

³⁸. Sampada Aranke, email communication with author, April 29, 2020.

³⁹. "Dewey Crumpler: Crossings," n.d., updated exhibition notice, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, CA, accessed multiple times (first on June 26, 2020), <https://richmondartcenter.org/exhibitions/dewey-crumpler/>. The retrospective was scheduled for March 2020. The Richmond Art Center intends to reschedule the exhibition, "Dewey Crumpler: Crossings," at a later date, however at present a date remains forthcoming.

The mural format functions as a didactic pedagogical expression. The medium's high square footage and architectural format dictates a slow and meandering viewing. In México the mural afforded a prominent position in consecrating President Álvaro Obregón's (1880-1928; president, December 1, 1920 – November 30, 1924) nascent revolutionary state. The Mexican school of painting solidified under the influence of "Los Tres Gigantes" – Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who succeeded in creating a visual language – an iconology – that celebrates both the peasants and the proletariat through depictions of traditions and customs, in tandem with revolutionary triumph. Out of the ashes of the old régime, and the shadow of European tradition and artistic hegemony, sprang a nationalist ideology and a national consciousness, a pride in the people, and an artistic style separate from, but on equal standing with, that in Europe.⁴⁰ The Mexican School created artwork in public spaces, giving, rather than withholding, art to the people. In this way, the Government supplanted the Church as the leading stewards of public art, and simultaneously replaced faith in religion with faith in nationalist ideology. As a function of their visual idiom – social realism – Mexican murals employ an iconological program; revolutionary and populist subject matter, in concert with placement in government buildings, which in effect legitimizes the state. Art historian, Leonard Folgarait, noting their placement in publicly accessible official buildings – mainly government, community, and religious – as well as their large format, asserts that murals operate "within the semiotic social system of [a particular time period and are] symptomatic of

⁴⁰. Agustín Arteaga, "Mexico's Renaissance," in *Mexico 1900-1950: Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Agustín Arteaga (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2017), 20, 22, 25-28.

the paternalizing generosity of the patron.”⁴¹ In both the case of Mexican muralism, and that of the New Deal, the “patron” equals the government.

However, this paternalism is absent in the case of *Multi-Ethnic Heritage*. Crumpler met with students throughout the project, and reworked his designs based on their concerns. His goal was contextualization, expansion, inclusion, and conversation – not dictation or direction. When the Black Student Union asked for alterations to the Arnautoff murals, Crumpler was adamant concerning the inclusion, and preservation, of *Life of Washington*. Crumpler’s exposure to murals across the United States and elsewhere, his willingness to converse with others, and his close study of history, afford him an understanding of Arnautoff’s message, as conferred through the mural idiom.⁴²

⁴¹. Leonard Folgarit, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1950: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge and New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6, quoted in Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012): 15.

⁴². Dewey Crumpler, interview with the author (via phone), transcribed notes (in possession of the author), February 13, 2020.

CHAPTER 3

LIFE OF WASHINGTON



Figure 12. Location key to the 13 *Life of Washington* mural panels. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.⁴³

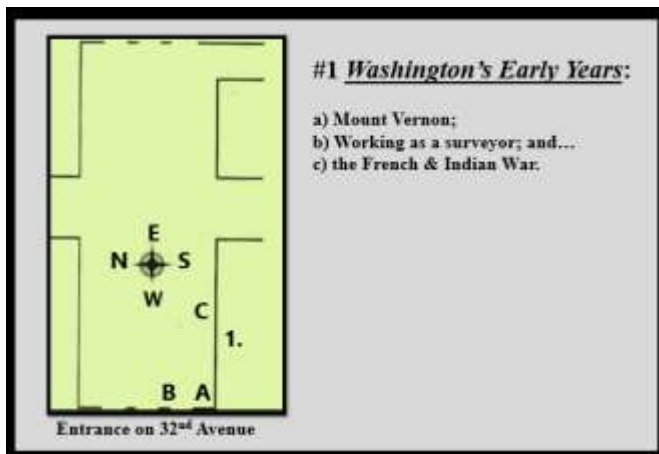


Figure 13. Key to Arnautoff's "Washington's Early Years" (details), panel 1/13, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave vestibule, south wall.⁴⁴

⁴³. GWHS Alumni Assoc., "Washington High School *Life of Washington* Murals (1936)," handout (courtesy of Vice President GWHS Alumni Assoc., Lope Yap, Jr., May 26, 2020), June 22, 2019. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.

⁴⁴. Ibid. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.



Figure 14. Details from “Washington’s Early Years”: a) A woman in yellow, and a youth in blue stand, in front of Mount Vernon plantation. Enslaved Africans bend to work the soil; b) Early on, Washington worked as a surveyor; c) Arnautoff painted various scenes depicting colonial soldiers and Indigenous peoples during the “Seven Years War” (see Note 32). Arnautoff, “Washington’s Early Years,” panel $\frac{1}{13}$, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave. vestibule, south wall.⁴⁵

The *Life of Washington* mural series begins with the “Washington’s Early Years” panel, directly to the right after entering the 32nd Avenue entrance. Depicted in the top right corner is a distant Mount Vernon – Washington’s Virginia plantation (Fig. 14; a). A woman with a parasol, accompanied by a small child, stands before a white, columned house. Enslaved Africans bend forward, tasked with agricultural work. Directly below this image stands the tall profile of

⁴⁵. Robert W. Cherny, “The Murals,” *Coalition to Protect Public Art*, accessed February 23, 2020, https://www.protectpublicart.org/the_murals. Photo by Richard Evans.

Washington engaged in his earlier profession as a surveyor (Fig. 14; b). Scenes from the Seven Years War, in which Washington took part, dominates the panel (Fig. 14; c).⁴⁶

⁴⁶. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, 2nd ed. (New York: Touchstone, 2007): 118. In this thesis, the designation ‘Seven Years War’ is used in place of the oft used designation, ‘French and Indian War.’ This former title inaccurately suggests that the war was an event between only two groups. In actuality, this was a global conflict, that included numerous European nations and several tribes of Indigenous people living adjacent to the North American colonies. This war was fought on the European continent and at sea, as well as in North America. Loewen references its global status plainly, calling it “[a]nother world war, the Seven Years War (1754-63), in the United States called the French and Indian War,” thus, this paper will use the more accurate term of ‘Seven Years War;’ James Piecuch, “French and Indian War,” in *Converging Worlds: Communities and Cultures in Colonial America, A Sourcebook*, 1st ed., ed. Louise A Breen (New York: Routledge, 2011): 349, <https://doi-org.libproxy.utdallas.edu/10.4324/9780203436042>. Historian, James Piecuch, succinctly identifies the primary North American crux at the center of the Seven Years War, stating that “[i]n the epic struggle known in North America as the French and Indian War, the English, French, and various groups of Native Americans struggled to maintain or expand their influence.” This clarifies that there were more players in this war than just the French and Indigenous peoples; Anthony McFarlane, “War, Trade and Empire,” in *The British in the Americas, 1480-1815*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1994): 223-24, <https://doi-org.libproxy.utdallas.edu/10.4324/9781315844244>. McFarlane further clarifies this event:

British determination to break the barriers to westward expansion formed by French forts and Indian protectorates prepared the way for a resumption of war with France in 1756. This, the Seven Years War (1756-63), marked a new stage in the struggle for empire, in which Britain and France engaged in combat on a global scale. Fought in Europe, India, West Africa, the West Indies and North America, the ‘Great War for Empire’ differed from the preceding war in that it involved a contest for territory in both the Caribbean and the North American continent, and ended with a treaty that redrew the map of European colonial dominion in the Americas.

Thus, exists a large historical debt due the inaccuracy promulgated by use of the term ‘French and Indian War’ in discourse. Shakespeare may question the importance of name as pertains to its substance, but in the accurate portrayal of history, terminological choices can obscure and influence public perception of events. Likewise, visual consumption – from advertisements to movies, and mass-market to fine art, is affected by artistic license, which can alter beliefs, and even assume the position of fact.



Figure 15. Arnautoff, “Washington’s Early Years,” panel ¹/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave vestibule, south wall.⁴⁷

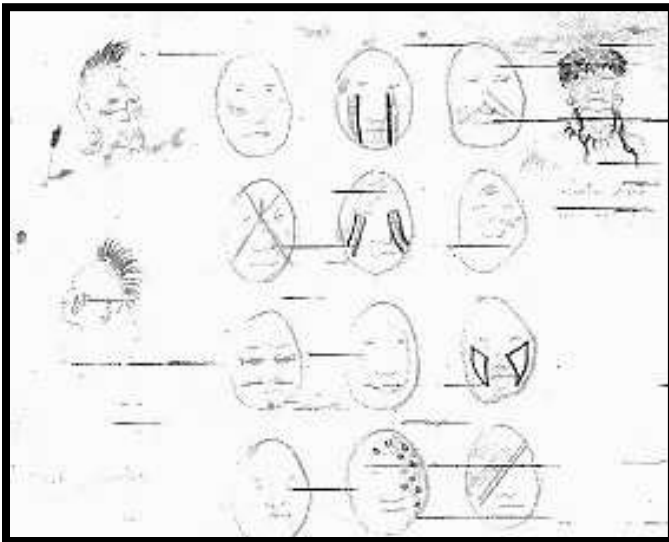


Figure 16. Arnautoff, face decoration preparatory sketches, *Life of Washington* mural series, c. 1934-36.⁴⁸

⁴⁷. Carol Pogash, “These High School Murals Depict an Ugly History. Should They Go?,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/arts/design/george-washington-murals-ugly-history-debated.html>. Photo by Jim Wilson.

⁴⁸. Sketches – historical, n.d. Series 8: Artwork, c. 1920s – c. 1950s, box 2, fldr 28. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. Archives of American Art (AAA), Smithsonian

The Victor Mikhail Arnautoff files at the Archives of American Art (part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.), contain microfiche copies of *Life of Washington* preparatory sketches. He included notes and details alongside sketches of military insignias, British, Colonial American, and Hessian uniforms, and the dress of Indigenous peoples, including head and facial adornments. Recognizable from the sketches are some of the images seen in the murals. The presence of notes suggests Arnautoff thoroughly researched his topic before painting. A sketched map of the eastern United States, with the names and relative locations of several Indigenous tribes, shows the caliber of research conducted by Arnautoff in preparation for his mural series.⁴⁹ Rather than continue the popularization of stereotypical presentations prevalent in the 1930s United States media, these notes and sketches indicate that Arnautoff sought to portray more accurate depictions of Indigenous peoples, to work in concert with his more accurate depictions of Revolutionary-era American colonizers. Indeed, he acknowledged the presence of different tribes, rather than the monocultural “American Indian” familiar to Western novelizations, films, television, and children’s games. His recent exposure to nationalistic upheaval and subaltern vocalization while flip-flopping from Tsarist Russian White to Communist Red, perhaps made him more aware of a varied perception of history as directly

Institution (SI), Washington, D.C. Affiliated archive access through the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Ft. Worth, TX, accessed on February 11, 2020.

⁴⁹. GWHS preparatory sketch research into names and locations of Indigenous peoples present during the life of George Washington. Sketches – historical, n.d. Series 8: Artwork, c. 1920s - c. 1950s, box 2, fldr 28. Arnautoff Papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1923-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C. Affiliated Archive Access through the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Ft. Worth, TX, accessed on February 11, 2020.

relating to the peoples who lived and live it. This sensitivity made him more ready to dig deeper than mere popular iconographical image.



Figure 17. Arnautoff, flag preparatory sketches, *Life of Washington* mural series, c. 1934-36.⁵⁰

⁵⁰. Ibid.

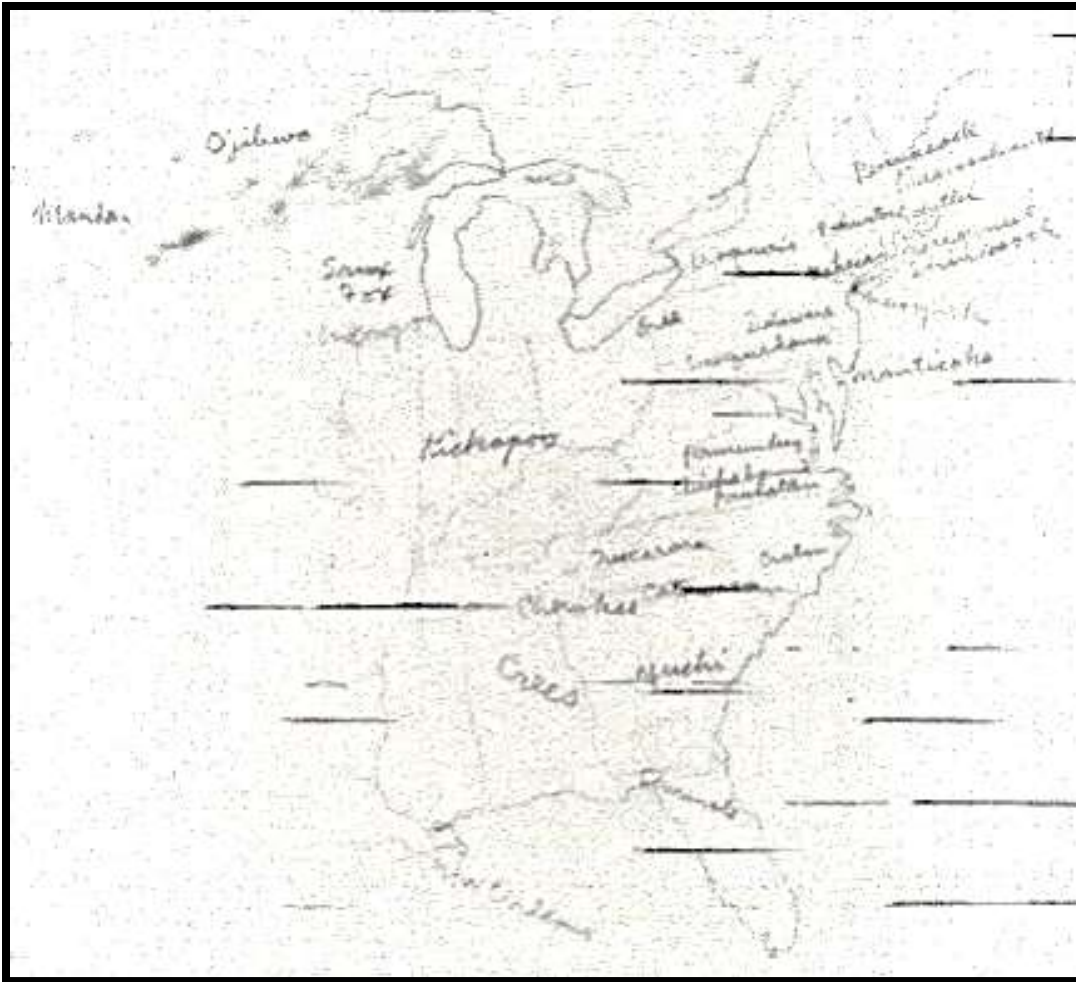


Figure 18. Arnautoff, map preparatory sketches, *Life of Washington* mural series, c. 1934-36.⁵¹

⁵¹. Ibid.



Figure 19. Arnautoff, “The American Revolution,” panel ²/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave vestibule, north wall.⁵²

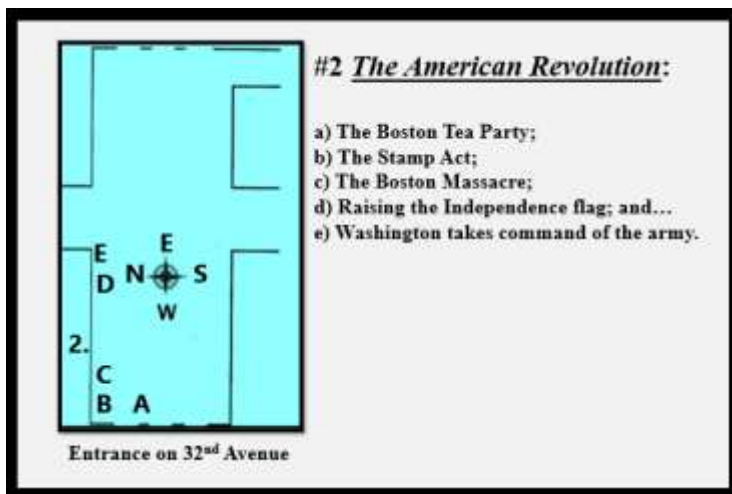


Figure 20. Key to Arnautoff’s “The American Revolution” (details), panel ²/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.⁵³

⁵². HPC Resolution No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), Appendix 4 (102). Photo by Richard Rothman.

⁵³. GWHS Alumni Assoc., “Washington High School *Life of Washington* Murals (1936),” June 22, 2019. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.



Figure 21. Details from “The American Revolution” panel: a) Boston Tea Party; b) Stamp Act; c) Boston Massacre; d) American revolutionaries raising the Independence Flag; e) General Washington takes command of the army. Arnautoff, “The American Revolution,” panel ²/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁵⁴

Continuing to the left, the narrative progresses to “The American Revolution,” with its depicted action following an angled support along the stairway. In the top left corner, colonialists dressed as Indigenous people dump boxes of tea in the harbor (The Boston Tea Party) (Fig. 21; a). In the bottom left, the fire and burning paper recalls events from the Stamp Act (Fig. 21; b). Dead center, beneath the crossed poles is the Boston Massacre (Fig. 21; c). Arnautoff effectively used the slant of his canvas in his depiction of men arduously straining against ropes, while they raise the Independence Flag (Fig. 21; d). This strained movement builds to the top right, where

⁵⁴. HPC Resolution, No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), Appendix 4 (102). Photo by Richard Rothman.

Washington – astride a white horse – takes command of the army (Fig. 21; e). Noted in this panel is Arnautoff's use of architecture – seen in his fictive structures disguising heating grates in the wall. At the Stamp Act, an orator rouses the crowd from atop a grate, cleverly transformed into a pedestal. Another grate metamorphoses into hewed stones, which adds structure to a raised embankment. “The American Revolution” panel is the most detailed of the thirteen, with layers of people and ships interspersed in a landscape of sea, trees, and provincial buildings. These details form a bodily crescendo of movement toward Washington's saluted form in the top right corner. The artist, Diego Rivera, who mentored Arnautoff, was skilled in his use of the architectural structure, both its limitations and affordances. His artistry translated a visual medium into a narrative form. Though inanimate paint and plaster, Rivera's murals invite visitors to follow linked chapters, played on walls and ceilings throughout a space. Through these visuals, he relays Mexico's nationalist history to its people. Coffey connects Rivera's mature frescos with liturgical and ritual use of decoration in Catholic churches. In both cases, she discerns artistic choices that exploit the architecture for its “processional and performative capacities.”⁵⁵ Arnautoff conveys similar artistic choices in his thirteen chapter narrative.

⁵⁵. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 21.



Figure 22. Key to panels ³⁻⁸/₁₃. North-side hallway: Panel 3, west wall; Panel 4, ceiling; Panel 5, east wall. South-side hallway: Panel 6, west wall; Panel 7, ceiling; Panel 8, east wall. Arnautoff, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave vestibule, first landing, north- and south-side hallways. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.⁵⁶



Figure 23. Panel 5: “Yorktown;” Panel 6: “Farewell to the Army;” Panel 8: “Washington, Hamilton, & Jefferson Discuss the Constitution.” Arnautoff, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁵⁷

⁵⁶. GWHS Alumni Assoc., “Washington High School *Life of Washington* Murals (1936),” June 22, 2019. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.

⁵⁷. Léger, “Save Our George Washington High School Murals,” July 7, 2019. Source for panel 5 and 6 images, with photos taken by Tammy Aramian and courtesy of the GWHS Alumni

A break in the ascent results in a brief landing with a recessed doorway to both the left and the right. Each recess boasts three murals, one ceiling and two wall. The north doorway wall presents images of “Valley Forge” on the west wall (not pictured), “Yorktown” on the east (Fig. 23, panel 5), and the “Moon” on the ceiling (not pictured). Likewise, the south doorway is enhanced with three clustered murals – “George Washington’s Farewell to the Army” (Fig. 23, panel 6), “Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson Discussing the Constitution” (Fig. 23, panel 8), and the “Sun & Rainbow” (not pictured), on the west and east walls, and ceiling, respectively.



Figure 24. Key to panels ⁹⁻¹³/₁₃, second landing. Panel 9, north wall; Panel 10, north-south directed hallway, east wall; Panel 11, north-south directed hallway, ceiling; Panel 12, north-south directed hallway, west wall; Panel 13, south wall. Arnautoff, *Life of Washington*, 1936, GWHS, 32nd Ave vestibule, second landing. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.⁵⁸

Association; Cherny, “The Murals,” accessed February 23, 2020. Source and photo for Panel 8 image by Robert W. Cherny.

⁵⁸. GWHS Alumni Assoc., “Washington High School *Life of Washington* Murals (1936),” June 22, 2019. Addition of numbers, colors, and cardinal directions by author.



Figure 25. Arnautoff, “Mount Vernon Plantation,” panel ⁹/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁵⁹



Figure 26. Panel 9, left-half (details): a) Enslaved African women pick cotton in a distant field; b) An enslaved African man holds the reins to Pres. Washington's horse; c) Pres. Washington speaks with his overseer; d) An enslaved African man ties corn cobs into bundles. Arnautoff, “Mount Vernon Plantation,” panel ⁹/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁶⁰

⁵⁹. Robert Cherny, “The ‘Life of Washington’ Murals Explained,” *The Living New Deal*, September 3, 2019, <https://livingnewdeal.org/author/robert-cherny/>. Photo by Richard Evans.

⁶⁰. Ibid. Photo by Richard Evans.

From the landing, the stairway continues upwards until it reaches the school's main elevation. On the left, "Mount Vernon Plantation" dominates the wall. This is the second time Arnautoff introduces Mount Vernon imagery within the mural cycle. This repetition underscores the integral importance of the plantation in Washington mythology. Of the thirteen panels, "Mount Vernon Plantation" poses one of the most controversial in the series. At the top left, enslaved African women pick cotton, stooped forward in a field beyond the farmyard (Fig. 26; a).⁶¹ An enslaved African valet holds the reins to Washington's horse. He is dressed in pantomime to the style of a white gentleman. He wears a white coat and tails, a white powdered wig, and red pants (Fig. 26; b). Just left of center, Washington wears a green coat, white pants, and a black tricorn hat. He speaks with a man – possibly an overseer – who doffs his brown hat with his right hand, while simultaneously gesturing to the side with his left (Fig. 26; c). In the center, Arnautoff co-opts the real doorway architecture, which physically invades the fictive plantation from below, into his painted world. The doorway's lintel is reimagined as a raised piece of masonry stone in the plantation yard. An enslaved African man in a green kerchief, with a white shirt and pants, ties corn cob silks together before dropping the bundles into a bag lying

⁶¹. Robert Wolfe, "Robert Cary and Company," in *The Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington*, edited James P. Ambuske, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, accessed on February 20, 2021, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/robert-cary-and-company/>. The connection of cotton to chattel slavery in the United States, while accurate, takes the place of visual reference short-hand for its history. Enslaved Africans were set in fields to harvest more crops than cotton, and the agricultural realm was not the only place where slavery was utilized. George Washington grew (or rather tasked enslaved Africans to grow) tobacco. Washington was not always successful in his output from Mount Vernon. Tobacco harvests were poor there in the 1760s, and by 1765 Washington was inquiring about a switch to hemp.

at his bare feet. His bent knees follow the right angle of the lintel, connecting fictive depiction with physical reality. (Fig 26; d).



Figure 27. Panel 9, right-half (details): Coopers make barrels and enslaved African men carry parcels to a boat. Arnautoff, “Mount Vernon Plantation,” panel 9/13, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁶²

Past the linteled doorway (Fig. 27), three white men and one enslaved African man are busy in a covered workshop. At the far right, a cooper holds a wooden mallet aloft in his right hand and holds a metal tool in his left, either tightening or removing a quarter hoop from the barrel. Just beyond, through the window, enslaved African men carry parcels to a waiting boat. In the left foreground, a shop worker runs a lathe across a thin strip. Here again, Arnautoff works the physical space into the fictive. He effectively camouflages a bulging bit of wall with a fictive masonry block design. This masonry design continues upwards from the door to enclose the grate, and provides an elevated space on which an enslaved man thrusts a large, iron mallet

⁶². Cherny, “The ‘Life of Washington’ Murals Explained,” September 3, 2019. Photo by Richard Evans.

downwards onto wooden spokes. The wheelwright holds the spokes perfectly straight in the wheel hub (*nave*), to prevent the force splitting the spoke.

Despite all the farmyard activity, this is not its true focus. Here, Arnautoff inserts a counter-narrative. If not apparent by the many instances of the words “enslaved African man/men/woman/women,” this is the actual focus of the inaptly named “Mount Vernon Plantation.” During the 1930s and 1940s – and in many instances up to the turn of the 21st Century – Washington’s ownership of enslaved Africans was/is not widely discussed.⁶³ The Federal Government chose the presidential theme for the school, and they may have tasked Arnautoff specifically with devoting a mural to Mount Vernon, however Mount Vernon alone is clearly not its full focus. This counter-narrative is evidenced by the following: The artist positions two enslaved African men in the center of the mural, disrupting the suggested foci of Mount Vernon, and by extension, George Washington. Long before the 1930s, Mount Vernon had become a major tourist attraction. In this panel there is no image of a stately manse, thus subverting the integrity of its title. Instead Arnautoff painted a common farmyard setting; the

⁶³. Loewen, *Lies*, 6, 144, and 305. Loewen discusses his research into the shortcomings of U.S. history textbooks. On page six, he describes conflicting motivations pushed on, and promoted by, history textbook companies: “Textbooks are often muddled by the conflicting desires to promote inquiry and to indoctrinate blind patriotism.” On page 144, Loewen address specific history textbook failings concerning the teaching of slavery within the United States: “Most textbooks downplay slavery in the North, however, so slavery seems to be a sectional rather than national problem.” On page 305, Loewen quotes the scholar, Henry Giroux (*Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*, 1981), who neatly sums-up one of the primary reasons history textbooks semantically distort some events, and are remiss to include others. As quoted, Giroux says, ‘The dominant culture actively functions to suppress the development of a critical historical consciousness among the populace.’ In discussion, Crumpler specifically referenced suppression of historical facts and purposeful omission of events, as leading contributors to the repression of African Americans and Americans of color (February 13, 2020).

only identifying detail to suggest a connection with Mount Vernon is the cameo appearance by Washington – situated left of center. This artistically subversive snub, reveals that the artist added detail enough to satisfy his FAP mandate, and nothing more. Arnautoff biographer, Robert Cherny, notes that “Washington dominates five of the six smaller murals, but the *centers* of the four largest murals are held by Native Americans, working-class revolutionaries, and enslaved African Americans.”⁶⁴



Figure 28. Panel 10: “Washington Tells his Mother Farewell;” Panel 11: “Personified Liberty Adds 13 Stars to the Sky;” Panel 12: “Washington Gives his Estate to the National University.” Arnautoff, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁶⁵

⁶⁴. Robert W. Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 109. The four largest murals are “Washington’s Early Years,” “The American Revolution,” “Mount Vernon Plantation,” and the yet to be discussed “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny).”

⁶⁵. Kelley, “We’re Getting these Murals All Wrong,” September 10, 2019. Source for panel 10 image, with photo by Tammy Aramian and courtesy of the GWHS Alumni Association; Léger, “Save Our George Washington High School Murals,” July 7, 2019. Source for Panel 11

Enslaved African peoples on large plantations often outnumbered the white residents as far back as the end of the 18th Century. In Charleston the population of enslaved and free Africans was greater than fifty-percent of the total population, according to the 1790 census, up till 1860.⁶⁶ Today, detailed records of African peoples enslaved by George Washington, and other white (and some non-white) plantation owners, is only a Google click away, but when Arnautoff painted “Mount Vernon Plantation,” this information was much less discussed.⁶⁷ In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, historian James Loewen researches public high school history textbooks for inaccuracies and falsehoods. In 2007, only nine textbooks, out of a sample size of eighteen widely-used high school history books, listed either the word *racism*, *racial discrimination*, *race prejudice*, or at the bottom of the heap – *white racism*. Of the nine textbooks that listed *racism*, or some derivation of the word, in the index, several did not use that listed term on its index-designated page(s). Only one of the eighteen defined the racism.⁶⁸ Such underwhelming statistics underscore the rarity, and importance, of Arnautoff’s 1936 artistic assertion. At the time, few conceived of the first president owning slaves, and still fewer contrived to paint a Mount Vernon mural without its aforementioned big-house, and fewer still included images of enslaved Africans living as chattel slaves. Indeed, Arnautoff followed the

image; Cherny, *The Coalition to Protect Public Art*, accessed February 23, 2020. Source and photo for panel 12 image.

⁶⁶. Maurie D. McInnis, “A Bird’s-Eye View,” in *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 20.

⁶⁷. See Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, B4 (page 152).

⁶⁸. Loewen, *Lies*, 144.

mandate – he painted the life of George Washington, and he did so in a manner far less radical than Méxican muralism, yet he painted it in a way far more blue than White America was comfortable.



Figure 29. Panel 12 (detail): The writing on the forward-facing pamphlet proclaims, ‘Shares of Potomac River Company given to establish a National University.’ Arnautoff, “Washington Gives his Estate to the National University,” panel ¹²/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁶⁹

At the end of hall, Arnautoff installed another three-part mural cluster in the doorway of a north-south directed passage. Like before, a frescoed panel borders either side of the doors, while another panel beams down from the alcoved ceiling. To the left of the doors, on the south wall, Washington bids farewell to his aging mother (Fig. 28, panel 10). Martha, Washington’s wife, stands at his right, and an unnamed, enslaved African woman (yet another example of Arnautoff revealing slavery connected to the president) stands just behind this tender moment. She holds Washington’s coat and jacket – indicating he is about to leave. The date is April of 1789. On the 30th of that month, George Washington took the oath of office. Mary, his mother, was dying, and

⁶⁹. Cherny, *The Coalition to Protect Public Art*, accessed February 23, 2020. Source and photo by Robert W. Cherny.

he knew this was likely his last chance to visit before her before he took up residence at Franklin House, in New York City, the presidential residence at the time.⁷⁰ Above this tableau, a ceiling fresco shows *personified Liberty* adding 13 stars – representing the first thirteen colonies – to the sky (Fig. 28, panel 11). Last in the trio is an image of Washington entrusting his estate to the National University [Fig. 28 and 29 (detail), panel 12].



Figure 30. Arnautoff, “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny),” panel ¹³/₁₃, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁷¹

⁷⁰. Taylor Soja, “Mary Ball Washington,” in *The Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington*, edited by James P. Ambuske, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/mary-ball-washington/>; “Building the New Nation’s Capital,” in *The Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington*, edited by James P. Ambuske, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-first-president/building-the-new-nations-capital/>; Residence Act (1790), 1 STAT 130, Establishing the Temporary and Permanent Seat of Government of the United States, July 16, 1790, in *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875* (1st Congress, Session II, Ch. 28): 130, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=001/llsl001.db&recNum=253>.

⁷¹. *Coalition to Protect Public Art*, accessed February 23, 2020. Photo by Richard Evans.

The thirteenth, and final, panel is entitled “Washington Points the Way West,” often referenced as ‘Manifest Destiny’ (Fig. 30). This fresco, though not concretely divided with borders, actually relates three, distinct scenes of some import. In this panel, Arnautoff evokes a sense of suspended motion – a disruption in action. Read left-to-right, the mural focuses first on the affairs of state. In this scene, three men gather, the man staring out from the trio is inarguably Benjamin Franklin, and listen to an upright Washington, wearing pale blue and white. He points at a map with his right hand, while he stretches his left arm behind him, and points to the west.

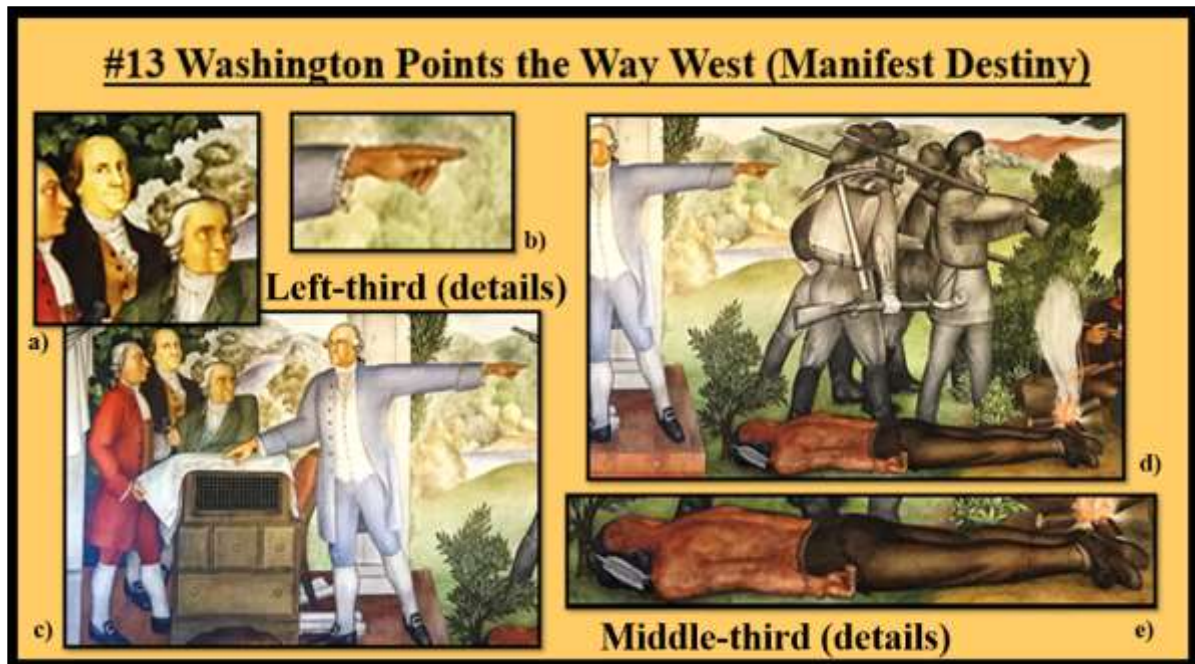


Figure 31. Panel 13 (details and locations within mural): a) Benjamin Franklin breaks the fourth-wall, making eye-contact with the viewer (left-third); b) Pres. Washington’s insistent finger points west (left-third); c) Pres. Washington points to a map with his right hand, and, without looking, points behind him with his left at ‘The West’ (left-third); d) Three men, dressed in frontier clothes and painted in grisaille, step over the body of a dead Indigenous person while advancing westward (middle-third); e) The prone body of a dead Indigenous person lies on the ground (middle-third). Arnautoff, “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny),” panel 13/13, *Life of Washington*, 1936.⁷²

⁷². Ibid. Photo by Richard Evans.

The finger is insistent (Fig. 31; a and b). Like an arrow shot, the audience follows this visual segue along an implied invisible line, flying in the direction of his pointed finger. Their eyes halt half-way. A disruption to the movement takes the form of four frontiersmen painted in grisaille (Fig. 31; b). They march west under the spell of Washington's directional finger. The use of grisaille, juxtaposed with the brilliant colors used elsewhere in the mural, is telling. Indeed, it is the only instance of this artistic choice within the mural cycle. The men appear sapped of life – of humanity, in comparison to the polychromatic fresco surrounding them. These grisailed figures, fixating towards the setting sun, function as the golems of Manifest Destiny. In reality, all pictures are paused moments in time and space; in effect they are suspended lives, like insects trapped in amber. However, the grisailed frontiersmen represent a state outside this fixed moment, similar to a freeze-frame in a film. At their feet lies the motionless, prostrate body of an Indigenous man (Fig. 32; d). In other murals, viewers may scan the mural, left to right, their eyes at an unvarying elevation, as they walk past, taking them from the apex of the president's pointed finger, through the central, gray-cast men, and through the site line terminus at the panel's far right edge. Yet here, asserting his authorial presence, Arnautoff disrupts typical audience viewing with the upsetting image of death. The dead man is even more noticeable in contrast to the gray men who plod past above him. This contrast forces the viewer to press pause, ever so briefly, to spend time with the scene.

Washington's involvement in Indigenous peoples' deaths was rarely discussed in the 1930s and 1940s. During Washington's administration, battles against Indigenous peoples

actually constituted eighty-percent of the national budget.⁷³ The British attempted a formal abatement of hostilities with Indigenous peoples with the Proclamation of 1763, which stated that colonists were forbidden to make land grants beyond the Appalachian continental divide. However, this enraged the colonists, who felt they were “paying to support a British army that only obstructed them from seizing [Indigenous] lands on the western frontier.”⁷⁴ Arnautoff devised a more historically accurate portrayal, one where Washington fought for the freedom of some, while disregarding the freedom of others. Loewen reveals that, “Washington held positive views of Native Americans early in his life, but after unleashing attacks upon them in the Revolutionary War, and the Ohio War in 1790, he would come to denounce them as ‘animals of prey’.”⁷⁵ Statements like these, combined with the imagery of death and enslavement, are among the reasons the murals incited anger and protests in the 1960s, and why, in part, they are in a dispute again today.

⁷³. Loewen, *Lies*, 115.

⁷⁴. Loewen, *Lies*, 118-19.

⁷⁵. Loewen, *Lies*, 124.



Figure 32. Panel 13 (details and locations within mural): a) A modern city in the distance (right-third); b) Settlers painted in grisaille head west towards a modern city that peeks above a hill (top two-thirds); c) A U.S. pioneer and an Indigenous person share a pipe and a fire beneath a tree (bottom-third). Arnautoff, “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny),” 1936.⁷⁶

Finally, the audience reaches the far right third. In the top corner, is a surprising site – a dimly lit, modern city (Fig. 32; a). Arnautoff had hoped to connect his mural to San Francisco, but discovered that Washington never reached California. His only connection is the future results of Manifest Destiny – the presence of a modern city in a contiguous country from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts. In this distant patch, he paints anachronistic skyscrapers peeping above an untouched wilderness. The broken branch on the tree, represents the broken treaties made with Indigenous people concerning land ownership west of the Appalachian Mountains. The branch also functions as a harbinger of future environmental destruction, as the U.S. seeks to

⁷⁶. *Coalition to Protect Public Art*, accessed February 23, 2020. Photo by Richard Evans.

“tame” the land and fill it with modern definitions of progress. Beneath the broken branch sits an American adventurer and an Indigenous person at a fire. Arnautoff paints the Indigenous man in the act of passing a pipe – interpreted as a sign of fellowship – to an American pioneer (Fig. 32; c). At a cursory glance, this appears like a pleasant episode in the last chapter of *Life of Washington*, however this is a mistake. On the ground, to the left of the Indigenous man is a small axe – presumably, the man’s tool and source for defense. The Indigenous man is seemingly unguarded and unafraid, enjoying a companionable moment with a fellow traveler. On closer inspection though, the vignette takes an ominous tone. While the pioneer’s right hand reaches for the pipe, his left hand begins to draw a knife. Arnautoff surreptitiously inserts his footnote to American-Indigenous relations discretely behind a leather jacket. Visually projecting into this final vignette, rest the feet of the murdered Indigenous man seen previously. The two, living men, warm themselves at the fire. They belong to a suspended moment, the paused action of a greedy white colonizer towards an Indigenous person. The inserted feet draw the audience back to the dead man, stressing repetition. Violence – physical, paternalistic, ideological – enacted by white colonizers onto people of color. The emotive resonance is increased by the juxtaposition of the obvious murder sprawled across the mural’s bottom section with the murder-in-progress suspended at its right.

In “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny),” Washington is again not the central protagonist. Washington stands to the side; carnage dominates the mural. Arnautoff proposes this is George Washington’s legacy. Still, Arnautoff admitted to admiring Washington – for his courage against tyrannical British rule, for rejecting the offer of kingship, and for setting the precedent of presidential term limits. This semi-modern Cincinnatus, endured hardship in the

service of his country, and in the end only wanted to return to his field and his plow. But, like most, he was also a flawed individual. In this mural series Arnautoff depicted a Washington charged with tensions, and complications for those who argue his achievements in the present day.

A closer viewing of “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny)” reveals purposeful and intriguing artistic choices. Three men, in addition to Washington provide the focus. Two look intently at the president, but the third man – Benjamin Franklin – breaks the fourth wall.⁷⁷ His eyes look beyond the frame and lock with those of the audience (Fig. 31; a). He tilts his head, ever so slightly back – almost in a shrug, as if in a curious communicate with the viewer. It is a playful moment. Benjamin Franklin is a commentary on foreknown knowledge concerning future outcomes. Arnautoff attempts a pause in his cinématique progression. Arrested, the viewer, halts to focus of this aberration. These moments are purposeful; Arnautoff crafted his design in such a way as to lead the audience through the narrative chapters at a preselected pace. These preordained stoppages assert their importance and insinuate the presence of painted messages within the mural. Franklin does not gawk to amuse; he ties his past to Arnautoff’s present to all the “presents” of future viewers, through a bridge formed from a stare.

⁷⁷. SC Lannon, “Breaking the Fourth Wall: Definition, Meaning and Examples,” *StudioBinder* (blog), June 21, 2020, <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/breaking-the-fourth-wall/>. Lannon, a screenwriter and director, provides an excellent definition of “breaking the fourth wall.” He says the *fourth wall* is “an imaginary wall that separates the story from the real world.” He mentions its origin from the theatre, “where the three surrounding walls enclose the stage while an invisible ‘4th wall’ is left out for the sake of the viewer.” ... It “is the screen we’re watching.” ... But it works “like a one-way mirror. The audience can see and comprehend the story, but the story cannot comprehend the existence of the audience.” ... “If you break that wall, you break that accord. This is called ‘Breaking The 4th Wall.’ It can be described as the story becoming aware of itself.”

He operates as the artist's critique of the early republic's decisions. Arnautoff also hints at, with the Franklin stare, a suspected foreknown knowledge on the part of the founding fathers of the bloody actions realized through the decree of 'Manifest Destiny.'



Figure 33. Arnautoff inserts his self-portrait into his mural. Arnautoff, *City Life* (detail), completed 1933 (opened to the public 1934), fresco, 10 x 36 ft, Coit Tower, 1 Telegraph Hill Blvd, San Francisco, CA 94133.⁷⁸

⁷⁸. "Coit Tower: Arnautoff Mural – San Francisco CA," *The Living New Deal* (Original Source: *New Deal Art Registry*), accessed March 3, 2020, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/coit-tower-arnautoff-mural-san-francisco-ca/>. Photo taken by Shaina Potts, and listed under the title "City Life 2."



Figure 34. Chaos ensues in another detail from *City Life*. Arnautoff, *City Life* (detail), 1933/1934.⁷⁹

In *City Life*, painted earlier, in 1933 and opened to the public in 1934, Arnautoff utilized the same artistic device. In this mural, he gives his own likeness to a man standing next to a newsstand (Fig. 33). The papers, *Masses* and the *Daily Work*, socialist and communist papers respectively, are present, while the local paper, the *Chronicle*, is conspicuously absent. The man stares not at the papers, but out at the mural audience. Behind, Arnautoff painted a bustling San Francisco street scene, with fruit vendors, various shoppers, and arcades (Fig. 34). Within this snapshot of capitalist American life, a man in a gray trench coat and hat is robbed at gunpoint. In

⁷⁹. Ibid. Photo taken by Shaina Potts, and listed under the title ““City Life 1.”

the distance, men lift a car off a motionless body as a photographer runs in to snap a photo. Pedestrians walk past, not looking, immune to such sights. Here, Arnautoff uses this break in the fourth wall to call attention to a counter-narrative to the capitalist “City on a Hill,” with its supposed virtues, and reveals the rot that lies beneath.⁸⁰ Both Benjamin Franklin and Arnautoff’s Coit Tower self-portrait disrupt the audience’s perusal and command attention to sly commentary and counter narratives.

⁸⁰. Daniel T. Rodgers, “We Shall Be as a City Upon a Hill,” in *As a City on a Hill: The Story of America’s Most Famous Lay Sermon* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2018), 31-43; Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 20-21, 43-45; Matthew 5:14-16 (KJV). “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an [sic] cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven.” These lines from the Bible (King James Version), have been used by white men in power in the United States before there was a United States. The Puritan, John Winthrop, used it in his oft-cited speech, “A Model of Christian Charity.” This was delivered near present-day Boston, on March 21, 1630. Before that, the Gospel of Mark cites Jesus as originating the phrase in his Sermon on the Mount. Since that time, the words “city on a hill” have inspired men, such as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, to add their own spin on just which people are to be a “light” unto the world, who is to receive the benefits of that light, and what actions taken, and results generated, the form of that light would take.

CHAPTER 4

UNTITLED (MULTI-ETHNIC HERITAGE)



Figure 35. Artist Dewey Crumpler, shown here in front of his mural panel, “The Black Panel,” spoke in support of preserving Arnautoff’s mural series (2019). Panel: Crumpler, “The Black Panel,” panel $\frac{3}{3}$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974, acrylic on canvas affixed to Masonite, approx 12 x 16 ft, GWHS, Administrative/Academic hall juncture, west wall.⁸¹

In 1968, the Black Student Union at GWHS demanded the removal of the *Life of Washington* murals – all panels save the two *accurate* ones – “Mount Vernon Plantation,” which reveals Washington’s ownership of enslaved Africans, and “Washington Points the Way West,”

⁸¹. Ben Davis, “This Artist Painted the Black Radical Response to the George Washington Slaveholder Murals. Here’s Why he Stands Against Destroying Them,” *Artnet* (Original Source: “GWHS Alumni Assoc. SF CA,” YouTube.com, June 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZEMpyvdAXQ>), July 10, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/san-francisco-mural-victor-arnautoff-dewey-crumpler-1596409>.

which discloses three men callously stepping over the body of a dead Indigenous person as the result of Washington’s westward mandate.⁸² These panels question the sanctity of the first president’s reputation and repudiate his cloak of godlike perfection. They disclose a very human man – one with faults as well as accomplishments – who participated in the enslavement of African people and supported expansion and conquest at the expense of Indigenous peoples’ lives.

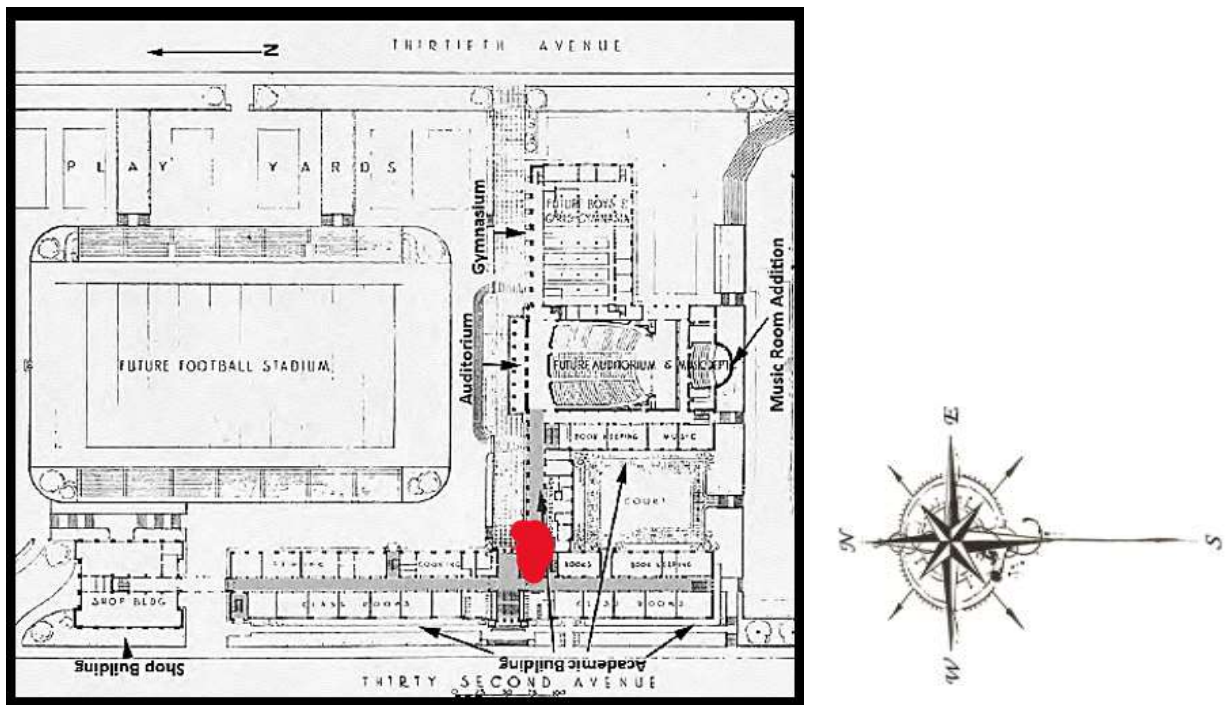


Figure 36. The location of Crumpler’s *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)* mural series is indicated in red. Addition of the red indicator detail on map, and the cardinal rose at right, by the author.⁸³

⁸². Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020; Thomas K. Pendergast, “SFUSD School District Ignored Plans to Save GWHS Murals,” *San Francisco Richmond Review*, February 28, 2020, <https://sfrichmondreview.com/2020/02/28/13434/>.

⁸³. HPC Resolution, No. 919, *Landmark Designation Report: GWHS*, Case No. 2016-013562DES (San Francisco: SF Planning Dept., Dec. 6, 2017), 6 (Fig. 8). Addition of the red indicator detail on map, and the cardinal rose at right, by the author.



Figure 37. A 1968 dated newspaper article concerning the Black Student Union protests over the Arnautoff mural at GWHS.⁸⁴



Figure 38. Image of newspaper issue from the first-noted instance of protest against *Life of Washington*.⁸⁵

⁸⁴. Newspaper clipping, 1968 [Box 2, Slide 507]. Series 6: Scrapbook, 1928-1968, 1979-1981. Arnautoff Papers, c.1920-2017, bulk 1923-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C. Affiliated Archive access through the Carter Museum, accessed on February 11, 2020.

⁸⁵. Alison M. Collins, "Let's talk about (stereotypes in the) Washington Murals...", *Alison M. Collins* (blog) [Original Source: Phil Garlington, "Resentment Over High School Mural," *San Francisco Examiner*, Tuesday, May 21, 1968, 3], July 26, 2019,

Ruth Adams, the school principal at the time, called a meeting on Wednesday, October 23rd, 1968, to discuss the matter. On October 29th, Principal Adams received a sympathetic letter from Robert Kingsbury, the president of the Northern California Chapter of the Artists Equity Association.⁸⁶ Adams responded on November 4th, 1968:

Vasily Arnautoff's description of his father's dedication to his work and his desire to open the eyes and minds of people to injustice was to me, at least, very moving. Even though his words seemed to fall on deaf ears, ... I have been all too aware of the fact that the murals alone were not the problem. The black student leaders told me that this was the symbol of the "Black Revolution" in our school and, as such, was only the beginning of their demands. ... the decision has been made to use plaques to explain the artist's intent ... It was also agreed that the planning of a contemporary mural would begin.⁸⁷

As stated, the school board agreed to install plaques bearing contextual and historical information beneath the murals as a proffered response and a compromise to the Black Student Union's concerns and demands for removal. It is not clear whether plaques were to be installed at every mural, or merely the two most contentious. To this day, no plaques exist bearing said

<https://alimcollins.medium.com/lets-talk-about-the-stereotypes-in-the-washington-murals-93912905c93c>. Photo by Ray Morris.

⁸⁶. Letter of Robert Kingsbury, Pres. of the Artists' Equity Assn., Inc., to Ruth M. Adams, Principal of GWHS, October 29, 1968, image 1 (UAN: AAA_AAA_arnavict_3113313). Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974, box 1, folder 32. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C., EDAN-URL: ead_component:sova-aaa-arnavict-ref40, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=AAA.arnavict_ref40.

⁸⁷. Letter of Ruth M. Adams, Principal of GWHS, to Robert Kingsbury, Pres. of the Artists' Equity Assn., Inc., November 4, 1968, images 2 and 3 (UAN: AAA_arnavict_3113314 and AAA_arnavict_3113315). Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974, box 1, folder 32. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C., EDAN-URL: ead_component:sova-aaa-arnavict-ref40, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=AAA.arnavict_ref40.

information.⁸⁸ In addition, the board agreed to commission a mural that would provide balance and perspective in response to the *Life of Washington*. The students agreed, with one caveat: they insisted that they select the muralist. They wanted an artist from the community who represented their beliefs, experiences, and perspectives. At first, the board refused, but in time they relented, but only after frustrated students took marked action.

The wheels of change move slowly, and after repeated delays and excuses, the students' patience wore-out. In late-1968/early-1969, a student, or students (reportedly students from the Black Student Union), threw red ink on one of the frescos. During an interview for this thesis, Crumpler mentioned that the ink is still visible despite attempts to restore the section.⁸⁹ Frescos, ostensibly mixtures of plaster and lime, absorb any pigment applied, or in this case thrown, on it. In some cases, art restorers are able to remove extrinsic paint applied to paintings, and thus return them to their original state. This is not true of frescos. Panicked, the San Francisco school board acquiesced to the students' demands for a contemporary artist response to *Life of Washington*. The students chose Dewey Crumpler, only nineteen at the time, but already a rising local talent. Crumpler's *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, highlights San Francisco's diverse population on three panels. In them he depicts ordinary citizens, heroic leaders, and religious and/or mythological figures representative of San Francisco's Asian, Latinx and Indigenous American / First Peoples, and African / African Diasporic heritages. At the

⁸⁸. Thomas K. Pendergast, "SFUSD Ignored Plans to Save GWHS Murals," San Francisco Richmond Review (San Francisco, CA), February 28, 2020, <https://sfrichmondreview.com/2020/02/28/13434/>.

⁸⁹. Crumpler, interview with the author, April 16, 2020.

dedication for the murals in 1974, Crumpler created a pamphlet identifying the figures in his murals, and provides explanations to their symbols (See Figs. 39, 42, and 44).



Figure 39. Pamphlet key to “The Asian Panel.” Crumpler, “The Asian Panel,” panel ¹/₃, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974, acrylic on canvas affixed to Masonite, approx 6 x 15 ft, GWHS, Administrative/Academic hall juncture, north wall.⁹⁰

⁹⁰. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)* mural series, “The Asian Panel,” Images 6 and 5 [UAN: AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113318 and AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113317]. Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974 [Box 1, Folder 32]. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C.

“The Asian Panel” is situated on the south facing wall, catticorner from the administration offices and adjacent the doorway watched over by the image of George Washington bidding farewell to his mother. In this mural, Crumpler makes two children the primary focus (Fig. 40). Their bodies form a yin-yang symbol, adding both an aesthetic and a symbolic balance to the panel. To the left, a male figure hangs his head. On the ground next to him are stacked World War II (WWII) helmets (Fig. 41). The pamphlet labels this figure “last soldier.” He represents the disasters of war, while the helmets represent the 441 Japanese-American officers who gave their lives during WWII, despite the internment of Japanese-American citizens in the United States. Right of center is Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), composed in paint. He was the first leader of the Kuomintang party (1919-1925), first provisional president of the Republic of China (1912), and an instrumental leader in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. In China he is often referred to as the “Father of the Nation.” Sun points to a young child with a book – a symbol of knowledge and the path to a good future (Fig. 41). A golden dragon, a symbol of prosperity and a protector from evil, weaves its tail through a sea, gilded in red and gold, twisting through the mural towards its center, where with a snap of its tail, the chains at the top of San Francisco’s Pagoda Gate break away. The break represents a break with the past and an entry into the future. Artist Ruth Asawa, at the time a member of the San Francisco school board, is included in the mural.⁹¹

⁹¹. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethic Heritage)* mural series, “The Asian Panel,” images 6 and 5 (UAN: AAA_arnavict_3113318 and AAA_arnaavict_3113317). Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974, box 1, fldr 32. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C.



Figure 40. Details from Panel 1. Crumpler, “The Asian Panel,” panel $\frac{1}{3}$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974.⁹²



Figure 41. Details from Panel 1: On the left side, the “Last Soldier” hangs his head as he sits next to a pile of soldier-less helmets. Artist, Ruth Asawa, mirrors him on the right. Crumpler, “The Asian Panel,” panel $\frac{1}{3}$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974.⁹³

⁹². Roberta Smith, “The Case for Keeping San Francisco’s Disputed George Washington Murals,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/26/arts/design/george-washington-san-francisco-murals.html>. Photo by Dewey Crumpler.

⁹³. Alex Lash, “For Muralist Dewey Crumpler, the Controversial Past is Present,” *The Frisc*, April 19, 2019, <https://thefrisc.com/for-muralist-dewey-crumpler-the-controversial-past-is-present-375ccbdafd9e>. Photo by Amanda Law.

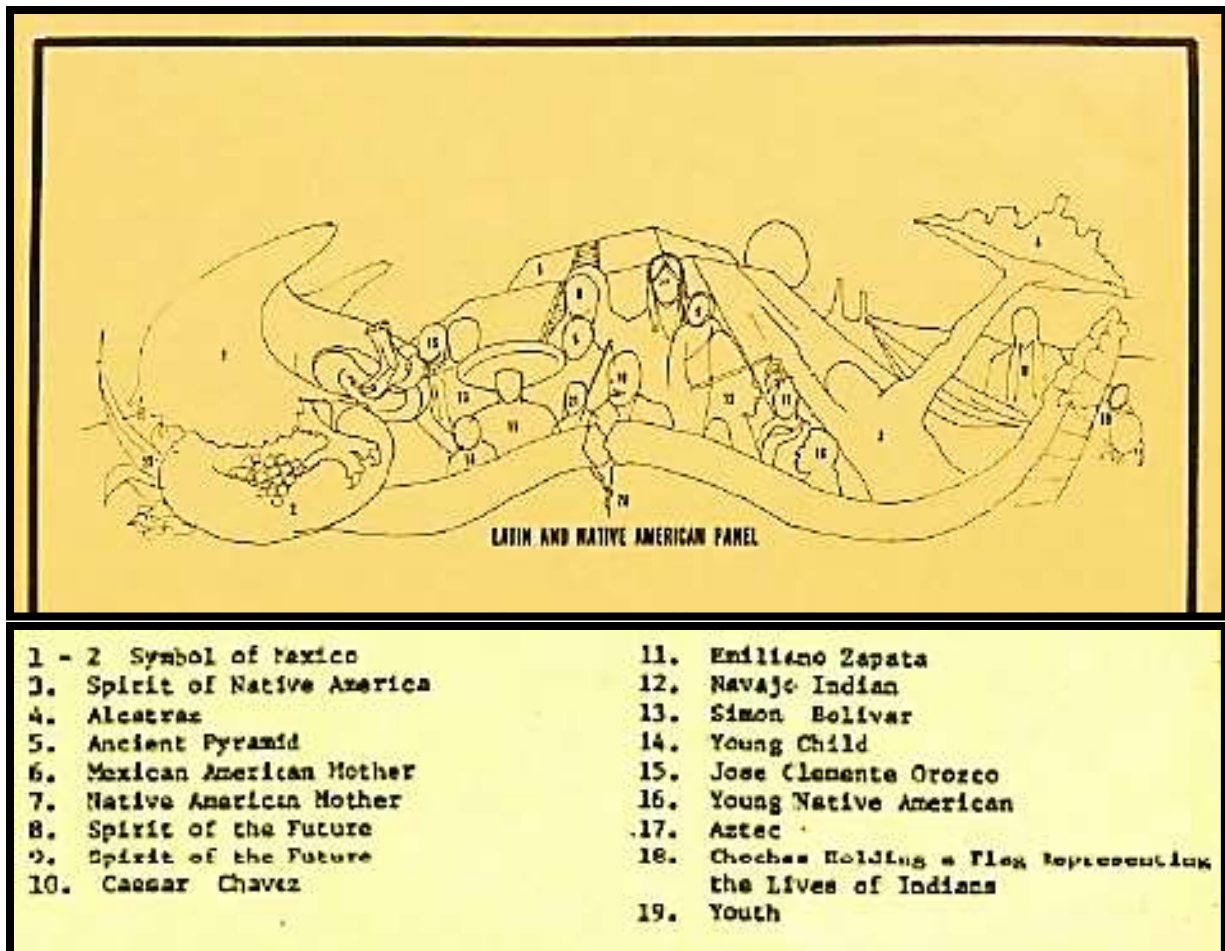


Figure 42. Pamphlet key to “The Latin and Native American Panel.” Crumpler, “The Latin and Native American Panel,” panel ²/₃, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974, acrylic on canvas affixed to Masonite, approx 6 x 15 ft, GWHS, Administrative/Academic hall juncture, south wall.⁹⁴

The “Latin and Native American Panel” faces “The Asian Panel” and sits directly adjacent the administration wing door. From the dragon’s tail, the chain metamorphoses into a serpent battling an eagle (Fig. 43). These two animals are symbolic of Mexico and are included

⁹⁴. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, “The Latin and Native American Panel,” Image 7 [UAN: AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113319]. Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974 [Box 1, Folder 32]. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C.

on Mexico's flag. Caesar Chavez presides over the chain's rupture point. Crumpler included figures seen as leaders amongst Latinx and Indigenous peoples, such as Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), the Venezuelan leader who helped liberate several present-day Central and South American countries from Spain, and Sitting Bull (c.1831-1890), a confederated Lakota leader who inspired resistance against an encroaching United States. In reference to San Franciscan current events, a present-day Indigenous American cradles an image of Turtle Island, commonly known as Alcatraz, in their hands.⁹⁵ From November 1969 to June 1971, eighty-nine Indigenous Americans and their supporters occupied the island in an attempt at repatriation. Formerly the island belonged to the Lakota, so with the shuttering of Alcatraz prison in 1963, an occupy movement began. This movement shed light on Indigenous American rights, issues, and activism.



Figure 43. Details from Panel 2: An eagle clenches a serpent in its beak, and a spirit, representing Indigenous peoples of America, holds Turtle Island – today commonly known as Alcatraz – aloft

⁹⁵. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethic Heritage)* mural series, “The Latin and Native American Panel,” image 7 (UAN: AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113319). Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974, box 1, folder 32. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C., EDAN-URL: ead_component:sova-aaa-arnavict-ref40, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=AAA.arnavict_ref40.

in the right corner. Crumpler, “The Latin and Native American Panel,” panel $2/3$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974.⁹⁶

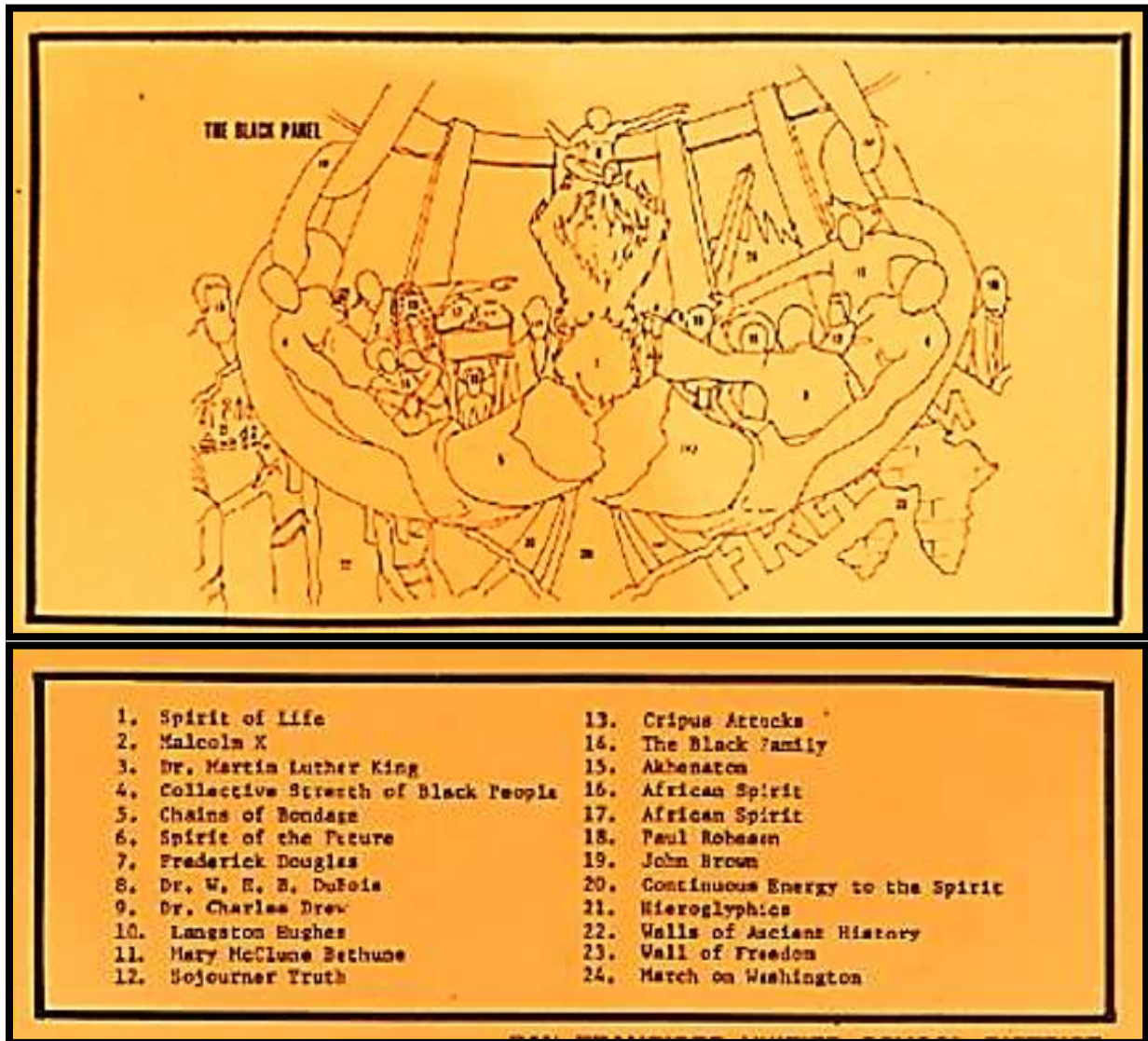


Figure 44. Pamphlet key to “The Black Panel.” Crumpler, “The Black Panel,” panel $3/3$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974, acrylic on canvas affixed to Masonite, approx 12 x 16 ft, GWHS, Administrative/Academic hall juncture, west wall.⁹⁷

⁹⁶. Smith, “The Case for Keeping San Francisco’s Disputed George Washington Murals,” July 26, 2019. Photo by Dewey Crumpler.

⁹⁷. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, “The Black Panel,” Image 4 [UAN: AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113316]. Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968,



Figure 45. Details from Panel 3: The Spirit of Life, engulfed in flames, breaks the Chains of Bondage, while holding the Spirit of the Future in its upheld hands. Crumpler, “The Black Panel,” panel $\frac{3}{3}$, *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, 1974.⁹⁸

Crumpler’s final panel, “The Black Panel,” abuts the academic wing wall when heading west. It serves as a visual horizon point past the administration offices. In the center, a fiery woman represents the Spirit of Life (Fig. 45). To the left, Malcolm X stands next to an Egyptian pharaoh. At the right, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. waves his arm out as though leading a congregation. The Spirit of Life holds aloft the youthful Spirit of the Future. In all three mural panels, Crumpler repeats themes of nature, and represents Future as a child. In his pamphlet, Crumpler writes that “where the chain is broken the spirit of life evolves holding in her hands the

c. 1974 [Box 1, Folder 32]. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁸. Smith, “The Case for Keeping San Francisco’s Disputed George Washington Murals,” July 26, 2019. Photo by Dewey Crumpler.

future which is the result of years and years of struggle. The flaming Black woman illustrates the eternal light of our race. ... The names at the bottom of the woman are ones that continue to feed the flame.”⁹⁹ These names are visible in a photo taken at the mural dedication ceremony in 1974.¹⁰⁰ Crumpler painted fictively carved names: “Angela” (Davis), “Bradley” (possibly CORE chairman Bill Bradley), and “Stokely” (Carmichael). These are the Black leaders he names as those who will carry the mantle hope into the future and continue the fight against injustice (Fig. 47).

⁹⁹. Explanatory handout for *Untitled (Multi-Ethic Heritage)* mural series, “The Black Panel,” image 4 (UAN: AAA-AAA_arnavict_3113316). Correspondence related to the murals at GWHS, 1968, c. 1974, box 1, folder 32. Series 2: Correspondence, c. 1923-2008. Arnautoff papers, c. 1920-2017, bulk 1920-1953. AAA, SI, Washington, D.C. EDAN-URL: [ead_component:sova-aaa-arnavict-ref40, https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=AAA.arnavict_ref40.](https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=AAA.arnavict_ref40)

¹⁰⁰. Therese Poletti, “Defending Victor Arnautoff’s WPA-era Murals at George Washington High School,” *Timothy Pflueger Blog*, April 23, 2019, <https://blog.timothypflueger.com/>.



Figure 46. Artist, Dewey Crumpler, and his wife, stand in front of “The Black Panel.” Photo taken at the 1974 dedication of *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹. Therese Poletti, “Defending Victor Arnautoff’s WPA-era Murals at George Washington High School,” *Timothy Pflueger Blog*, April 23, 2019, <https://blog.timothypflueger.com/2019/04/23/defending-victor-arnautoffs-wpa-era-murals-at-george-washington-high-school/>. Photo taken by an unknown individual; provided courtesy of the GWHS Alumni Association.



Figure 47. Enlarged detail from Fig. 46: In “The Black Panel,” there are three first names “chiseled” below the breaking chain — ‘Angela’ (Davis), ‘Bradley’ (possibly CORE chairman Bill Bradley), and ‘Stokely’ (Carmichael).

Crumpler affixes historical luminaries, courageous leaders of color, and religious and mythological figures within his panels. Included among the better known names, he paints untitled laborers, students, and elderly people of color. He amplifies the importance of representation – not just well known figures marked by celebrity. By his inclusion of identifiable figures from different time periods and geographic regions, Crumpler exposes oppression to be a persistent, generational issue. Though the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States, was ratified on December 6th, 1865, modern forms of enslavement and racist practices continue today.¹⁰² These micro- and macro-aggressions include exclusionary practices and laws, embedded white, patriarchal social norms and soft language, racist imagery, demeaned

¹⁰². Joint Resolution proposing the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, January 31, 1865, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-2011, General Records of the U.S. Government, RG 11, ID 1408764, National Archives, Washington, D.C., last updated on February 8, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment>.

and demeaning references, residential redlining, intimidation, mis- and non-representation, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Crumpler implicates these figures as participants in an ongoing struggle. His images elevate people of color to a totemic level, hoping to inspire future generations. In all three panels the chains are painted as broken yet present. Thus, he simultaneously celebrates the successes achieved by those he depicted, while reminding of the need for continued vigilance. The physical chains in Crumpler's brilliant red and yellow hued murals reference the metal bindings used to enslave others, but they also represent systemic attacks upon those who do not fit the white, often male, Western European ideology and identity.

Crumpler's *Multi-Ethnic Heritage* successfully reveals the hidden figures and parallel story arcs absent in the *Life of Washington* murals. His retention and collaborative use of Arnautoff's murals highlights the importance of a catalyst in the creation of a response. Without the catalyst, the response falls flat, like a delayed declaration during a quiet moment in a meeting. The persistent chains leave open the possibility of a future response to the Arnautoff-Crumpler murals. In the meantime, Crumpler's warm-toned and sinuously painted impactful leaders, and former broken chains, function as talismanic hope for continued victories in the fight for freedom. Without hope the strength to fight withers. Hope is the comfort of something you may never see, yet may exist one day in the future if individuals persevere in the present. Without knowledge of past atrocities, hope loses purpose. Lack of accurate historical record creates a hollow feeling which invades present subjectivity. There is an awareness of this inequality, despite nationalist propaganda's attempts to insert false narratives into historical memory. However, without accurate historical knowledge from trusted sources, individuals lack the data necessary to construct a foundation that explains current lived conditions.

Professor and activist, Dr. Angela Davis, echoes this when she says “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”¹⁰³ The words “all the time,” are key to understanding the import of this declaration and fits into what Davis calls the “treadmill of reform.” To serve as a hypothetical example, say incidences of police violence led to protests and calls for reform. Typically, a committee is formed to discuss institutional practices and future measures. Years pass, and police violence is again an issue, and again a committee is formed to discuss reforms. This is the presentation of events the public sees. However, behind the scenes police budgets increase, and in both small towns and large cities police departments are gifted military surplus vehicles and tactical gear, while the few implemented reforms and/or adopted practices fail to create significant, effective change.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³. Angela Davis, “Angela Davis at SIUC on Feb. 13, 2014,” February 13, 2014, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, uploaded to YouTube.com by James Anderson on February 16, 2014, MP4, 56:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s8QCucFADc>.

¹⁰⁴. Michael Leo Owens, Tom Clark, and Adam Glynn, “Where Do Police Departments Get their Military-style Gear? Here’s What we Don’t Know,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), July 20, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/20/where-do-police-departments-get-their-military-style-gear-heres-what-we-dont-know/>; 1033 Program FAQs, DLA Disposition Services, Defense Logistics Agency, United States Department of Defense, <https://www.dla.mil/DispositionServices/Offers/Reutilization/LawEnforcement/ProgramFAQs.aspx>; Alexander Post, “Mayor Breed is Right: It’s Time to Defund Police and Reinvest in Public Safety,” *The San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), June 22, 2020, <https://www.sfexaminer.com/opinion/mayor-breed-is-right-its-time-to-defund-police-and-reinvest-in-public-safety/>. In 2016, the Dept. of Justice issued 272 reforms to the San Francisco Police Department, who had a budget of \$560 million. Four years later, the completion rate was 15% – approx 41 reforms, or about 10 a year. However, the budget increased to over \$700 million, an increase of approx 25%.

CHAPTER 5

CINEMATIC VIEWING – AN INTERLUDE

Power lives in the mural's status as a hybrid artistic medium – painting combined with architecture – creating a mode of embodied immersion. The mural is essentially a walking film. By visually entering its chapters, the viewer experiences something akin to virtual reality. This embodied immersion can be seen in the Sistine Chapel: dull echoes, mumbled words, and gingerly steps create background music; the cool air swells within the ears and encases the viewer; a whiff of melted wax mixed with smoke and ozone tingles the nostrils; and shadows play across the expanse, briefly lighting up Adams and Eves, and next shrouding them in darkness. These sensations accompany the viewer as they move, slowly through a space, their necks craning upward, taking in details, as they slowly circumnavigate the rectangular room.

This circular viewing mimics the design of the cyclorama. The cyclorama was an amusement popular in 19th and early 20th century. A panoramic image displayed on the inside of a cylindrical building, transporting visitors to far-away lands and past events. In one version, the viewer stands at the center of the cylinder, surrounded by a 360° image of a particular destination. In another version, the visitor sits on a bench along the wall's perimeter. In front of each bench a frame displays a slide which shows one part of a panoramic vista, or one chapter in a tale. When a bell sounds, the images move one space, repeating until the image circumscribes the room, then repeats the cycle ad nauseum. In a sense the viewer takes in the image as if panning their eyes across a vista. In effect, the surrounding images transport the viewer to the locale depicted. The original cycloramas, popularized in the late 19th century, displayed painted images, and at time affixed dioramas in front of the painted backdrops. This increased the sense

of space and created a depth akin to a real-life view. Like early motion pictures, some cycloramas included music and even narration.

The mural functions in much the same way. The audience travels from one screen (panel) to the next. In some scenes the action is lively and the story heavy with events – like “The American Revolution” panel. In others, the action is slowed with only one event, for example when “Washington Tells his Mother Farewell.” This is a more tender, emotional scene than the heart pounding anticipation in “The American Revolution.” At the close of Arnautoff’s epic Washington biopic, Crumpler submits a sequel – with a bit of a rewrite. He tells the tales of people of color, who achieved great things and inspired their communities. Yes, at times some of these figures were enslaved (ex. Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth in “The Black Panel”), and some were brutally murdered (ex. Emiliano Zapata and Sitting Bull in the “Latin and Native American Panel”), yet the fame of their triumphs far surpassed that of their deaths. When the Black Student Union spoke against all the frescos *except* those depicting violent acts against and enslavement of peoples of color, it was not because they enjoyed looking at these violent and negative portrayals. Despite the unpleasant images, they recognized in them an accuracy that their public education failed to include in their syllabi. What they disapproved was the deification of the first president, the central theme of the school that bears his name. What they wanted was representation, honesty, and respect.

This often unknown piece of information – a truth unfamiliar both to many white students and students of color at the time, was startling to Crumpler upon his first viewing of the murals. In discussion, he recalled his own cognitive dissonance – the uncomfortable feeling of

unbalance.¹⁰⁵ In school, his teachers never discussed Washington owning slaves, but did assert that Washington said, “all men were created equal.” For Crumpler, the sudden awareness of these two incongruous concepts broadcast across 1,600 square feet of wall, urged him to question the version of history he was fed by the educational establishment up to this moment. For some, the daily passing of the frescoes perhaps slackened their dissonant resonance. Like driving in a car along a well-known route, the frescoes became habitual scenery, no longer piquing interest.

¹⁰⁵. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.

CHAPTER 6

ARNAUTOFF AND THE MURAL



Figure 48. Map of the Outer Richmond district, San Francisco, CA. Arrows and labels indicate the location of GWHS. Addition of street, school, park, and city names, indicator arrows, and respective label colors by the author.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶. “History of the Richmond District,” *Richmond District Blog* (blog), 2008, <https://richmondsfblog.com/images/richmondmap.png>. © 2021 Richmond District Blog. All rights reserved. Addition of street, school, park, and city names, indicator arrows, and respective label colors by the author.

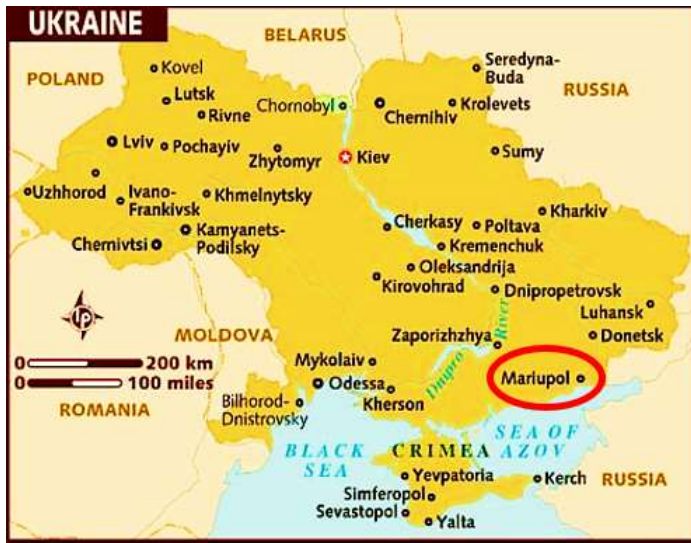


Figure 49. Map of Ukraine (2020 borders). Mariupol, the city of Arnautoff's birth, is circled in red. Addition of red oval by the author.¹⁰⁷

Victor Mikhail Arnautoff was born in Mariupol, a city in south-eastern Ukraine, in 1896. At the time, it was part of Tsarist Russia. A small town when Arnautoff first lived there, by his retirement, this village, on the north coast of the Sea of Azov, was a large industrial city. Arnautoff's youth was a markedly turbulent time for the region. From an early age, Arnautoff wanted to attend art school; however, on June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne, and his wife – Sophie, were assassinated, kicking off the events of World War I (WWI). Arnautoff recalled years later in his autobiography, “the time of youth ended early, both for me and for many secondary school students in Mariupol. War broke out in

¹⁰⁷. *Lonely Planet*, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/europe/ukraine/>. © 2020. All Rights Reserved. Addition of red oval by the author.

1914, while I was on vacation.”¹⁰⁸ Encouraged to volunteer, Arnautoff and his classmates were rushed through their senior year at their local gymnasiums and placed in accelerated military training programs.

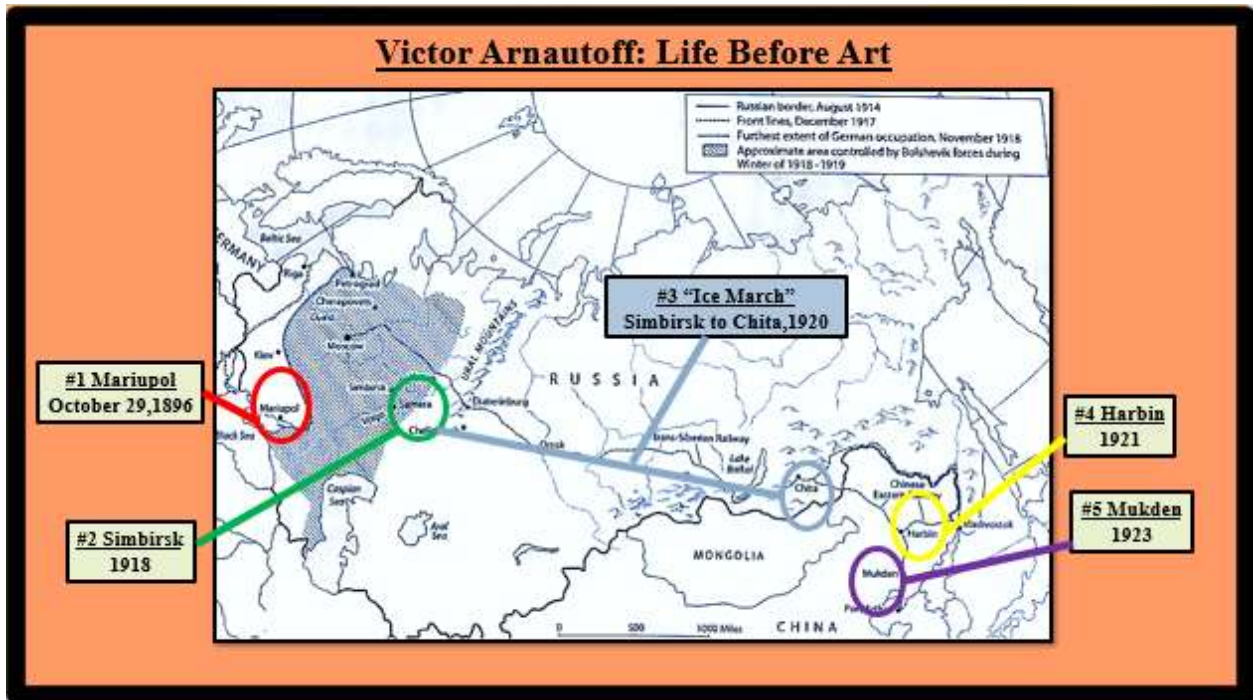


Figure 50. Map marked with Arnautoff’s movements across Russia and into China. #1 Mariupol: Arnautoff was born in this Ukrainian city on October 29, 1896. At the time, Ukraine belonged to Tsarist Russia; #2 Simbirsk: In 1918, Arnautoff began his military education; #3 “Ice March”: In 1920, changed political conditions in Ukraine meant Arnautoff was unable to return home. He traveled east, to China — a difficult journey, attempted by many, that became known as the “Ice March;” #4 Harbin: In 1921, Arnautoff reached Harbin — at that time located on the border of Russia and China; #5 Mukden: In 1923, Arnautoff relocated to Mukden, China, where he trained horses for the regional commander, married his wife, Lydia, and started a family. Addition of ovals, lines, colors, and labels by the author.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸. V. M. Arnautoff, with Leonid Sanin, *A Life Renewed: An Autobiographical Sketch*, 2nd ed., trans. Lloyd Kramer (1990), (Donetsk: Izdatel’sstva Donbas, 1972): 1.

¹⁰⁹. Robert Cherney, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 23. Addition of ovals, lines, colors, and labels by the author.

Arnautoff, who came from an intellectual family, was challenged with balancing the politically tenuous space between worker-class and nobility. After completing nine months of intensive training at the Yelizavetgrad Cavalry school, Arnautoff was appointed the rank of junior officer in the First Squadron of the Fifth Uhlan Lithuanian Regiment. Although he performed well during training and proved himself quite capable in battle, it was his education and family stature which secured his higher-ranked position.¹¹⁰ The unsteady political and social negotiations his family experienced in Mariupol followed Arnautoff in his military career. As chaotic events transpired in Russia, and throughout Europe, this sense of not-belonging made it difficult for the young soldier to know what was true. News from the outside came in spurts to the army, who remained on the move from the constant pursuit of German troops. Information provided by both upper-level officers and Bolshevik-leaning infantrymen was not much better, as it reeked of half-truths and opinions. “My position in the regiment was difficult: an intellectual, but not of the gentry, separated from the soldiers by rank, and yet not an officer of the nobility.”¹¹¹ Once, while observing enemy movements from an observation point, a Bolshevik infantryman encouraged Arnautoff to read the paper *Pravda*. Seeing as this word translates to ‘truth,’ Arnautoff asked, “but does it print [the truth]?”¹¹² This early display of suspicion, repeats in Arnautoff’s artwork and political activities throughout his life. Years later,

¹¹⁰. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 8-9. In his autobiography, Arnautoff says that “once during an operation [he] had to assume command of a squadron that had become encircled.” For this he was “awarded the St. George Cross for skillful military action.”

¹¹¹. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 6.

¹¹². Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 5-6.

this same proclivity towards suspicious scrutiny, provoked his research on the life of George Washington before constructing his mural series.¹¹³



Figure 51. Diego Rivera (1886-1957), “Cruzando la Barranca” / “Crossing the Ravine,” 1929-31, fresco, *Historia de Morelos, Conquista y Revolución/History of Morelos, Conquest and Revolution* mural series, Museo de Cuauhnáhuac, Cuernavaca, México.¹¹⁴

Arnautoff received training in fresco, primarily from the artist Diego Rivera while working with him on the Palacio des Cortes (Palace of Cortez), gave Arnautoff ample opportunity to take in Rivera’s social philosophy.¹¹⁵ Mexican muralism, in comparison to the murals of many U.S artists, embeds layered narratives and ideologies beneath layers of fictive

¹¹³. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 35.

¹¹⁴. Evgeny Zhivago, HP Scanjet G4010, color photograph, part of the album *Diego Rivera (1886-1957)*, Flickr, November 25, 2014, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/20302464@N07/with/15878117202/>. © All Rights Reserved.

¹¹⁵. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 17-30.

architecture and figurative scenes. Though at first Arnautoff disagreed with Rivera – that what “was true for Mexico could ... serve as a recipe for other national schools” – he later saw sense in this argument. He realized that murals place “art in the service of the people.” He said “One can understand why they turned to large-scale painting – you can’t hide it in a private collection. As a picture it can be addressed to the masses and speak in a language they understand.”¹¹⁶ Similar visual relay of messages and instruction has a long tradition, as seen in Romanesque church tympanums and on the preserved walls of Pompeii. Particularly for the illiterate, visual communication was integral to society’s cultivation of idiom and community indoctrination.

This exposure to Mexican muralism, is evident in Arnautoff’s designs and sketches. His murals are not typically as densely packed with imagery as Rivera’s, however the consideration of architecture and movement is quite apparent, as well as the ever-important addition of subtext. American history textbook companies minimize less pleasant historical events and details, while allowing other nuggets of history to die on the cutting room floor. Often public school textbook selection and approval is left to the states, or local community committees. Research shows these committees pick textbooks they feel most represent their communities’ aspired ideals and preferred dinner conversation.¹¹⁷ In fact, routinely respondents in national polls agree that “books

¹¹⁶. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 21.

¹¹⁷. Loewen, *Lies*, 307-8. Loewen provides insight into the textbook selection and adoption process. States without textbook selection boards, must form committees at the local level:

States without such boards are not freer of censorship, for their screening usually takes place on the local level, where concern about giving offense can be even more immediate.” ... “[S]tates without boards have less influence on publishers, who orient their best efforts toward the large states with adoption boards. California and Texas, in

that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries.”¹¹⁸ The fact that George Washington owned enslaved Africans was not commonly taught information until the last few decades of the 20th century. In Howard Zinn’s, *A People’s History of the United States*, he references the 1932 edition of a best-selling history textbook written by two liberal northern historians. In this edition, the historians present “slavery as perhaps [a] ‘necessary transition to civilization’.”¹¹⁹ Also of little reportage during the 1930s and 1940s, were the casualties of westward expansion, committed by mostly White settlers to Indigenous peoples, and sanctioned by Washington’s administration.¹²⁰ To put a base numerical face to the effects of westward

particular, directly affect publishers and textbooks because they are large markets with statewide adoption and active lobbying groups. Schools and districts in nonadoption states must choose among books designed for the larger markets.

¹¹⁸. “Gallup Poll (October 1987),” *Advocate* (Stamford, CT, December 26, 1987), I, quoted in Loewen, *Lies*, 332, 426N93.

¹¹⁹. Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*, 22nd Ed. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2015): 172.

¹²⁰. Nell Irvin Painter, “Opinion: Why ‘White Should be Capitalized, Too,” *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/22/why-white-should-be-capitalized/>; National Association of Black Journalists, s.v. “NABJ Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers,” NABJ Style Guide, June 2020, <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>. The author of *The History of White People* (2010), and the Edwards Professor of American History, Emerita at Princeton, Nell Irvin Painter, on the subject of capitalizing colors as racial identifier says, “white Americans have had the choice of being something vague, something unraced and separate from race. A capitalized ‘White’ challenges that freedom, by unmasking ‘Whiteness’ as an American racial identity as historically important as ‘Blackness’ – which it certainly is.” She articulates her position by stating, “we should capitalize ‘White’ to situate ‘Whiteness’ within the American ideology of race, within which ‘Black,’ but not ‘White,’ has been hypervisible as a group identity. Capitalizing all our races – ‘Black,’ ‘Brown’ and ‘White’ – simply makes this ideology visible for all.” She was assisted in her decision, by that made by the National Association of Black Journalists, who in June of 2020 came to the same conclusions.

expansion, “in 1820, 120,000 [Indigenous Americans] lived east of the Mississippi. By 1844, fewer than 30,000 were left.” The process of “Indian Removal, as it has been politely called, cleared land for white occupancy between the Appalachians and the Mississippi ... The cost in human life cannot accurately be measured, in suffering not even roughly measured. Most of the history books given to children pass quickly over [this part of U.S. history].”¹²¹ In light of this information, the images Arnautoff chose for his frescos are purposeful acts of rebellion – protest against the standardized, institutionally sanctioned and sanitized, United States deification of its first president. While he unequivocally stated his admiration for general – later president – Washington’s reported defense of freedom, he is equally vehement in his memoir concerning his distaste for abuse of power. Arnautoff possessed a studied approach in his opinion formation, which comes across in his writings. His effusive words are unapologetic; he ticks through his cognitive gears, checking off the stages in his political ideology. In his revelation, he neither hides, nor dismisses, his staggered development. There is a quizzical skepticism asserted in the face of bold assertions, evidenced in his responses and retorts to both Bolshevik supporters and noble-born generals serving in the Russian army, and, later, in hour-long debates with the formidable and charismatic Rivera. Arnautoff was not one to quickly cast aspersions, but his commitment to an internal sense of right and wrong shows through in his artistic choices within *Life of Washington*. It is reiterated in the subjects he focused on throughout his artistic career.

Any delusion Arnautoff had about military life, was quickly dashed when he reached the front. “I saw all I needed to of the stupid tyranny of officers, the ineptitude of command, the

¹²¹. Zinn, *A People’s History*, 125.

mud, and the deprivation.”¹²² In the midst of WWI, Russia came apart at the seams. Food scarcity led to the February Revolution riots of 1917 in Petrograd.¹²³ On March 8, 1917, the Russian Revolution officially began when the provisional government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, in what is known as the October Revolution. Seven days later, Tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918) formally resigned. The Brest-Litovsk peace agreement, signed on March 3, 1918, had officially concluded Russia’s participation in WWI, and with it, Arnautoff’s tenor as an officer in the Uhlan Lithuanian Regiment.¹²⁴

After the Russian Revolution, Arnautoff marched his way across 2000 kilometers of icy Siberia, finally reaching China. In Mukden (present-day Shenyang), he was employed by Marshal Zhang Zoulin, one of several regional commanders who ruled China’s northeastern provinces, and who vied with other regional commanders for power from 1916 to 1928.¹²⁵ Arnautoff’s military training in the calvary made him a suitable candidate to train Marshall Zhang’s horses. In 1923, Arnautoff met Lydia Blonskii. That same year they were engaged and

¹²². Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 4.

¹²³. “Russian Revolution: Russian History [1917],” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated by Michael Ray on November 14, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution>. This date is based on the Julian calendar. Russia implemented the Gregorian calendar, a papal revision of the former Julian dating system, on February 14th, 1918. The Soviets took control of Russia, in what is known as the October Revolution of 1917, and later adopted the Gregorian calendar by dropping the Julian dates of the 1st thru the 13th of February of 1918. Thus, what was the October 25th, was now November 7th in the Gregorian calendar. Likewise, the February Revolution of 1917 became the March Revolution of 1917 in the Gregorian dating system.

¹²⁴. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 4-9.

¹²⁵. Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, 36-7.

married.¹²⁶ Son number one, Mikhail, was born in the summer of 1924, with son number two, Vasily, following close behind in the fall of 1925.¹²⁷ Despite seeming domestic success, his heart remained set on an artist's life. A few days after the birth of Vasily, Arnautoff, with financial help from his father-in-law, left for San Francisco, where he attended the California School of Fine Arts (CSFA).

While attending CFSA [later renamed the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) in 1907], Arnautoff first focused primarily on sculpture.¹²⁸ However, in 1927 he took a mural class with artist Ray Boynton, who at the time was experimenting with the *buon fresco* technique and it changed his direction entirely. In buon fresco, the artist applies pigment to wet plaster. This process allows for full pigment absorption into the plastered wall. Typically, the artist transfers a design to the wall in sections. The sections are the amount of wall the artist thinks they can complete painting before the plaster dries. When dry, the pigment is permanently fused with the plaster. If the artist is unable to completely finish a chosen section, or if he makes an error, the only way to rectify the situation is to chip the dried plaster off the wall, apply a new layer of wet plaster, and begin again. This technique requires meticulous planning. A popular artistic practice

¹²⁶. Arnautoff, w/Sanin, *A Life Renewed*, 13. In his autobiography, Arnautoff spells his wife's surname "Blonskii." However, in many U.S. publications, when not listed as Lydia Arnautoff, her surname is spelled "Blonsky." A brief online spelling of this name in the Ukraine reveals various slight alterations, however the common spelling appears to end in either one 'i' or two. The author chooses to honor the spelling used by Arnautoff in his autobiography, rather than perpetuate the use of a possibly thrust-upon Anglicized spelling, a common occurrence in the United States, as the author is aware from previous, unrelated, genealogical research.

¹²⁷. Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, 38-9.

¹²⁸. "History," San Francisco Art Institute, accessed March 30, 2022, <https://sfai.edu/about-sfai/sfai-history>. © Copyright SFAI 2022.

during the Roman era and early Renaissance, buon fresco saw a resurgence during the Mexican Revolution and Great Depression in the United States. Brilliant colors and layered details splash across large, smooth walls. It is difficult to master – even proving troublesome for Renaissance master, Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci (1452-1519).¹²⁹ In a 1935 *Chronicle* newspaper interview, Arnautoff explained, “When I was a student I intended to become a sculptor, but when I touched wet plaster I somehow lost interest in sculpture. I like the big scale of fresco and the technical exactness of the medium.”¹³⁰



Figure 52. Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci (1452-1519), *Ultima cena / The Last Supper*, 1498 (completion date), fresco (with tempera paints added to oils, calcium carbonate, magnesium, and distemper, and lead white), approx 15 x 29 ft, commissioned by Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, in 1495, Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy. Both images are in the Public Domain [PD-Art (PD-old-100)]. Left image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_Vinci_-_Ultima_cena_-_ca_1495.jpg; right image (detail): [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo,_ultima_cena_\(restored\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo,_ultima_cena_(restored)_02.jpg).

¹²⁹. Ross King, *Leonardo and the Last Supper* (New York: Walker & Company): 103, 271. Fresco was an area less practiced by da Vinci. Instead, he used non-traditional materials, so that he might work at a slower pace. As a primer, he used lead white, which turns a brownish color with oxidization. That combined with the moist conditions in the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, in Milan, Italy, resulted in deterioration of the mural within twenty years.

¹³⁰. “San Francisco Artists,” *Chronicle* (September 1, 1935: D3), quoted in Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, 55-56; 248n54.

By the time he graduated, Lydia and his children had joined him from China. In the spring of 1929, Arnautoff's and Lydia's applications for U.S. citizenship had failed to materialize and his visa was expiring; the only way to become permanent residents was to leave the United States and reapply for entry. Fresco and large-scale murals were only just beginning in California; the place for serious mural instruction was Mexico.¹³¹ One of his professors, Ralph Stackpole, encouraged him to search out Diego Rivera in Mexico. Before World War I, Stackpole and Rivera studied together in Paris, and afterwards remained in contact. For the next couple years, Arnautoff, family in tow, worked as Rivera's assistant. He even oversaw projects while Rivera painted murals in the United States.

¹³¹. Cherny, *Victor Arnautoff and the Politics of Art*, 58.

CHAPTER 7

CRUMPLER AND THE RESPONSE



Figure 53. A young Dewey Crumpler stands with a painting, intended as a mock-up for a potential mural. He painted this preliminary design while attending Balboa High School, in San Francisco (roughly 1966-68).¹³²

Almost every Sunday – from age seven to sixteen – Dewey and his godfather went to Golden Gate Park. While his godfather read the paper and relaxed on a park bench, Crumpler visually and spiritually devoured paintings and sculptures at the de Young museum located within the park. He recalled that only one person in the entire museum looked like him (meaning

¹³². Jenkins Johnson Gallery, “Conversations on Culture Featuring Dewey Crumpler,” episode ⁶/25, *Conversations on Culture* playlist, screenshot, May 15, 2020 (uploaded to YouTube.com on May 19th, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yBNusR28wk&list=PLB3cIvy5VkcwUqwPb3Djt68JF0cMmbaAB&index=2>.

a Black man). This man, the gift store clerk, took an interest in the young Crumpler, and introduced him to the arts of Africa pictured in the museum catalogs and books. In his February interview with the author, Crumpler shared how important these adults were in his early life. They were not related by blood, but his godfather and the store clerk nurtured his artistic passion as though he was. Crumpler loved art from an early age, but as he grew up any misconception he had about the current place for a Black man in the art world fell away. He began to question if he wanted to join a world where people who looked like him were absent. Crumpler states that he became conscious of the fact that this “palace” he spent every waking moment in had “nothing to do with [him].”¹³³ While he still loved art, he felt his desire for this world dim. In 1966, Crumpler discovered Marcus Books, the oldest African American bookseller in the country, which opened at the Leavenworth Street print shop in 1960. It took its name from Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), who was a Jamaican Black activist who advocated for Black representation in America during his brief tenure in the United States (1916 to 1927).¹³⁴ Crumpler credits Marcus Bookstore for connecting him with artistic and creative people of color in San Francisco. These connections rekindled his desire for art.

A few years later he was invited to attend Balboa High – part of a San Francisco United School District (SFUSD) pilot project for an arts-focused educational tract. Crumpler became interested in murals during his tenure here. While still in high school, he painted a large

¹³³. Crumpler, interview with the author, April 16, 2020.

¹³⁴. Aria Danaparamita, “Marcus Books: Oldest African-American Bookstore Fights to Stay Open,” *National Trust for Historic Preservation* (Washington, D.C.), August 12, 2013, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/marcus-books-oldest-african-american-bookstore-fights-to-stay-open#.X3QMC2hKjIV>.

concept painting for a mural, that happened to catch the eye of legendary singer-songwriter, and Motown vice president, Smokey Robinson. Though still in high school, Crumpler began to gain a level of notoriety in the Bay Area from awards won at city festivals. He also received honorary citations in 1967 from both San Francisco's mayor and the California State Assembly, for meritorious performance in the arts. At the time, Melvin Belli (1907-1996), lawyer to the rich and infamous, had a talk show and he invited Crumpler talk about the honors and show a few recent examples of his work.¹³⁵ As Crumpler answered the interviewer's questions, Robinson, also on the line-up, sat in the show's green room watching. After the program he asked to buy the concept piece (Fig. 53). Crumpler lets out a long-laugh and then a sigh as he relates the story. "I told him he couldn't afford it!" This, of course tickled the rich and famous Robinson, who told him to stop by his hotel later that evening and he would have his money. When Crumpler arrived at the hotel, Robinson took out a thick roll of cash and began throwing bills down on the bed. Crumpler said that at the time it was more money than he ever imagined.¹³⁶

¹³⁵. "Melvin Belli,"* *Internet Movie Data Base* (IMDB.com), talk show, TV series, starring Melvin Mouron Belli (1907-1996), release date January 26, 1966, USA, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9025330/>. [*Episodes not listed.]

¹³⁶. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.



Figure 54. This painting, chosen for a 1970 *Time Magazine* cover, depicts minister, and civil rights activist, Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr. (1941-). Jacob A. Lawrence (1917-2000), *Untitled*, 1970, opaque paint on paperboard, 28 x 22 in (71.12 x 55.88 cm), National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of *Time Magazine*, NPG.78.TC466. © The Jacob & Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.¹³⁷

¹³⁷. The image is currently in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, at the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C. (NPG.78.TC466). https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.78.TC466#:~:text=In%201970%20Time%20magazine%20commissioned,African%20American%20artist%20was%20appropriate. © The Jacob & Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York). Dewey Crumpler originally saw the image on the cover of *Time Magazine* (“Special Issue: Black America 1970,” *Time Magazine* vol 95, no. 14 (April 6, 1970): cover, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601700406,00.html>).



Figure 55. “The Wall of Respect,” as it appeared in this 1967 by Robert Abbott “Bobby” Sengstacke (1943-2017). This evolving mural, with many contributing artists, was formerly located in the Southside of Chicago, IL.¹³⁸

Crumpler used the money to travel the United States and look at various examples of mural making. At this point his father worked for an airline, so tickets were inexpensive. After reading about *The Wall of Respect* in *Time Magazine*, he went to Chicago to see it in person (see Fig. 54 and 55).¹³⁹ Black members of the artist group AfriCOBRA (The African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) created this multi-image mural. This South Side Chicago artistic collective

¹³⁸. Robert Abbott “Bobby” Sengstacke (1943-2017), “Wall of Respect,” 1967, color photograph, image no. 7173194, University of Chicago Collections: Robert Sengstacke Photography Archive, The University of Chicago Visual Resources Center, Chicago, IL, https://luna.lib.uchicago.edu/luna/servlet/detail/uofclibmgr2~5~5~122486~1234018:Wall-of-Respect%3Fsort%3Dcreator%252Cculture%252Cdate%252Cstyle_or_period?qvq=w4s:/what%2FAfrican%2BAmerican%2Bmural%2Bpainting%2Band%2Bdecoration;q:wall%20of%20respect;sort:creator%2Cculture%2Cdate%2Cstyle_or_period;lc:uofclibmgr2~5~5&mi=41&trs=97. © Robert A. Sengstacke.

¹³⁹. “Special Issue: Black America 1970,” *Time Magazine* 95 no. 14 (April 6, 1970), cover, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601700406,00.html>.

developed an aesthetic philosophy based on “an approach to image making which would reflect, and project, the moods, attitudes, and sensibilities of African Americans, independent of the technical and aesthetic structures of Euro-centric modalities.”¹⁴⁰ While there he met AfriCOBRA member, Napoleon Jones-Henderson (1940-present). On another trip, he visited the *Amistad Murals*, at Talladega College, in Alabama (see Appendix A, Image A3), but it was the *Detroit Industry* murals by Diego Rivera, at The Detroit Institute of Arts, which really blew him away. The institute atrium consists of 27 frescoed panels depicting the Ford Motor Company (see Fig. 56). The murals focus on the binaries – life/death, spiritual/physical, nature/technology – that Rivera saw within humans and society. Crumpler pictorializes this combination of tangible and metaphorical representation his *Multi-Ethnic Heritage*. Like Rivera, Crumpler uses bold colors and layers his figures in a manner suggesting depth and movement. Like Arnautoff, Crumpler is

¹⁴⁰. “AFRICOBRA: Philosophy,” *Logan Center Exhibitions Archives: AFRICOBRA in Chicago Exhibition (May 10 – September 29, 2013)*, Logan Center, University of Chicago, IL, accessed May 13, 2020, <https://arts.uchicago.edu/logan-center/logan-center-exhibitions/archive/africobra-philosophy>. First there was OBAC (Organization of Black American Culture), established in 1967. To a certain extent, this group continued as a separate organization into the 1990s. OBAC established a presence in the south-side of Chicago through their celebration of Black culture and individuals with their combined, yet individuated, murals, which formed the *Wall of Respect*. Some of OBAC’s members later formed COBRA (Coalition Of Black Revolutionary Artists), an artist collective that explored, and sought to define, a Black art movement based on a common aesthetic. A few years later, in 1969, this group changed its name to AfriCOBRA (the African Commune Of Bad Relevant Artists). This alteration in title highlights their inclusion of diasporic peoples of African descent, and an increased focus on an Afrocentric ideology within the group’s artistic practice. Coinciding with the name change, the group added members Napoleon Jones-Henderson and Nelson Stevens. Founding members include Wadsworth Jarrell, Jae Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, Gerald Williams, and Jeff Donaldson. The *Wall of Respect* was located at 43rd Street and Langley, in Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood. In the *Wall*’s eight-year tenure, more than 1500 murals, at one time or another, adorned the building’s edifice. In 1971 a fire tore through the building, which unfortunately was torn down in the aftermath, thus permanently destroying the mural(s).

uncomfortable with rote, delivered answer to life, history, and art. Through his engagement with murals around the country, he came to understand how time and place affect a mural's pedagogical program, and also how interpretation and perception changes with the viewer and the year.



Figure 56. Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, 1932-33, fresco, 17 ft 8½ in x 45 ft, Rivera Court C200, level 2, north wall, lower panel (detail), Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, MI, gift of Edsel B. Ford, 33.10.N, <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/detroit-industry-north-wall-58538>.

Crumpler believes there is a direct connection between his desire for answers and his interest in the mural medium. Murals are not locked away, seen as precious and something for the few. Murals are public – available for all – a workhorse of mass-communication. Crumpler believes murals demonstrate a vast potential to engage with the Black community and serve as a vehicle to concretize experience. The representations of Black people he, and most people his age, saw were “really horrible” – images of suffering and intimidation in the news, like in the

Watts Riots in Los Angeles (1965) and the Hunter's Point Social Uprising in San Francisco (1966), or lampooned versions of Black people, such as in *Amos 'n' Andy*.¹⁴¹



Figure 57. Unknown, "Staging and Equipping area in rear of Potrero Police Station," black and white photograph.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹. "Amos 'n' Andy Show (American Radio Program)," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated by Emily Rodriguez on June 12, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amos-n-Andy-American-radio-program>. "The Amos 'n' Andy Show" ran in one format or another from 1928 to 1960. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, a white male duo, created the minstrelsy-influenced radio show and voiced the title characters. The show ran as "The Amos 'n' Andy Show," from 1943 to 1960, while simultaneously running under the moniker, *Amos 'n' Andy's Music Hall*, from 1955 to 1960. The television adaptation, which ran from 1951 until 1953, continued in syndication until 1966, with a brief revival in 2012.

¹⁴². Planning & Research Bureau, San Francisco Police Department, *128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City & County of San Francisco*, 1966, compiled and prepared by Sgt. Ford E. Long, Sgt. Richard Trueb, and the San Francisco Police Dept. (San Francisco, CA: 1966), 127, <https://archive.org/details/128hoursreportof1968long/page/n5/mode/2up>.

It was a tumultuous time for the Bay Area. In 1966, the Black Panther Party formed in Oakland.¹⁴³ A young man was killed by police in Hunters Point, a neighborhood in southeastern San Francisco (see Fig. 57).¹⁴⁴ The Panthers formed, in part, as a response to the riots following that 1966 murder. Conversations about identity and representation led to conversations about the disparate depictions of George Washington and the Black and Indigenous peoples represented on GWHS's walls. Artist and school board member, Ruth Asawa, wanted the students to create a response piece. According to Crumpler, the Black Student Union knew they needed a professional artist for the response murals to resonate in comparison to the Arnautoff murals.¹⁴⁵ Crumpler was chosen by the students from among the five designs submitted. He accepted the project, but only on the nonnegotiable agreement of one condition: he would add to Arnautoff's work, but he would take no part in any plan to remove or alter the original frescos. Through his recent exposure to U.S. murals, and his naturally inquisitive nature, he came to understand the counter-narratives implicit in Arnautoff's mural. He also knew that if he was to provide a response, then there needed to be something to respond to. By continuing – by adding to – the

¹⁴³. Richard Kreitner, "October 15, 1966: The Black Panther Party is Founded," *The Almanac*, *The Nation*, October 15, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/october-15-1966-the-black-panther-party-isfounded/>. This article recalls the historic date of the Black Panther organization. It alludes to an earlier newspaper headline from 1968: Michael Harris, "Black Panthers: The Cornered Cats," *The Nation* (July 8, 1968), 15-18, which was uploaded by *The Nation* on October 10, 2015, https://www.scribd.com/document/284322344/October-15-1966#download&from_embed.

¹⁴⁴. Planning & Research Bureau, San Francisco Police Department, *128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City & County of San Francisco*, 1966, compiled and prepared by Sgt. Ford E. Long, Sgt. Richard Trueb, and the San Francisco Police Dept. (San Francisco, CA: 1966): ii-iii, 1-3, <https://archive.org/details/128hoursreportof1968long/mode/2up>.

¹⁴⁵. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.

mural cycle, Crumpler stresses the need to move forward with an awareness of the past and an intention to witness. Witnessing is about proclaiming events as they happen, so that they are never forgotten, or mislaid, or left on an editing room floor.

Once the students agreed to his stipulation, he knew he knew he had to get serious; just as Stackpole instructed Arnautoff to search out Rivera, one of Crumpler's high school teachers told him that if he really wanted to understand murals, he needed to go to México. Evangeline "EJ" Montgomery, a Bay-area Black artist, former Crumpler classmate, and "powerhouse," who held an informal monthly "salon" in her home, knew artist, Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012). Catlett was an American artist living in exile at that time in Mexico City. Crumpler says that Catlett was just beginning to receive notice in the United States during the 1960s. When Crumpler traveled to México, Montgomery arranged for him to meet Catlett during his stay.

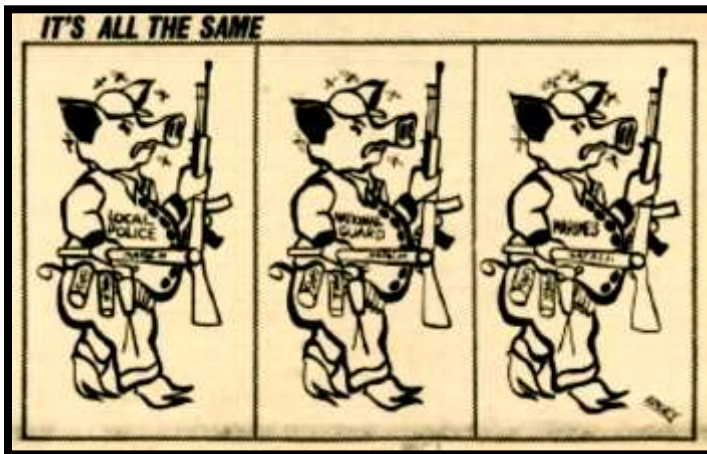


Figure 58. Emory Douglas (1943-), *It's All the Same*, 1972, newspaper cartoon, *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service*, weekly publication (1967-83).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶. Melissa Smith, "Legendary Black Panther Artist Emory Douglas on How Digital Media Can Be Harnessed to Make Protest Art Far More Effective Than Ever," *Artnet* (image courtesy of Flickr Creative Commons), June 30, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/emory-douglas-interview-1889924>.

On his first night in Mexico, the driver dropped him at a shady hotel “with lizards crawling on the wall.” Feeling very out of his element, he called Catlett, who rescued him. She set him up in a hotel she “used for all her guests.” After freshening up, he attended dinner at her house, and it was there that he met muralist Pablo O’Higgins (1904-1983). During dinner they discussed art and the mural format. O’Higgins advised him to speak with David Alfaro Siqueiros, *un de Los Tres Gigantes*, about Mexican muralism. The elder artist gave him the address where Siqueiros was currently working on a mural. The next day, Crumpler sought out this giant of art. At the worksite bribed a guard to gain entry. In relating this, Crumpler pauses; in his tone resonates and appreciable weight of respect for this man who “changed his life.” Siqueiros was amused by this young American kid, cocky one moment, shy and unsure the next. Crumpler handed him his designs for the GWHS murals. “Siqueiros took one look at my drawings and said, ‘See what you have here is a picture of rectangle. This will never be a mural. Murals are about architecture’.”¹⁴⁷ Next, he explained a theory he called the ‘golden center.’ In particular he stressed that the architecture, in tandem with the mural design, should dictate viewer movement through the space. Coffey undertakes an explanation of why the mural’s operatic features appealed to Siqueiros – this battle-worn, multi-manifesto-writing Mexican revolutionary, but she allows Siqueiros, himself, to finish the thought. She begins with how Siqueiros:

eschewed traditional perspective in favor of a dynamic composition based on the principals of optical experience and calibrated to the visitor’s experience. [Then Siqueiros continues]: ‘In the Gallery of the Revolution there will be no seats or benches for sitting ... A mural must make the spectator walk, it has to move him,

¹⁴⁷. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.

because in an amplified platform every wall becomes active, and he who observes it should enter through activity, physical activity and spiritual activity.’¹⁴⁸

These words project strength and unwavering belief – “in the Gallery of the Revolution.”

Siqueiros viewed the mural as an inspiration for the masses. There will be no seats because the eyes of the people will see, and they will act. Crumpler credits O’Higgins and Siqueiros with changing his entire perspective about the nature of art. The idea of movement is pivotal in understanding the progression from “Washington’s Early Years,” at the entrance of 32nd Street, through to “Washington Points the Way West,” on the second landing. Physical movement is also present in the evolution of Crumpler’s artistic response. He simultaneously activates the spiritual level that Siqueiros spoke of, in his choice of imagery.

Despite the many artistic similarities, there are apparent stylistic differences between *Life of Washington* and *Multi-Ethnic Heritage*. Both Arnautoff and Rivera created broad, landscaped scenes with distinct fore-, middle-, and backgrounds. Siqueiros and Crumpler differ from the formers in key ways that evoke a more emotive interpretation. Like Siqueiros, Crumpler places more emphasis on the foreground, painting figures that appear about to escape their frame. Also typical of both is emphasis given to a large, central focus – usually figural – rendered in vibrant colors, and surrounded by swirling, frenetic energy. Coffey notes that Siqueiros put a “particular emphasis on how [he] depicted the human body and thereby established a relationship with the

¹⁴⁸. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 121.

viewer's body" ... [which call attention to] "Siqueiros's aspirations for a cinematographic mural art that [can] activate the viewer by forcing [them] to move."¹⁴⁹



Figure 59. David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), *La nueva democracia* / *The New Democracy*, 1944, mural, Pyroxylin on Celotex, triptych (center panel), approx 20 x 40 ft, Palacio de Bellas Artes, México City, México.¹⁵⁰

Siqueiros implements these choices to dazzling effect in the mural, *La nueva democracia* (see Fig. 59). This work, located in the Palacio de Belles Artes, in México City, depicts a woman wearing a revolutionary Phrygian cap. Though chains still cuff her wrists, they swing free of any restriction. As an extension of her body, they function as potential defensive weapons, like a single-headed meteor hammer attached to both wrists.¹⁵¹ Siqueiros painted her to celebrate the

¹⁴⁹. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 191.

¹⁵⁰. Héctor Abad Faciolince, "Day of Illusions, Day of Disappointments," author/contributor webpage, October 28, 2019, <https://www.hectorabad.com/dia-de-ilusiones-dia-de-decepciones/>.

¹⁵¹. See Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Figure A7 (page 145).

end of WWII and its proclaimed victory over fascism. The personified “New Democracy’s” golden intoned skin glows in comparison to the pale white, deformed mass behind her. It – the mass, for it lacks humanity – wears a gray-green helmet, and, like the woman, its chest is bare. Whatever it was, its existence does not trouble the woman. Her Phrygian cap and bare breasts evoke the image of *La Liberté guidant le peuple*.¹⁵² In her left hand she lifts a burning torch, not unlike that which “Lady Liberty” wields in the U.S. *Statue of Liberty*.¹⁵³ “Rather than receding into an illusory depth, [Siqueiros’s] figure explodes through the painted surface, forcing the viewer to experience the mural physically and psychologically as they move in front of it. This cinematic effect is enhanced by the narrow viewing space. From every point, the image dominates the viewer’s visual field.”¹⁵⁴ The atmospheric swirls in the left and right corners evoke the swirls and soft colors seen in William Blake’s *Ancient of Days* (see Fig. 60), or the indistinct background in Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* (see Fig. 61). Both works enlist the spiritual in obvious terms, whereas *Nueva Democracia* uses these deifying effects to magnify secular references and situations. Siqueiros purposefully places the importance of his imagery on an equal, if not greater, pedestal as God, in order to show viewers that the divine, and conversely, the demonic, is here on Earth. Crumpler, like Siqueiros, takes an agnostic position in his mixing of frank, human subjectivity, framed by origin-story mysticism, in his design choices.

¹⁵². See Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Figure A8 (page 146).

¹⁵³. See Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Figures A9 and A10 (page 147).

¹⁵⁴. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 46.



Figure 60. William Blake (1757-1827), “The Ancient of Days,” copy D, plate 1, frontispiece, from *Europe: A Prophecy*, 1794, illuminated book, hand-colored relief etching on paper, approx $9\frac{1}{5} \times 6\frac{3}{5}$ in, The British Museum, London, UK, acquired 1859, on display (G30/od)(G30/od), 1859,0625.72 [Creative Commons Licenses (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>. Per strictures of this license, author states they did not change or alter the image in any way.], https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1859-0625-72. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 61. Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564), *Creazione di Adamo / The Creation of Adam*, 1508-12, fresco, ceiling (detail), approx 131 x 43 ft (approx 5633 sq ft), Sistine Chapel, Vatican City. Image is taken from Wikimedia, and is in the Public Domain. Creative Commons, Public Domain, PD-Art (PD-old-100), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>. Per strictures of this license, author states they did not change or alter the image in any way.], last updated on August 7, 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo_-_Creation_of_Adam_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Michelangelo_-_Creation_of_Adam_(cropped).jpg).

While in Mexico, Crumpler took in other sights and experiences. He noticed a marked difference in peoples' appreciation of public art, and he noted its esteemed and elevated position within the community. While sketching murals and architecture, a security guard offered him water and inquired about his sketches. A woman brought him cookies. No one asked him to move along, or cross the street. There were no suspicious inquiries concerning his actions. "Here [he] was – a young, Black man of nineteen years – a stranger from the United States," yet in Mexico he was respected.¹⁵⁵ He did not feel distrusted or feared. Though he was a young artist, not an *artiste célèbre*, his profession garnered a certain level of respect in Mexico, which in America seemed only reserved for those artists in the art world's upper echelons. He recalls the confused looks on the faces of artists and others in the community when he told them he was in México to study muralism. In the late 1960s/early 1970s, this artistic pursuit set him as an outlier from others of his generation. In reverse, the youth in México were leaving the country for the big New York art schools, the city scene, and the allure of abstract expressionism and pop art. Crumpler laughs in remembrance, "They couldn't understand this American kid coming to Mexico to learn from them."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.

¹⁵⁶. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.



Figure 62. Dewey Crumpler, *Oni*, 1984, artist addition to his earlier mural, *The Fire Next Time II* (1977), material unknown, >5000 sq ft, Joseph P. Lee Rec Center, 1395 Mendell, Bayview, CA.¹⁵⁷



Figure 63. Dewey Crumpler, *Collapse*, 2020, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 60 x 72 in. © Dewey Crumpler.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷. Cindy (only name provided), “The Fire Next Time II,” *Art and Architecture – SF* (blog), April 2, 2013, <https://www.artandarchitecture-sf.com/the-fire-next-time-ii.html>.

¹⁵⁸. Dewey Crumpler artist page, Jenkins Johnson Gallery (online), San Francisco, CA, <https://www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com/artists/63-dewey-crumpler/works/2859-dewey-crumpler-collapse-2020/>. © Dewey Crumpler.

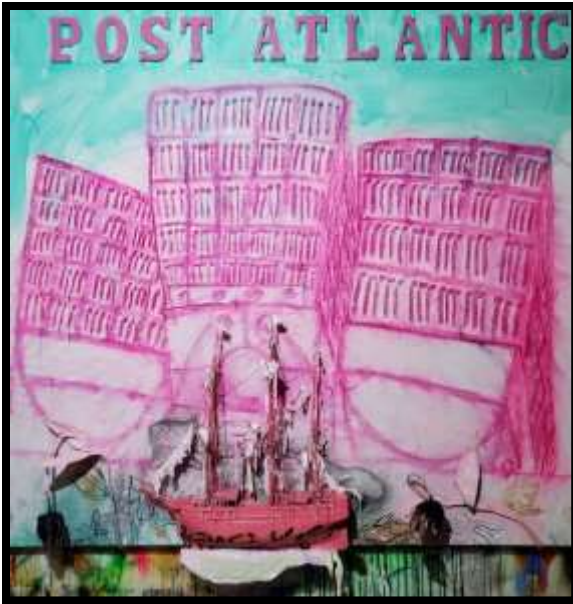


Figure 64. Dewey Crumpler, *Post Atlantic*, 2020, charcoal, graphite, and mixed media on canvas, 60 x 72 in. © Dewey Crumpler.¹⁵⁹

Like Arnautoff in 1935, Crumpler felt a similar emotive connection to the mural format. In an interview with Sampedra Aranke, the curator of his show *Collapse: Recent Works by Dewey Crumpler*, he explained that painting murals is “very performative;” the artist’s entire body becomes a gesture, which stretches and arcs with the brush strokes across the mural structure’s expansive surface. With a laugh, he opined in a deep, sonorous voice, full of memory: there is nothing like the feeling of your “entire body [while] in the gesture of making a three-to-four foot eye.”¹⁶⁰ While painting murals in the San Francisco Bay-area, Crumpler evolved his strictly

¹⁵⁹. Dewey Crumpler artist page, Jenkins Johnson Gallery (online), <https://www.jenkinsjohnsongallery.com/artists/63-dewey-crumpler/works/2863-dewey-crumpler-post-atlantic-2020/>. © Dewey Crumpler.

¹⁶⁰. Crumpler, “Collapse in Conversation,” by Aranke, Hedreen Gallery, Seattle Univ., WA, April 12, 2018.

realistic, figural style to experiment with abstraction. He recalls that while painting at George Washington High School, some paint dripped down the wall and he enjoyed the shapes that it created. Just as the *Wall of Respect* stimulated his appetite for murals, this drip made him hungry for new forms of expression. In 1987, feeling his practice was too narrow, he enrolled in the MFA program at Mills College in Oakland.¹⁶¹ There he took inspiration from his professor, Jay DeFeo. Speaking of DeFeo, Crumpler emphatically remarks that she was “as a maker – ruthless, ... as a thinker – ruthless.” At Mills, he explored Dogon cosmology, a way of viewing that emphasizes space, “particularly as an aspect that articulates itself in a kind of void. [It is] a religion that creates energy because [the void] is trapped in motion.”¹⁶² Through these ideas he began to generate a particular kind of movement and spatial development that continues to filter through his works and in his artistic thinking.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹. Dewey Crumpler, “Dewey Crumpler Resume,” artist webpage, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://deweycrumpler.com/read-me>. Crumpler earned a BFA from SFAI in 1972, a MA from San Francisco State University in 1974, and an MFA from Mills College, Oakland, CA, in 1989.

¹⁶². Alissa Lagamma, introduction to *Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara*, comp. by Alissa Lagamma w/contributing authors (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in conjunction with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020), 32. The Dogon are an African people indigenous to, and migrating within, the Sahel region. Currently they primarily reside in the central plateau region of Mali, in Africa.

¹⁶³. Crumpler, “Collapse in Conversation,” by Aranke, April 12, 2018.

CHAPTER 8

ART ON TRIAL AND THE EFFECTS OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Currently the Arnautoff murals lie at the center of a debate started decades ago, tabled in 1974, and resumed with a vengeance in 2019. Arnautoff, an avowed communist, depicted George Washington the surveyor, the soldier, the son, the husband, and the president, but also George Washington the owner of enslaved Africans and the breaker of Native American treaties. Arnautoff, through his research, attempted to depict a more honest image of Washington the man, rather than a deified legend.

In spite of his efforts eighty-six years ago, the murals are in danger once more.¹⁶⁴ Their fate is in limbo – a stay lengthened by government shelter-in-place decrees due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Before the Fall 2019 school semester, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) voted to paint over the Arnautoff frescoes, a process which would permanently destroy them.¹⁶⁵ In response, parents, citizens, both current and former students, and hundreds of academics signed an open letter of protest.¹⁶⁶ After public outcry,

¹⁶⁴. “San Francisco High School may Destroy Historical Murals,” *National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)*, May 6, 2019, <https://ncac.org/news/san-francisco-high-school-may-destroy-historical-murals>.

¹⁶⁵. Sam Lefebvre, “‘This is Reparations’: S. F. School Board Votes to Paint over Controversial High School Mural,” *KQED* (Bay-area, San Francisco, CA), June 25, 2019, <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13860237/this-is-reparations-s-f-school-board-votes-to-paint-over-controversial-high-school-mural>.

¹⁶⁶. “Open Letter on the Proposed Destruction of a Mural Cycle,” *Nonsite.org*, Editorials Issue #29, Atlanta: Emory College of Arts and Sciences, July 2, 2019, <https://nonsite.org/open-letter-on-the-proposed-destruction-of-a-mural-cycle/>. To provide a sampling of those who signed letter, the signees include actor Danny Glover, the daughter of writer Alice Walker (a former

SFUSD downgraded their initial decision to paint over the murals to a lesser fate – concealment by wall panels.¹⁶⁷ When the pandemic struck, injunctions, led primarily by the George Washington High School Alumni Association, but also by free speech groups, such as the NAACP, worked to pause any and all possible actions against the mural.^{168 169}

The current debate primarily concerns the same two problematic *Life of Washington* panels as in the 1960s – “Mount Vernon Plantation” and “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny),” though this time for different reasons, and with different hoped-for outcomes. In the 1960s, the Black Student Union deemed those two panels the only “honest panels” – not pleasant to view, certainly, but a part of an oft occluded history. Disclosing that history was imperative to chopping down the deified Washington. What they wanted was representation. Today, in a reversal of rationales, the SFUSD, and a parent-faction of GWHS students, consider the two panels racist and the images trauma-inducing. There is a concern that

GWHS student), and academics such as Enrique Chagoya, T. J. Clark, Hal Foster, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Lucy Lippard, Mark Rosen, Shilyh Warren, and Judith Butler.

¹⁶⁷. Carol Pogash, “San Francisco School Board Votes to Hide, but Not Destroy, Disputed Murals,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY), August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/arts/san-francisco-murals-george-washington.html>.

¹⁶⁸. Jon Golinger, “Notice of Intent to Qualify an Initiative for the November 2020 Ballot to *Protect Public Access to Public Art* in San Francisco,” *Coalition to Protect Public Art*, October 11, 2019, https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/protectpublicart/pages/1/attachments/original/1570820494/NoticeOfIntent_Nov2020BallotMeasure.pdf?1570820494.

¹⁶⁹. Laura Waxmann, “Movement to Preserve Controversial Mural gets Support from NAACP,” *San Francisco Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), August 6, 2019, <https://www.sfoxaminer.com/news/movement-to-preserve-controversial-mural-gets-support-from-naacp/>.

viewing images of Africans in enslavement and Indigenous peoples murdered, engenders a societal conception of African Americans and Indigenous peoples, both in the past and in the present, as weak, abused, helpless, and without a voice. Critics fear the murals promote a cognitive association between terrible events, powerlessness, racist hierarchies, and society's perception of, and attitude towards, African Americans and Indigenous Peoples.¹⁷⁰ These individuals demand that all the Arnautoff panels must go; to leave any panels celebrating George Washington, who owned slaves, and, as part of his presidency, implemented policies that directly led to the disenfranchisement and deaths of Indigenous peoples, is akin to supporting a white supremacist ideology.

What seems forgotten is Crumpler, and his *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*. Whether destroyed or concealed, the non-existence of the Arnautoff murals, affects the Crumpler murals as well. A response mural is hardly effective when the subject it responds to no longer exists. This truth is not lost on Crumpler, who asserts "all the conversations and emotions stirred up by a work of art are part of what that work of art means. My mural is part of the Arnautoff mural, part of its meaning, and its meaning is part of mine. If you destroy his work of art, you are destroying mine as well."¹⁷¹ If Arnautoff specifically agreed with the issues and emotions his murals provoked during the 1960s, it is unknown. However, Arnautoff does mention the 1960s controversy in his autobiography. As regards the affair, Arnautoff stated, "I'm very glad that my

¹⁷⁰. Peter Dreier, "Can Students Be Traumatized by Art?," *Public Seminar* (The New School, New York City), July 2, 2019, <http://publicseminar.org/2019/07/can-students-be-traumatized-by-art/>.

¹⁷¹. Davis, "This Artist Painted the Black Radical Response to the George Washington Slaveholder Murals," July 10, 2019.

frescoes provided the impetus for this new progressive work.”¹⁷² In conversation with Crumpler, he, while certainly not without an opinion, is reticent to take part in the legal action forming around the preservation of *Life of Washington*. Rather, he considers the current generation of students the appropriate stewards of the present. Just as the Black Student Union and other groups advocated for their beliefs in the 1960s, he believes it is important that these students take ownership of the moment and advocate for their needs and their beliefs. Crumpler sees his role as one of a mentor, to provide advice, and teach, not to control or assert his will on those that must live in this moment: walk past this mural, receive an education at George Washington High, and through discussion learn to navigate this country as well as an increasingly global existence. They are the ones actively living this moment, and thus best suited to contend what the murals mean to them.¹⁷³

In the November 2019 *Harper's Magazine* opinion piece, “Whiteout,” author Kevin Baker calls the controversy “a campaign to erase the worst things that dead white men have done in our history.” He goes on to argue that “everywhere he worked, Arnautoff included scenes of struggle, of the fights of working people to form unions, win power, and build a decent life for themselves.”¹⁷⁴ While Baker makes several good points, such as referencing themes running throughout Arnautoff’s oeuvre, which help counter the theory that the images are, and that Arnautoff was, racist, he indulges in such poor argumentation as pointing to a token “man of

¹⁷². Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 36.

¹⁷³. Crumpler, interview with the author, April 16, 2020.

¹⁷⁴. Kevin Baker, “Whiteout,” Easy Chair, *Harper's Magazine*, November 2019, <https://harpers.org/archive/2019/11/whiteout/>.

color ... pulling up a liberty pole” and “Native Americans, in full battle regalia, fight[ing] with and against Washington and, above all, for themselves,” as sufficient ammunition against claims that “African Americans [and] American Indians are portrayed in only passive or victimized roles.” Baker posits an interesting counter-narrative theory floated by Cherny, which glosses over Arnautoff’s feelings about Washington and the project in general. Arnautoff was particularly excited about the project and about his chance to depict the first president. His memoir highlights the importance of research as a first step in the process: “First I endeavored to study the life and work of this famous man, a committed defender of freedom[; I] got books and materials relating to him.”¹⁷⁵ After “considerable reflection,” he designed a series which not only showed Washington’s life and deeds, but also “his beauty of soul, the greatness of his dedication,” and “convey[ed] the spirit of Washington’s time.”¹⁷⁶ Arnautoff admired Washington’s courage and strength in battle, a respect which grew from his time in combat. He did not want to dismiss these qualities, yet, like Rivera, he believed murals – art – were instruments of truth. Rivera applied a more vivid, bombastic style in his creations, echoing his explosive personality, while Arnautoff was more thoughtful, both in his artworks and in his writings. He employed a realism, stemming from his belief that “the making of art is not a matter of idle contemplation, it cannot leave the viewer indifferent. It’s goal is to stop people, to stimulate their thinking.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵. Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 35.

¹⁷⁶. Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 35.

¹⁷⁷. Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 30.

An experience with Rivera may have run through Arnautoff's mind in designing *Life of Washington*. While assisting Rivera with his fresco series for the Governor's Palace in Cuernavaca, México, the panel, "The Colonial Landlord's Hacienda," was criticized for its depiction of an Indigenous person "dressed in the hide of a wolf in a fresco depicting the subjugation of Cuernavaca by the" Spanish.¹⁷⁸ Originally, the Indigenous person was more expressive to the point of distracting from the other elements in the narrative and suppressing the overall advanced message. After some thought, Rivera reworked the image:

Rivera: You know I do not like the Indian either. The facial expression is too much. With his expressiveness he distracts from the basic action. We somehow got a romanticized Indian. We'll have to simplify it.

Arnautoff: And right there he ordered the Indian scratched off and then painted it over. This time, the face expressed virtually nothing. The previous Indian was far more interesting but stood out in the group and detracted.¹⁷⁹

This quiet emphasis on the events, rather than an emphasis on emotion, is characteristic of Arnautoff's artworks. He instead elected to focus on narrative and players, and use the images to provide information. He kept his emotions vested, and allowed the unencumbered designs speak and act on the viewer – to make them stop, and to make them think. The images percolate through the viewer, eliciting opinions, questions, and planting the seed of an idea, that if unobstructed by external bias, may grow into a revolution.

¹⁷⁸. Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁹. Arnautoff, *A Life Renewed*, 26.

One person who was stopped by Arnautoff's murals was Crumpler. He recalls his own cognitive dissonance on first seeing the panels. What he saw seemed illogical. To witness the "Father of this Country" – someone who supposedly advanced the ideas of liberty and justice for all – commodifying African people, cracked his previously understood framework of the United States. In conversation he described the state of education at the time:

Understand, most students including myself never knew that George Washington owned slaves. Never. That wasn't brought up in history class. That's one reason this was a horrible image for me originally: Arnautoff put slaves next to the president of the United States, and it was that contradiction when I first saw the mural that threw me.¹⁸⁰

Some viewers feel Arnautoff was racist, but the idea that he was racist because he depicted a racially related murder, is a fallacy of transitive logic. Similar use of this logic would have murder mystery writers, who describe bloody deaths, enjoying or participating in murder; or, have an actor who portrays philanthropic characters participating in philanthropic acts in their non-acting life.¹⁸¹ In opposition to these assertions, research from primary sources show Arnautoff intended the murals as a correction to rampant historical inaccuracies in textbooks and

¹⁸⁰. Davis, "This artist painted the Black Radical Response to the George Washington Slaveholder Murals," July 10, 2019, last paragraph.

¹⁸¹. "Transitive Law: Logic and Mathematics," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated by Sr. ed. Brian Duignan, on April 16, 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transitive-law>. Transitive logic is often seen in math equations, but the principal also applies to non-numerical deductions. The basic equation is constructed as so, with a, b, and c representing unknown variables:

$$\text{If } a = b, \text{ and } b = c, \text{ then } a = c.$$

However, without knowing the relations between a and b, b and c, and a and c, what appears a slam dunk, falls flat in the face of nontransitive and intransitive relations. These relations and properties exist both in math and in life.

social commentary. There is a noted absence of Parson Mason Locke Weems's storied chopped-down cherry tree in the *Life of Washington* mural series. Neither do we see Washington kneeling in the snow to pray, ignoring the perils of hypothermia, nor General Washington imitating the prow of a great ship as he crosses the treacherous Delaware in the middle of the night.¹⁸² Baker suggests that the presence of enslavement and violent acts against peoples of color counters a former whitewashed version of American history, through the depiction of "the real, gloriously ambiguous beginning of the United States, which included bitter conflict and exploitation."¹⁸³ While the word "gloriously" plays to the mural opponents' view that the imagery weighs the actions of Washington and finds his transgressions a small price in comparison to the weight of his heroism, Baker does have a point about history as ambiguity.

The mural functions as a didactic exhibition. The medium's high square footage and architectural format dictate slow, and meandering viewing. In Mexico, the mural afforded an important position in consecrating Álvaro Obregón's nascent revolutionary state. As a function of their visual idiom, social-realism murals employ an iconographic program; revolutionary and populist subject matter, in concert with placement in government buildings, in effect legitimizes the state. Art historian, Leonard Folgarait, notes the publicly accessible placement of murals. He asserts that their installation in mostly official buildings – government, community-oriented, and religious, combined with their large format, leads the mural to operate "within the semiotic social

¹⁸². See the Appendix A: Supplemental Images, images A11, A12 , and A13 (pages 148-49).

¹⁸³. Baker, "Whiteout," November 2019.

system of [a particular time period and is] symptomatic of the paternalizing generosity of the patron.”¹⁸⁴ In both the case of Mexican muralism, and that of the New Deal, the “patron” equals the “government.”

Spanning the country, murals and public buildings completed under the direction of the WPA bear the legacy of a time when the government supported artists and their endeavors. Employment through the WPA began in 1935 and continued until the program’s dissolution in 1943.¹⁸⁵ In 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) (1882-1945; president: March 4, 1933 – April 12, 1945), received a letter from his friend, the artist George Biddle (1885-1973). At the time, Biddle was traveling through México. He saw how the Mexican government leveraged murals to engender positive sentiment for, and faith in, México’s National Party, as well how the murals encouraged Mexican citizenry to participate in a collective effort to rebuild the country after the Great Revolution. Upon taking in the success of México’s mural and arts

¹⁸⁴. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 15.

¹⁸⁵. Andrew Hemingway, “Cultural Democracy By Default: The Politics of the New Deal Arts Programmes,” *Oxford Art Journal* (February 2, 2007): 269-70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcm008>. The Works *Progress* Administration (WPA) was renamed the Works *Projects* Administration in 1939.* It was one of four projects known as Federal Project Number One, the others being the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP), The Federal Theatre Project (FTP), and the Federal Music Project (FMP). Other New Deal programs included the Historical Records Survey and the Federal Arts Project (FAP). The WPA differs from the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), though all were New Deal-Era programs. The PWAP lasted from 1933-34, while the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA FAP) went from 1935-43. A slightly different program, the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP; 1935-38), created countless non-site specific artworks. Often public art from this era is lumped together in discussion under the WPA initialism, however the different programs received funds from different sources, and they operated at different times within the general New Deal-period. [*Italics added by author to emphasize name change.]

programs, Biddle thought the same strategies might work well in the United States. His May 9th, 1933, letter to Roosevelt articulates his impressions:

The Mexican Artists have produced the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian Renaissance. Diego Rivera ... tells me that it was only possible because “[President]” Obregón allowed Mexican artists to work at plumber’s wages in order to express on the walls of the government buildings the social ideas of the Mexican revolution. The younger artists of America are conscious, as they have never been of the social revolution that our country and civilization are going through; and they would be very eager to express these ideals in a permanent art form if they were given the government’s cooperation. They would be contributing and expressing in *living monuments** the social ideals that you are struggling to achieve.¹⁸⁶ [*Italics are the author’s.]

Biddle elaborates on the positives of providing work and promoting artistic expression in the United States. Whether he was aware of the later paternal hand conducting which sentiments from among preapproved paths the citizenry saw, coaxed by the accepted and acceptable themes of American life sewn throughout many New Deal artworks, is unknown.

The government paternalism present in New Deal and Méxican muralism is absent in the case of *Multi-Ethnic Heritage*. While Crumpler met with students throughout the project, and reworked his designs, he never capitulated to demands that might compromise his vision. His goal was re-contextualization, expansion, inclusion, and conversation. When the Black Student Union asked for alteration to the Arnautoff murals, Crumpler was adamant concerning the inclusion, and preservation, of *Life of Washington*. Crumpler’s exposure to murals across the United States, his conversations with diverse individuals, and his close study of history, accorded him an understanding of Arnautoff’s message, as conferred through the mural idiom. It was

¹⁸⁶. Becker, ed., *Art for the People*, 11.

important to him that included in his murals be figures from history the students might at first not know, as a means to catalyze investigation into these individuals and the history surrounding them. He says part of the reason the United States emphasizes youth, is because this emphasis delays memory. With each successive generation the past becomes fuzzier until parts of it simply vanish from record. “When you understand history ... you absolutely cannot stand what must not persist. History is as much a weapon as it is a document. History is essential – you can [either] teach it to repress or to liberate.”¹⁸⁷

Size is a key element in this pursuit. The expansive width and towering height induces the viewer to walk from left to right, pause, look back, squat, move in, look-up, and stand back again. This demands patience and dedicated viewing time. To fully absorb the image, one must enter its field to such an extent that reality outside the mural fades away. This effect is not unlike watching a movie in a darkened theater. The lights dim, and suddenly there is no more audience, just a lone individual and a story.

In “The Rigorous Study of Art,” Walter Benjamin states that “...approach becomes possible only through a frame of mind that recognizes that the realm of perception itself changes over time and in accordance with shifts in cultural and intellectual [*geistig*] direction.”¹⁸⁸ Conception of acceptable and unacceptable is both a product of a historical time period and of the viewer’s historical time period. Keeping in mind both these conceptions at once is at times

¹⁸⁷. Crumpler, interview with the author, February 13, 2020.

¹⁸⁸. Walter Benjamin, “On the Rigorous Study of Art,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility and Other Works* (1932), ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, and Others (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008): 69.

difficult. Dr. Susan Neiman, who studies philosophy of ethics and morality, with a focus on Germany's actions as it navigates a way to understand and live with its collective guilt and shame after World War II.¹⁸⁹ The German language has a word for coming to terms with past atrocities: *vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which essentially means “ ‘we have to do something about our Nazi past’ .” Nieman believes Germany's struggle with guilt, and the steps it takes to approach it, might provide a framework for the United States, and what she sees as their unresolved guilt concerning the enslavement, murder, and disenfranchisement of pretty much everyone outside the white, mostly male, European descended class of people. Nieman believes the United States must acknowledge its past, bad and good, and educate itself on how past actions do not stay in the past, but instead grow into systemic issues that affect citizens in the present.

¹⁸⁹. Susan Neiman, “History and Guilt: Can America Face Up to the Terrible Reality of Slavery in the Way that Germany has Faced Up to the Holocaust,” *Psyche, Aeon*, August 12, 2013, <https://aeon.co/essays/dare-we-compare-american-slavery-to-the-holocaust>.



Figure 65. “Hitler inspecting modern art during one of the Nazi ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibitions of the late 1930s.”¹⁹⁰

Vergangenheitsbewältigung requires emotional confrontation, as well as logical assessment, with the crimes it concerns. In the first decades of the Federal Republic of West Germany, the emotional aspect of this process was missing. Nieman suggests that the reparations Germany paid to the State of Israel, functioned as a token acknowledgement of guilt – a placation, with the hope that there be no more thought of such nasty business. Extending this assessment to the United States, she asserts that affirmative action guidelines perform a similar function to German reparation payments. But where Germany continues to address their responsibility for past atrocities, the United States government, after the passing of affirmative action and the civil rights amendments, considers the matter closed. U.S. citizens are rarely asked to dialogue with their jaundiced history. This avoidance spans the middle passage, through the Civil War, through the Jim Crow-era, and into the current environment of mass incarceration and targeted policing. This avoidance is unrelated to any intrinsic aversion to violent imagery. In

¹⁹⁰. Adam Turl, “Erasing Arnautoff,” *Red Wedge*, July 10, 2019, <http://www.redwedge.com/online-issue/erasing-arnautoff>.

both Germany and the United States, WWII images of cruelty, violence, and war-ravaged cities remain readily available – serving as tiny reminders of thousands of tiny actions and inactions that built a fascist state and led to global war. Currently the United States houses twenty-five museums and research centers dedicated to the Holocaust. In contrast that is more than those in Germany and Israel combined.¹⁹¹ Quite a number for a country that saw no action on its contiguous soil. Germany did remove Nazi imagery that might serve a talismanic purpose. There are no shrines for Nazi adherents to travel to, where they might foment hate; there is no Hitler gravesite to visit, and his bunker does not hold tours. Tours of Auschwitz, though, exist as cautionary tales. These tours exhibit the depravity of humanity, and urge citizens to stay vigilant in their defense against tyranny by reminding them of the millions murdered, and the horrific and dehumanizing manner in which they were killed. The memory of those lives taken exists to shine a light on the moral turpitude to which people are capable. A memory kindled and curated so as to never fade away.

Past atrocities, even those stemming from an accident – such as “friendly fire” – cannot go unaddressed, lest they risk possible repetition. With lack of attention, those killed, and their loved ones, are denied satisfaction and respect for their loss. Artists can use their medium as a weapon. They can create didactic artworks and build their practice into a vehicle for change. Crumpler shares a similar sentiment. He says, “art is designed as an enterprise, to act as a mirror.

¹⁹¹. “Jewish Studies: Global Directory of Holocaust Museums,” in *Israel Science and Technology Directory*, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.science.co.il/jewish/Holocaust-museums.php>. There are seven Holocaust museums and research centers in Germany and six in Israel.

Makers attempt to speak through [their] images.”¹⁹² Artists are observers. They watch and absorb the world around them, then inject their experiences and observations into a visual extension of their hopes, fears, and realities. Photography, while now more accepted as an art form, is currently at the center of an ethical debate concerning possible exploitation and sensationalism of sensitive and tragic events.¹⁹³ While some Weegee-esque photographers exist, many artists are attempting to speak truth to power through digital celluloid.¹⁹⁴ The world is in a moment of accelerationism. In most American pockets and bags there is a camera, a computer, and an almost instantaneous link to millions of people around the world. Smart phones are used for

¹⁹². Gray Brechin, Dewey Crumpler, Carol Denney, and Jack Heyman, “The Murals and The Life of Victor Arnautoff,” *San Francisco 27th Annual LaborFest* (virtual lecture via Zoom.us), July 22, 2020, <https://laborfest.net/event/the-murals-and-the-life-of-victor-arnautoff-zoom/>. Crumpler refers to himself as a maker, rather than an artist. For him, the word “maker” is far more encompassing, and less hindered by preconceived notions of what makes an artist and how an artist must create art. [The author was in virtual attendance.]

¹⁹³. Richard B. Woodward, “Disaster Photography: When is Documentary Exploitation?” *ARTnews*, February 6, 2013, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/the-debate-over-ruin-porn-2170/>; Katie White, “What Art Defined the Civil Rights Era? We Asked 7 Museum Curators to Pick One Work that Crystallized the Moment,” *Artnet News*, January 20, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artworks-that-define-the-civil-rights-era-1755375>.

¹⁹⁴. Thomas Mallon, “Weegee the Famous, The Voyeur and Exhibitionist,” *New Yorker*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/05/28/weegee-the-famous-the-voyeur-and-exhibitionist>. Weegee, real name Arthur Fellig (1899-1968), was a sensational U.S. photographer. He was one of the first police-chasing photographers, going so far as to install a police radio in his car. As a freelance photographer, he sold his photos to such illustrious newspapers as the “Herald-Tribune, Daily News, Post, the Sun, and PM Weekly,” with his images making the leap from print news to museum exhibitions. He held two shows at MoMA during his lifetime (1943 and 1944). He received public praise from the likes of Langston Hughes and Alfred Stieglitz. The article declares that “if there were critics who remained skeptical of photography’s status as art, there were now plenty of them ready to usher this night-crawling creature of newsprint into the pantheon.”

artistic practice, but they are also used for documentation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, while many Americans shelter in place, there has been a substantial increase in art creation by professional and layperson alike, with makers reconsidering and adapting their practices.¹⁹⁵ The murders in 2020 of George Floyd, on May 25th, Breonna Taylor, on March 13th, and many other tragic deaths, sparked the flames of protest and raised calls for police and social reforms.¹⁹⁶ These events, intensified by the pandemic, resulted in the synchronic outcropping of hundreds of temporary and permanent murals, created not only in the United States, but around the world.¹⁹⁷

The mural medium as an artistic weapon of emotional expression is democratic. As Crumpler explains, the mural is a powerful communication tool for many reasons, such as its conspicuous size, its graphic quintessence, and its public visibility, often in public buildings and on exterior walls. Arnautoff was a staunch supporter of workers' rights and unions. He supported the 1934 West Coast Longshoremen Strike, and created art in remembrance of the events, which culminated in the death of two men on July 5th. This date came to be known as "Bloody Thursday." Two protesters were shot by police that day in San Francisco. They both died later from their wounds. Nearby, Arnautoff was working on his Coit Tower mural, "City Life." In 1937, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) was formed. One of

¹⁹⁵. See the Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, B5 (page 152).

¹⁹⁶. See the Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, B6 and B7 (page 152).

¹⁹⁷. Sarah Cascone, "Street Artists Around the World Captured a Turbulent Year in Real Time – See the Beautiful and Unforgettable Works of 2020 Here," *Artnet News*, December 31, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/street-art-2020-1933692>.

Arnautoff's later became a member. During the 2020 commemoration of Juneteenth (June 19th), the ILWU joined marches and held memorials in protest of George Floyd's murder.¹⁹⁸

Following right behind 2020 Juneteenth protest, the Arnautoff murals were a topic of discussion at the 27th Annual LaborFest. This month-long San Francisco event takes place in July in remembrance of "Bloody Thursday." Crumpler was one of four speakers on the panel entitled, "The Murals and The Life of Victor Arnautoff," which primarily focused on the GWHS mural debates.¹⁹⁹ In defending the Arnautoff murals, Crumpler defended the necessity of painful images, and the function of art as a "truth-teller," particularly in the context of history. He spoke

¹⁹⁸. "George Floyd," search results for George Floyd memorials and protests, and the ILWU response to the murder of George Floyd, *International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU)*, posted to ILWU.org, May 29, June 8-10, 12, 15, and 20, July 13 (multiple entries) and 14, and August 11 in 2020, and April 20 in 2021, <https://www.ilwu.org/?s=george+floyd>. The link above connects to the ILWU organization page, and the search results for 'George Floyd.' The ILWU has long been a supporter for the rights of others. This tenant goes back to their founding after the events "Bloody Thursday."; Cal Winslow, "Bloody Thursday 1934: The Strike that Shook San Francisco and Rocked the Pacific Coast," *Beyond Chron: The Voice of the Rest*, July 3, 2014, <https://beyondchron.org/bloody-thursday-1934-strike-shook-san-francisco-rocked-pacific-coast/>. On May 9, 1934, the West Coast longshoremen struck, effectively silencing the ports all along the West Coast for 83 days. Events took a turn for the bloody on July 5th, when strike-breakers were sent to the docks. The result: two dead, Howard Sperry and Nick Bordouise, and 67 injured. Just up the hill, Arnautoff and others were completing the Coit Tower murals. Arnautoff created several etchings and prints, which document these events. Each year, San Francisco and other cities along the West Coast, honor "Bloody Thursday," with San Francisco holding a month-long LaborFest. During this month, individuals come together to honor the past, and work on strategies for the future. The ILWU supports others as well, from those striking at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline, to the Arnautoff murals at GWHS. When former police officer, now convicted felon, Dereck Chauvin, murdered George Floyd, on May 25, 2020, the ILWU joined others in demanding police reform throughout the following summer. The search result list cited above, documents the protests and memorials following Floyd's murder.

¹⁹⁹. Brechin, Crumpler, Denney, and Heyman, "The Murals and The Life of Victor Arnautoff," *San Francisco 27th Annual LaborFest*, July 22, 2020.

passionately about the brutal, 1955 murder of Emmet Till, which was tragically “rebirthed” in the 2020 murder of George Floyd.²⁰⁰ In both instances, imagery was extremely instrumental in galvanizing response. Till’s mother, Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley allowed photographs of her fourteen-year old son in his coffin – his body untouched by a mortician – after he was brutally murdered. Darnella Frazier recorded Floyd’s senseless and vicious murder on her smartphone, and then released the footage on the internet where it quickly spread around the world. Crumpler connects the two murders and the two, strong women who made sure the world see the outcome of complacency in the face of hatred, and racism:

Regarding Till: We are in hell! It is veiled, hidden... And only the light of the truth will reveal it... And that heroic woman did not let her child’s death go in vain.

Regarding Floyd: Four-hundred years collapsed in the body of that miserable dog, and this would have gone by unnoticed, except for that heroic woman who held her camera up and watched as that man called out for his mother. What except that moment will teach young people in the future? They have to see it. [The people in positions of authority in education] didn’t acknowledge it existed. The transition of a child to a high school student, in a place of education, is the best way to have students confront and learn history. *Whitewashing* – taking away what makes them uncomfortable. This country is founded on omissions. Black peoples’ blood should never be forgotten. A Native Americans’ blood ... needs to be shown and never forgotten. For me, art is an essential. And art has to breathe. We need to breathe truth into this country.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰. See the Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Figures A14 and A15 (page 150). Also see the Appendix B: Supplemental Sources, Source B9 (page 154).

²⁰¹. Brechin, Crumpler, Denney, and Heyman, “The Murals and The Life of Victor Arnautoff,” *San Francisco 27th Annual LaborFest*, July 22, 2020.

For action to take place, people must be emotionally viewed. Logic alone is not enough to secure the instigation of a movement.

In 1957, Leon Festinger, who wrote *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, conducted research and experiments that linked dissonance and communication. In basic terms cognitive dissonance is a psychological discomfort resulting from holding two or more incompatible ideas, beliefs, attitudes, or tenets simultaneously. Festinger posited that this was a normal, daily occurrence for most individuals, but also that active acknowledgement of the disparity of held beliefs induced emotional strain, or *dissonance*. He asserted that humans are ever attempting to achieve emotional balance, a sense of internal harmony. Later theorists explained this theory nicely the book the book *Building Communication Theory*. These authors stated that when individuals are presented with information that conflicts with a currently-held belief or idea, the individual must find a way to resolve the discomfort resulting from this dissonance. One example given consists of two friends, one who joins a group and likes it a lot, and the other who does not care for it all. “The idea is it would ‘bother’ us (we would feel dissonance) if our friend did not also value what we value, and we would be motivated to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling. A central tenant of the theory is: the more the mental discomfort (dissonance), the more we are motivated to change something to make things comfortable.”²⁰² An alternative to changing the belief, is creating, or finding, a justification for it. This justification often comes in the form of a caveat, or bargain – an internal rationalization. For example, in the case of societal

²⁰². Dominic A. Infante, Andrew S. Rancer, and Deanna F. Womack, “Persuasion Approaches,” in *Building Communication Theory*, 3rd ed. consulting ed. Robert E. Denton, Jr. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1997), 163.

wrongs, such as perpetuated, ignored, or rationalized racism by the state, citizens might prefer to believe their country holds a legitimate reason for its actions, which are undertaken in the best interest of the nation and its citizens, and though they do not fully understand all the reasons, the citizens choose to believe their government is generally good (or the best option available), and therefore its actions are good, or at least for the greater good. Often dissonance is related to self-conception. If someone tells a lie, but also believes lying is wrong, they might create a reason why lying was the right choice in a particular situation. “We try to protect our self-concepts by rationalizing our actions and decisions so we do not ‘look bad’ to ourselves. Changing [one’s self-concept] to ‘I am dishonest’ would also have restored consistency: ‘I lied’ and ‘I am dishonest.’ However, we seldom reduce dissonance by changing a favorable belief about ourselves.”²⁰³ Other options include ignoring the new information, or criticizing the source of the information. Another alternative is selective exposure, where information is only sought from sources that confirm an individual’s beliefs, attitudes, and understandings.²⁰⁴ The primary kernel put forth by Festinger is that every day, all around the world, humans are making slight changes and adjustments in thinking in order to maintain an internal equilibrium.²⁰⁵ Applied to the “Mount Vernon” panel, cognitive dissonance is created from a cognitive starting place where George Washington was a good man and president, who saved the people from tyrannical British rule, established a nation, and believed all men were created equal. Then Arnautoff introduces

²⁰³. Infante, et al., “Persuasion Approaches,” 161.

²⁰⁴. Infante, et al., “Persuasion Approaches,” 162.

²⁰⁵. See the Appendix A: Supplemental Images, Image A16 (page 151).

dissonance with his images of, Washington owning enslaved Africans. The cognitive dissonance is then the question of how to reconcile a person – a president – with the dual information of his good deeds and his bad. Which is he? The comfort exists in the safe binary of good or bad. Little children understand this. From a human's first breath they are unconsciously categorizing. The same cognitive dissonance occurs with “Washington Points the Way West (Manifest Destiny).” Here again is the cognitively deemed good president, but here also is an image of a murdered Indigenous person. However, Washington does not seem to notice or care, and thus the viewer feels a twinge of uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. Arnautoff's mural is not a promotion of racist beliefs and violent desires, but a reminder, a burr in the side of silent history books, and a call for unwavering skepticism and suspicion. It is a call to always question the soundness of the *truth* [Pravda] spoken by others, especially by those in power.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶. Loewen, *Lies*, 352-53. “American history textbooks help perpetrate the archetype of the blindly patriotic hard hat by omitting or misunderstanding progressive elements in the working class. Textbooks do not reveal that CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] unions and some working-class fraternal associations were open to all when many chambers of commerce and country clubs were still white-only. Few textbooks tell of organized labor's role in the civil rights movement, including the 1963 March on Washington. ... “Such nonthinking occurs most commonly when society is the subject. ‘One of the major duties of an American citizen is to analyze issues and interpret events intelligently,’ *Discovering American History** exhorts students. Our textbooks fail miserably at this task. ... Sociology professors are amazed and depressed at the level of thinking about society each fall... These students cannot use the past to illuminate the present and have no inkling of causation in history, so they cannot think coherently about social life.” [*The high school textbook referenced here, *Discovering American History* (Kownslar, Allan O. and Donald B. Frizzle, *Discovering American History*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974.), is one of the exemplars Loewen used for the research presented in his book.]

CHAPTER 9

NEW DEAL MURALS VS. CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS

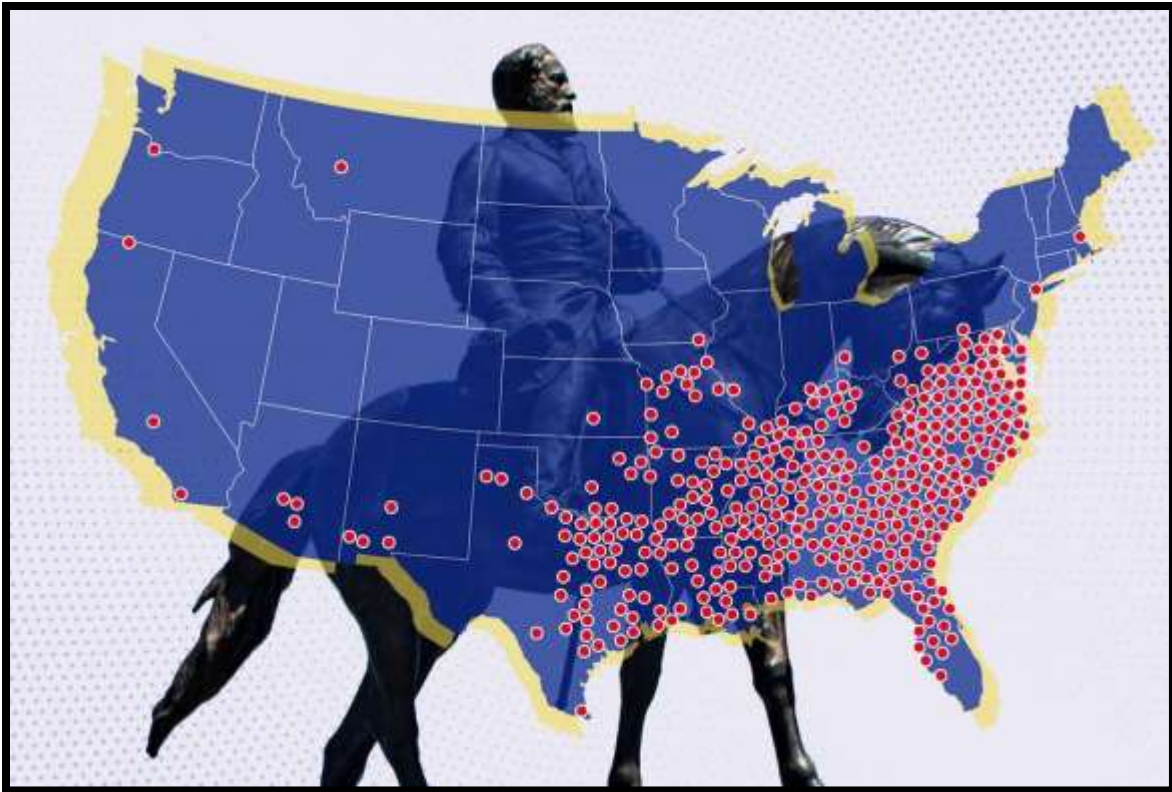


Figure 66. Image: Greg Rones/Shutterstock, with graphic by Nathaniel Blum.²⁰⁷

Invariably during the conversation about murals and monuments in the United States, Confederate monuments enter the conversation. Nieman compares the differences in treatment, sentiment, and prescribed action between Nazi monuments, and sites of possible Nazi reverence in Germany, and Confederate monuments, primarily located in the southern United States. She

²⁰⁷. “Study: States Where Confederate Monuments are Falling – And Where They’re Not,” BeenVerified Team & Southern Poverty Law Center, last updated September 16, 2020, <https://www.beenverified.com/data-analysis/confederate-monuments-state-removal-study/>.

suggests there is a difference between acceptable narrative and culpability permitted national identity in each country. In Germany, its citizens integrate studies of philosophy and national memory in lessons that teach that exclusion and hate lead to genocide. Conversely, the U.S. rewrote their past narratives, and resituated past misdeeds in an identity of victimhood and a stoic “lost cause.” In both cases, these are choses freely made by each country – at least by those voted in as de facto self-representatives – that speak loudly about how they perceive history and historical memory.

There is no quick fix for guilt. Germany has contended with its guilty past for half a century; more than three times that amount span the years between the Civil War and the present day, yet the United States still hides, suppresses, and rewrites their image at nearly every turn. This presents most conspicuously in American history textbooks, with their exclusion of events and their carefully chosen wording, but visually this dots the national landscape in the almost 1,600 Confederate symbols located on public land. Of that number, monuments account for 698.²⁰⁸ “Germany has spent much of the past 50 years in the excruciating process of dealing with the country’s national crimes.” Nieman goes on to say that “working through Germany’s criminal past was not an abstract exercise; it involved confronting one’s own parents and teachers and calling their authority rotten.”²⁰⁹ Guilt requires critical engagement with not only the “big-picture” issues, but also the minute. History, rendered visually, provides the opportunity

²⁰⁸. Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), “SPLC Whose Heritage? Dataset Updates as of September 15, 2020,” part of the *Whose Heritage? Community Action Guide* reports, September 15, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/splc-whose-heritage-dataset-updates-september-15-2020>.

²⁰⁹. Nieman, “History and Guilt,” 2013.

for an ekphrastic experience with the past, as well as with its possible connections to the present. American historian, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, encapsulates the quintessentially American sensibility its citizens have towards their past, saying “one of the things I notice in the classes [I teach] is that we’ve become inured to the suffering and pain of slavery, that we’ve distanced ourselves from it, that people can’t experience the terror, the horrible pain, the anxiety, the stress, et cetera, that came with the slave experience.” In agreement, Quentin Tarantino replies, “people in general have so put slavery at an arm’s distance that ... just the information is enough for them – it’s just intellectual. They just want to keep it intellectual. These are the facts and that’s it.” Later he adds, “I think America is one of the only countries that has not been forced, [unlike others] by the rest of the world, to look their own past sins completely in the face. And it’s only by looking them in the face that you can possibly work past them.”²¹⁰ The problem in this lies in the insufficiency of facts to create connections with misdeeds, or spur action to suppress a potential reenactment of events in the future. If what Gates says is true, that his students are by-and-large inured to the horror of slavery, then why worry about two panels in a New Deal-era mural? Considering the level of violence today, depicted across youth consumable media – the news, tv and movies, videos captured by cell phones – why are the two images at George Washington High School a site of battle in the fight to protect the innocent eyes of children?

²¹⁰. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Tarantino ‘Unchained,’ Part 2: On the N-Word,” *The Root*, December 24, 2012, <https://www.theroot.com/tarantino-unchained-part-2-on-the-n-word-1790894617>.



Figure 67. John Guess, Director of the Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC), stands next to the recently reinstalled *Spirit of the Confederacy*. Louis Amateis, *Spirit of the Confederacy*, 1908, bronze, relocated to the Houston Museum of African American Culture (HMAAC) in 2020. All images courtesy of HMAAC.²¹¹

While many individuals are vocal critics of Confederate monuments, others, while uncomfortable with the imagery, stay silent. This does not mean the monuments, plaques, and statues do not engender discomfort, but this silence does shine a light on a system of inequality where U.S. citizens believe their voices do not matter. This inequality continues into the next generation through the fostering of a system where children accept it, as they feel their parents have, and grow up to believe they lack the right to demand respect. Then there are those who are not aware of the statutes, plaques, and murals in their community, who may walk by them daily,

²¹¹. Valentina Di Liscia, “At This Museum of African American Culture, Displaying a Confederate Statue is a ‘Part of Healing’,” *Hyperallergic*, August 31, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/583649/houston-museum-of-african-american-culture/>.

but do not know to whom they refer, or to what period of history they represent, until a news-story brings its possible removal to their attention.

Elliot Jones, whose grandmother – the legendary Dr. Maya Angelou – attended George Washington High School, recalls the first time he traveled to Washington D.C., and his unease in the presence of Confederate monuments, statues, plaques, and busts on the National Mall, and in the Houses of State. He feels “the public has grown accustomed to these political relics and ... become numb to the hypocrisy of the public display of tributes to men whose notoriety stems from rebellion, war, and the tyranny of the antebellum south.” Like Nieman, he feels “it’s instructive to see how the German government views all symbols of hate and celebrations of Nazis. They now acknowledge that the Holocaust would not have been possible without the participation and acquiescence of most Germans, and they [now] know the negative impact that the exposure to racist symbols and propaganda [has] on attitude and behavior. Therefore, the government has enacted laws that ban all symbols promoting anti-Semitism, fascism, Hitler, and the Nazi regime.” He draws a distinction, though, between the GWHS murals and Confederate tributes. Graffiti on, and destruction to, “politically motivated racist symbols is not censorship,” he states. Conversely, he believes the removal of the high school murals would “interfere with the responsibility of preserving important works of art that depict our nation’s racist and oppressive history towards Blacks, Native Americans, and others.”²¹² With murkily defined

²¹². Elliot Jones, “Op-Ed: Which Monuments Should Come Down and What Should Replace Them?” *SFist*, July 27, 2020, <https://sfist.com/2020/07/27/op-ed-taxpayers-continue-to-fund-racist-symbols-and-messaging/>.

delineations like these, public confusion and confliction over what action to take is understandable.²¹³



Figure 68. This Confederate monument, popularly known by its incised epithet – “The Boys Who Wore Gray,” was partially removed by protestors on August 14, 2017, two days after the fatal events at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA.²¹⁴

²¹³. Marlene Lenthag, “Virginia Supreme court says Confederate Statues can be Removed,” *ABC News* (National), April 1, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/virginia-supreme-court-confederate-statues-removed/story?id=76818457>. After the tragic events at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville on August 12, 2017, calls for the removal of Confederate statues increased in number. Demands were (*still are*) particularly vociferant in the case of statues erected to Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy’s highest ranking general, and Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederate States; Gregory S. Schneider and Laura Vozzella, “Northam Says Virginia will Remove Lee Monument in Richmond,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), June 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/northam-to-remove-lee-statue/2020/06/04/0b2c013c-a603-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html. In response to the George Floyd protests, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam called for the removal of Confederate monuments on June 4, 2020; City of Charlottesville, et al. v. Record No. 200790 - Frederick W. Payne, et al, Supreme Court of Virginia, Opinion by Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn, April 1, 2021, <http://www.courts.state.va.us/opinions/opnscvwp/1200790.pdf>. After a lengthy court battle, the Supreme Court of Virginia reversed and rescinded the previous court ruling, which now opens a path for the continued removal of Confederate monuments in the state.

²¹⁴. Turl, “Erasing Arnautoff,” July 10, 2019. Photo by Virginia Bridges at *The Herald-Sun*/AP services.

monuments serve as daily reminders for Southern African Americans about how they are seen. These monuments are the ancestors of some of the people (generally White) living and working in their community. Those bronzed figures represent individuals who stood in opposition to the end of slavery and to the rights of full personhood for Black Americans. Individuals who erected them, some still alive today, fought against school integration, the desegregation of businesses and services, the rights of property, marriage, voting, equal protection, and a fair justice system for African Americans. These unjust attacks, employed by powerful groups, and governments – both local and national, is what Jones refers when he uses “politically motivated” as regards to monuments.

However, he neglects to fully distance the Arnautoff murals from the Confederate monuments. His argumentation fails to note that WPA and FAP murals were also politically motivated tools. During a time of low morale and low employment, the New Deal murals and art largely depicted happy families, factory and farm workers. Rivera’s artistic paean to industrialization at The Detroit Institute of the Arts, depicts mostly deindividuated men moving in unison – the collective action and combined results instituted in Henry Ford’s Dearborn automobile plant. Rivera visited the plant numerous times, and so understood automobile manufacturing technology had surpassed the collective repetitive movement he painted. His artistic motivation was not strict realism, but social realism, which inserts unspoken commentary in the bodies, landforms, and structures depicted. In the Crumpler mural, the artist elevated his painted dignitaries and social leaders to the level of gods when he depicted them standing eye-to-

and charity, promoting patriotism and good citizenship. Our members are the ones who, like our statues, have stayed quietly in the background, never engaging in public controversy.”

eye with the panels' attendant mythological figures. In the study of art, the hierarchies of scale suggest that the largest person, and/or the most centrally placed figure, is often the most important or powerful. In Crumpler's panels, mortal men, women, and children conspire with gods and goddesses in jewel-toned arrangements. The assertive reds and yellows, and the arched arrangement of figures, creates a uniform collective representation, one where all stand on equal footing.

CHAPTER 10

A PARTING THOUGHT ON THE SANCTITY OF ART

Public murals of the last century carry an air of impermanence, due to their public location and exposure to the elements. This transitoriness, until recently, placed these works in a category apart from artworks curated and installed in museum and galleries, as well as from artworks consumed by the wealthy, and stashed in private collections. Caught between the present cultural liberalism and the fascist conservatism dividing the United States, some murals are living on borrowed time. The mural functions as a site of cultural and societal impact, housing memory in a reliquary of two-dimensional images. This issue necessitates public conversations about the particular values a society ascribes to visual representations, and how those associations, between values and iconography, can attenuate over time till barely a thread connects what was before to what is now. Monuments and murals are often informed by their location; therefore, if these works are removed, they lose their emotional aspect, interpreted meaning, and social value. The hyphenate *Arnautoff-Crumpler* mural illustrates a confabulation which is occurring across the United States. These vocalizations reveal the divided views and values held by U.S. citizens about art, as well as their understanding of its functions.

Prevailing views on public art and monuments are substantiated, perhaps morally or emotionally, by the U.S. government and its municipalities – by what it chooses to protect, what it chooses to remove, and the reasons for these choices. Many modernist critics avoid discussing murals, because they view murals as a cooperative work – their designs chosen by committee and at times painted by teams of artists, some of whom were self-taught – and thus not the pure aesthetic expression of the autonomous artist. Andrew Hemingway explains that this sentiment

heightened as New Deal artists “were increasingly marginalized [when] the ‘social Keynesianism’ of the early New Dealers gave way to the to the ‘commercial Keynesianism’ of the early 1940s.”²¹⁷

Setting aside ascribed emotional and scholarly viewpoints, an additional, more concrete, factor contributes to the lack of attention afforded murals, monuments, and other public artworks. This factor is location. Museums and galleries provide a convenient destination to view large collections; murals reside in and on various buildings, down alleyways, and situated sporadically across cities and small towns. Typically, these locations house *one* mural, or other artistic work, and showcase *one* artist. Location, and the distance between locations, requires active effort on the part of the viewer – first, to discover its existence, and second, to make the trip. Conversely, museums display large and varied collections, launch well-publicized exhibitions, and require little effort to locate. The relative ease of seeing a large number of objects, while visiting only one place, provides the relaxation often sought in such diversions. It is not unlike the popularity in visiting a mall, with its many options and sights contained in one convenient spot.

When a painting or sculpture finds disfavor, the curator or museum director can move it, store it away for a more appropriate showing, or deaccession the work. The piece remains unharmed. Removal and reinstallation of frescoes, and murals of other mediums, applied directly to a wall, is costly and necessitates the direction of skilled conservators. Fresco is particularly fragile, and the condition of some murals make successful removal and reinstallation nearly

²¹⁷. Hemingway, “Cultural Democracy by Default,” 272.

impossible. Since many of these works reside on, or in, public buildings, or on public lands, typically it is public money which pays for their upkeep and relocation. A museum may receive a little negative press if they alter an exhibition, or hide or store away an artwork. Deaccession, when not in the service of restitution, actually earns money for the museum. Deaccession funds received from sales of artworks by an overrepresented artist, artistic style, or movement, are used to fill gaps in the museum's collections. Since the Arnautoff mural resides in a public education institution, the money to cover the panels comes from the San Francisco public education coffers. The estimated \$600,000 to \$875,000 plus price tag to cover the murals is especially upsetting in a school district with existing education inequalities and an estimated deficit of more than \$169 million for the next two years.²¹⁸ An official estimate to either remove the murals to a

²¹⁸. Alejandro Serrano, "Washington High School Alumni sue SF School District over Decision to Cover Murals," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Washington-High-School-alumni-group-sues-SF-14492898.php>. The \$600,000 estimate is to paint over the mural, which would permanently destroy it. The \$875,000 cost is the estimate to nail acoustic tiles over the mural which, while possible to remove, could not be done without significant effort. In the same way the choice of cremation or burial does not change the presence of death, permanently painting the mural away or hiding it behind nailed down panels, changes little. In both instances, the mural is gone, likely to be forgotten, lifeless; Vanessa Arredondo, "San Francisco School Board ponders what to do about Looming \$169 Million Deficit," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 15, 2020, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/education/article/San-Francisco-school-board-ponders-what-to-do-15805849.php>. The school district expects a \$75 million budget gap by the end of the 2021-22 fiscal year. This gap is projected to grow another \$94 million during 2022-23. Projected additional costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and school reopening is anywhere between \$5 million to \$38.1 million. San Francisco USD expects the largest expenses to come from hiring more custodians (\$20 million) and from hiring more educators in order to keep class sizes small when students return to in-person learning (\$13.1 million). Since the start of the pandemic the district spent approximately \$6.7 million to staff connectivity, personal protective equipment (PPE), and cleaning supplies.

new location, recontextualize them, add curtains, or any suggestion to preserve the murals in some form, does not exist.

Finally, with the advent of modernist architectural design, the focus on walls and room partitions within buildings is less. Modern architecture often concentrates on wide-open spaces and large windows, thus eliminating the wall space necessary for a mural.²¹⁹ In general murals are painted in the same time period as the building's construction. This partially explains the preponderance of murals within older public buildings versus their relative non-existence in newer iterations. This may be one of the reasons murals within buildings are commissioned less today. Add the difficult and meticulous nature required of fresco, and it is no wonder that when murals are produced today, fresco is rarely implemented. This means the subjects portrayed on the murals are tied to the past – dated – and thus these images, some flawed, some in disrepair, are summoned from the mental visual dictionary of the mind, producing an overall malaise towards the artform and, in particular, toward New Deal-era murals. With their public accessibility, murals are susceptible to vandalism and other forms of destruction. In some cases, restoration is possible. However, fresco is porous. The red paint students in the late 1960s spattered on one of the *Life of Washington* panels is still visible, the pigment having quickly, and permanently, fused with the plaster. When murals are painted on exterior walls and outdoor structures, they often suffer the ravages of weather and age, with their physical quality degrading over time. Daily exposure to view degrades public art in a separate way. For example, the repetitious use of the 32nd Avenue entrance by the students at George Washington High School,

²¹⁹. Becker, *Art for the People*, 10.

dulls the images' presence, placing it into the category of common-place sights, until, like the buildings and landforms accompanying a daily drive, the image eventually fades away.

Likewise, imagery seen daily fades into a mélange of various abstracted shapes and colors. When asked, a GWHS senior contended that most students do not even notice the murals: "Last year, our history teacher said, 'There's [*sic*] murals downstairs.' I said, 'Where?'"²²⁰

There is a horror in looking at a wall once vibrant, now blank. An appreciable disquiet suffuses the vacant space, creating a discernable desire to immediately replace, reimagine, or refresh. This desire for newness is part of the American identity. As though a condition of its formation, the United States – since its inception – has espoused an ideology that centers around the present and the future, and relegating any unseemly past historical dealings into the metaphorical dustbin. If the mural is covered, whether with paint or panel, the oppressive blankness of 1,600 square feet will pronounce its absence far more than the objectionable imagery ever pronounced its presence. The removal of these murals will create a sudden interruption in the landscape. The viewers, dully familiar with the "something" they daily pass, will stop short in its vacuity. Perhaps that is good. Interruptions produce questions – *what is the reason for this? what was there before? is it still there, trapped beneath the paint or panels – buried alive?* Questions produce discussion. Even now, dialogue ensues. One freshman student said, "the mural 'reminds [students] of what happened in history, and I don't think we should forget that.'" He went on to say that his parents disagree with him. This dissonance compelled

²²⁰. Nanette Asimov, "Washington High Students Speak Out After Summer Battle Over Mural," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Washington-High-students-speak-out-after-summer-14361949.php>.

him to research the artist and mural online, saying, “‘I found my own opinion,’ [and] ‘I think it’s good to remember history.’” Four junior-year friends, all African American, attending George Washington “began discussing the issue over lunch on the steps just outside” the 34th Street entrance. Topics range from empathizing with those who are offended or uncomfortable with the imagery, while maintaining support for its preservation, to the importance of remembering history, and to focusing on the future. One student says, “‘I feel like you shouldn’t cover up the truth,’” while another adds that it is unreasonable to “‘cover up the truth [just] because it hurts people’s feelings.’” However, one member in this tiny symposium mirrors the forward-looking U.S. ideology: “‘It’s the past, and we’re in the future. ... They teach us more about slavery than we get to know about presidents.’” A fair point. Many students echoed an overemphasis on enslaved African history, rather than the vast sources concerning other areas of African American and Black American history. Despite its proximity, the mural is rarely used as a tool to launch the subject of history, historical memory, and representation, or to engage the students in conversations about the intersection of art, history, and narration. *Life of Washington* is well placed to serve as a launching point to engagement with the wider diversity of people and histories found in *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*, installed literally around the corner. Unfortunately, this mural is rarely engaged with the other.

A student, not part of the school-step lunchtime deliberations, says they understand “‘how the mural could be offensive to some people.’” But offense is important – it communicates an individual’s boundaries – to others and to the individual. The student encapsulates this sentiment, asserting that “‘America did some horrible things. ... They should keep [the mural] as a way to [acknowledge] that we’re not neglecting the fact that we did

this’.”²²¹ Students deserve honest and full answers to their questions, and if these answers are not known, or these questions have not yet been considered, by the adults to which these students turn, then they need the space to look elsewhere for answers. The student discussions on the steps of the building is a step in the right direction. Arnautoff and Crumpler would be pleased.

²²¹. Ibid.

APPENDIX A

SUPPLEMENTAL IMAGES



Figure A1. Maritime Museum, 900 Beach St, San Francisco, CA 94109. Architect and Artists: William Mooser, III (architect); Hilaire Hiler (interior murals); Sargent Johnson (bas relief façade and veranda mosaic); Beniamino Bufano (sculptor), 1936. Built under the auspices of the WPA, the San Francisco Maritime Museum (formerly the Aquatic Park Bathhouse), exhibits details of the *Streamline Moderne* style in its architecture. Source: Wikipedia, s.v. “SFMaritimeMuseum,” photo provided by en.User:Leonard G., at English Wikipedia, Creative Commons, CC-SA-1.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/sa/1.0/>), November 9, 2005, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SFMaritimeMuseum.jpg>.



Figure A2. Alameda Theater, 2317 Central Ave, Alameda, CA 94501. Architect: Timothy Pflueger, 1932. The Alameda Theater – also designed by GWHS architect Timothy Pflueger – exhibits the curved corners and attention to bold lines that are indicative of the *Streamline Moderne* style. Here, though, the motion indicated is vertical, rather than horizontal – more like a rocket ship than a car or ocean liner. Source: Wikipedia, s.v. “AlamedaTheatre,” photo provided by User:Binksternet, self-published work, released into the public domain, no restrictions on use, Creative Commons, PD-self, November 2, 2008, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AlamedaTheatre.jpg>.



Figure A3. Jared French (1905-88), *Meal Time with the Early Coal Miners*, 1938, oil on canvas (unknown whether affixed to board, or directly to the wall and framed), United States Post Office, 150 W. Main Street, Plymouth, PA 18651, lobby wall. Painted under the auspices of the Section of Fine Arts. This post office mural, painted by artist Jared French, is an example of work that received criticism from Treasury Section bureaucrats, such as Edward Rowan, over its depictions of nudity and poverty. Previously, French submitted a sketch for the Parcel Post Office mural, in Richmond (VA), intended to represent Confederate General J.E.B. ('Jeb') Stuart's 'Raiders.' However, the sketch included several naked men, leading Rowan to refuse and condemn the design, saying "it [the design] is too obviously flying in the face of the public." For his next post office commission – this time in Plymouth, Pennsylvania – French provided a cheeky response. Art historian, Frances K. Pohl notes that French, though he "partially [clothed] his handsome, muscular youths in the foreground, ... left a fully naked young man facing the viewer in a boat in the top right background." Quote: Pohl, *Framing America* (2012): 394. Photo: Jimmy Emerson, DVM. Source: *The Living New Deal*, s.v. "Post Office Mural – Plymouth PA," <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/post-office-mural-plymouth-pa/>. Used with permission of the United States Postal Service. © All rights reserved.



Figure A4. Hale Woodruff, *The Mutiny on the Amistad*, 1939, oil on canvas, one of a six panel mural series relating the Amistad history, 6 x 10 ft, Collection of the Savery Library, Talladega College, Talladega, AL (image courtesy of Talladega College). This panel depicts the history of the slaver-ship, *La Amistad*, and the captive Mende people who took control of the ship off the coast of Cuba in 1839. The series depicts the story from the “mutiny,” to the trial of the Mende captives, and through to their eventual return home to Africa. Sources: Laura C. Mallonee, “Hale Woodruff’s Vibrant Murals Immortalize African-American History,” *Hyperallergic*, January 7, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/172987/hale-woodruffs-vibrant-murals-immortalize-african-american-history/>; Balasz Takac, “Paintings of Victory – Hale Woodruff’s Amistad Mutiny Murals at Talladega College,” *Widewalls*, January 20, 2021, <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/hale-woodruff-amistad-mutiny-murals>.



Figure A5. Victor Arnautoff, *Fisherman at Baker Beach*, n.d., gouache and watercolor on paper, Collection of the Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA, Gift of Sylvia and Eric Elsesser, 2003.124.1. Source: Oakland Museum of California, <http://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/20031241>.



Figure A6. Victor Arnautoff, *Richmond: Industrial City*, 1941, mural panel, oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft, commissioned by the U.S. Treasury Section of Fine Arts. Formerly installed in the downtown post office lobby, in Richmond, California, this Arnautoff mural was removed from the walls in 1976, stored in the post office basement, and forgotten. It was rediscovered in 2014. Recently, the Fine Art Conservation Lab, in Goleta, California, restored the work. Upon completion, it was installed in the Richmond Museum of History & Culture, as part of their collection. Source: Richmond Museum of History & Culture, s.v. “Arnautoff Mural,” n.d., <https://richmondmuseum.org/history/arnautoff-mural/>.



Figure A7. Single-headed meteor hammer [referred to in Chinese as either *Fei Chui* (flying hammer) or *Lui Xing Chui* (meteor hammer)], steel, Chinese in origin, late Qing Dynasty (ruled 1644-1912), Collection of Taiyuan City, in Shanxi Province, China. The average width and height of a single-headed meteor hammer is 2 x 2 in, and the average weight is 11lb 10 $\frac{2}{5}$ oz. It consists of a fourteen-sided polygon (tetrakaidecagon) attached to a chain by an s-hook, and is finished with a metal ring at the opposite end. Source: Neil Anderson, “Antique Meteor Hammer,” *Dragon Chases the Pearl: Exploring Antique Martial Art Weapons of China* (blog), last updated July 11, 2020, <https://www.antiquechinesesword.com/meteor-hammer>.



Figure A8. Eugène Delacroix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple* /*Liberty Leading the People*, 1830, oil on canvas, $8\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{3}{5}$ ft, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France The image of *Liberté*, or as the French refer to her, *Marianne*, leads the people in the second French Revolution on July 28, 1830. Typically, the spirit of *Liberty* is personified as a woman, often with a bared chest and a ripped dress. These attributes trace back to Ancient Greek statues, which often depicted women, goddesses, and feminine personifications as nude, or semi-nude, in loose, draped gowns. Liberty is dressed more modestly in her reincarnation as the *Statue of Liberty* (see A9 image below).
Source: Wikimedia, s.v. “Eugène Delacroix – Le 28 Juillet. *La Liberté guidant le peuple*,” image provided by User: Trzęsacz, Creative Commons, Public Domain, PD-Art (PD-old-auto-expired), last updated April 11, 2017,
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eug%C3%A8ne_Delacroix -
Le 28 Juillet. La Libert%C3%A9_guidant le peuple.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eug%C3%A8ne_Delacroix_-_Le_28_Juillet._La_Libert%C3%A9_guidant_le_peuple.jpg).



Figure A9. Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, *Statue of Liberty*, dedicated on October 28, 1886, copper statue atop a poured concrete base, faced in granite, height (statue to torch tip only): 151 ft 1 in; Height (statue to torch tip plus with pedestal): 305 ft 1 in, Liberty Island, New York Harbor, New York City, Gift of the People of France to the People of the United States. “Lady Liberty” strides over broken chains, yet this detail is almost impossible to see from ground level (details shown in fig. A10). The breaking chains trope is echoed in Siqueiros’s *Nueva Democracia* and Crumpler’s *Untitled (Multi-Ethnic Heritage)*. Source: Wikipedia, s.v. “Lady Liberty under a blue sky (cropped),” Creative Commons, CC-BY-SA-4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>), photo taken by User:Mcj1800, October 5, 2015, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lady_Liberty_under_a_blue_sky_\(cropped\)_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lady_Liberty_under_a_blue_sky_(cropped)_cropped.jpg).



Figure A10. *Statue of Liberty* (details). Two aerial views provide a glimpse of Lady Liberty and her chains. The left image catches her in the act of walking over them, while the right image provides a close-up of the shackles and a foot. Source: National Park Service (NPS), Statue of Liberty National Monument (NM), last updated February 26, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/abolition.htm>.



Figure A11. Grant Wood (1891-1942), *Parson Weems' Fable*, 1939, oil on canvas, 4 $\frac{1}{5}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{5}$ ft, Collection of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, TX, 190.43. George Washington biographer, Parson Mason Locke Weems, pulls back a curtain to reveal a young George admitting to chopping down his father's cherry tree. The artist tops a child's body with a mature Washington head. The implication here, is that though Washington is a youth in this fabled moment, he was always the stalwart man who became president. Source: Wikipedia, s.v. "Parson Weems' Fable," Creative Commons, Public Domain, PD-Art (PD-old-auto), page last edited on January 3, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parson_Weems%27_Fable.jpg.



Figure A12. John C. McRae (engraver); Henry Brueckner (painter), *The Prayer at Valley Forge from the Original Painting by Henry Brueckner*, 1866, published by Joseph Laing (London, Edinburgh, New York, c. 1889), engraving, Collection of The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., lccn# 96521655. In this engraving, George Washington kneels to pray in the snow at Valley Forge. This is largely thought to be a myth, as Washington, a former surveyor and seasoned military officer, would certainly know the risks of damp and hypothermia, and thus avoid prolonged contact with the wet. Source: Wikipedia, Creative Commons, Public Domain, PD-Art (PD-old-100), last updated December 9, 2020, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valley_Forge_prayer.jpg.



Figure A13. Emanuel Leutze (1816-68), *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851, oil on linen, 12²/₅ x 21¹/₅ ft, Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 97.34, Gift of John Stewart Kennedy (1897). George Washington balances perfectly on the edge of a low skiff, despite the choppy waters of the Delaware. In this crossing, many men were lost. Source: Wikipedia, s.v. “Valley Forge prayer,” Creative Commons, Public Domain, PD-Art (PD-old-100-expired), page last edited on December 9, 2020, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Washington_Crossing_the_Delaware_by_Emanuel_Leutze,_MMA-NYC,_1851.jpg.



Figure A14. Artist Unknown, *Emmett Till*, mural painted on a boarded-up storefront, downtown Oakland, CA, July 2020. After the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, protests ignited across the United States and around the world. Impromptu murals provided an outlet for emotion. More than one person made comparisons between the Floyd murder and the senseless murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in 1955, the implication being that race relations have not improved much in 65 years. Source: JR Valrey, “Supervisor Shamann Walton’s CAREN Act Seeks to Legally Address the Weaponization of Dialing 911,” *San Francisco BayView – National Black Newspaper*, July 9, 2020, <https://sfbayview.com/2020/07/supervisor-shamann-waltons-caren-act-seeks-to-legally-address-the-weaponization-of-calling-911/#>.



Figure A15. (right) Aziz Asmar and Anis Hamdoun, *George Floyd Memorial*, mural painted on a crumbling edifice, Idlib, Syria, June 2020. As far away as Syria, the heartbreaking news of the murder of American George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin inspired mural creation. Artist Aziz Asmar stated that “Floyd’s death ‘by suffocation’ reminded him of Syrian civilians ‘killed by suffocation after the Syrian regime hit them with chemical weapons’.” Photo: Unknown. Source: Catherine Park, “Syrian Artists Memorialize George Floyd with Mural in War-Torn City,” *Fox 5 Washington DC news*, published June 1, 2020, <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/syrian-artists-memorialize-george-floyd-with-mural-in-war-torn-city>.

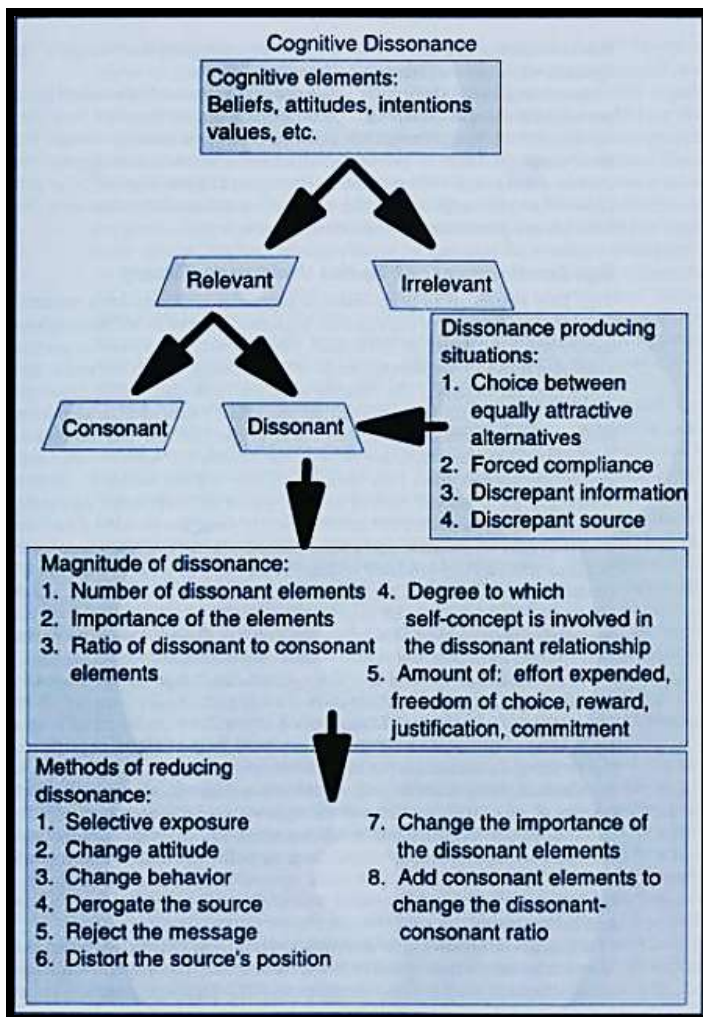


Figure A16. This table shows the progression of decisions an individual goes through when they encounter dissonance. Image Source: Infante, Dominic A., Andrew S, Rancer, and Deanna F. Womack. *Building Communication Theory*. 3rd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1997), 163.

APPENDIX B

SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCES

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B8. Johnson Publishing Company. "Jet Vol VIII No. 9." September 15, 1955. Magazine (periodical). Ink on paper. 6 x 4¹/₈ x 1¹/₈ in (closed); 6 x 8⁵/₁₆ x 1¹/₈ in (open). Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Gift of Elmer J. Whiting, III, 2011.17.5. https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2011.17.5; Nodjimbadem, Katie. "Emmett Till's Open Casket Funeral Reignited the Civil Rights Movement." *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2, 2015. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/emmett-tills-open-casket-funeral-reignited-the-civil-rights-movement-180956483/>; Santi, Christina. "Remembering Emmett Till's Brutal Murder." *Ebony*, July 25, 2019. <https://www.ebony.com/news/remembering-emmett-till-63-years-after-his-brutal-killing/>. Fourteen-year-old Chicago-born, Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam on August 28, 1955, because he reportedly whistled at Bryant's wife while she was working the counter at their grocery store. For this crime, the two white men kidnapped Till (who was Black), beat him senseless, and later made him carry a 75-pound cotton-gin fan to the banks of the Tallahatchie River, where they gouged out his eye, shot him in the head, and finally tied the cotton-gin fan to his neck with barbed wire before throwing him into the Tallahatchie. The boy's body was found three days later, and by that point the body was only identified by an initialed ring he on his hand. His mother, Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley, took her sadness, anger, and outrage at those who murdered her son, and refused to allow her only-child to go quietly to the grave. She requested an open casket funeral, and forbade the mortician from preserving or touching up the body. Thousands of people attended the service, and on September 15, 1955, *JET* magazine, with permission from Tim-Mobley, ran photos of Till's mutilated body in his coffin, with the article "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth." Bryant and Milam were found "not-guilty" on September 23. This wide publication of Till's coffin photo was played and instrumental part in ignited the '60s Civil Rights Movement; Nevett, Joshua. "George Floyd: The Personal Cost of Filming Police Brutality." *BBC News*, June 11, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52942519>; "George Floyd: What Happened in the Final Moments of His Life." *BBC News*, July 16, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726#:~:text=A%20memorial%20service%20for%20George,righ%20activist%20Rev%20Al%20Sharpton>; Sullum, Jacob. "Derek Chauvin May Get a Sentence Much Shorter than the one William Barr Thought Would be Seen as Too Lenient." *reason.com*, February 12, 2021. <https://reason.com/2021/02/12/derek-chauvin-may-get-a-sentence-much-shorter-than-the-one-william-barr-thought-would-be-seen-as-too-lenient/>; Muzzy, Emalyn. "The Chauvin Trial: What You Need to Know." *The Minnesota Daily*, March 1, 2021. <https://mndaily.com/265965/news/the-chauvin-trial-what-you-need-to-know/>. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by Officer Derek Chauvin for supposedly using a fraudulent \$20 at a Minneapolis grocery store. Floyd was forcibly restrained by other officers on the scene, while Chauvin thrust his left knee down on Floyd's neck, and proceeded to hold it there for seven minutes and forty-six seconds. Floyd became unresponsive after about six minutes, but Chauvin continued to bear down. Bodycam footage shows that Floyd said he could not breathe more than twenty times and pleaded for his life. Seventeen-year old Darnella Frazier, was among the crowd pleading with

officers to stop. She recorded the murder on her cell phone released the recording on Facebook, resulting in protests around the world and calls for police reform and defunding police departments. Currently, the state of Minnesota is slated to begin its trial of Chauvin on March 8, 2021. He is charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Artists, professional and nonprofessional responded with works of remembrance and protest. They poured their emotions into images that live on in the people and actions they inspired. The memory of Till was lost for a time, but has been resuscitated through books and documentaries. This period of loss, caused by the very human desire to tuck terrible events in the past, kept Till's history away from memory, and perhaps led to a lack of vigilance against racist statements and laws. It perhaps blinded people to all the tiny little acts that build and inspire and churn until awaken as intolerance, violence, and lack of empathy in the following generations. These two lives are linked through time, one affecting the other, just as in *Life of Washington* and *Multi-Ethnic Heritage*. This shared emotional connection is on display in the mural of Emmett Till (left image), painted in Oakland, California, during the Summer of 2020 protests for racial justice that was sparked by Floyd's murder. In Idlib, Syria, Floyd's murder resonated with Aziz Asmar and Anis Hamdoun, who painted a memorial mural to him on crumbling wall in the war-torn city.

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 - *Series 2*: Correspondence, circa 1923-2008. 0.5 Linear Feet. Box 1, Folders 11-15, 17-25, 29, 35, and 37.
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- *Series 5: Printed Material*, 1923-1998, 2007-2017. 0.6 Linear Feet. Boxes 1-2, Oversize (5). Box 1, Folders 53 and 54, and Box 2, Folders 1-13, and Oversize 5.
- *Series 6: Scrapbook*, 1928-1968, 1979-1981. 0.2 Linear Feet. Bound Volume (4). Scrapbooks 1928-1968 and 1979-1981, and Bound Volume 4.
- *Series 7: Photographic Material*, circa 1920s – circa 1960s; 2-15. 0.2 Linear Feet. Box 2.
- *Series 8: Artwork*, circa 1920s – circa 1950s. Box 2, Folder 28.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Megan Frances Refice was born in a small northern Indiana town during the blizzard of 1980. Since her rural beginnings, her later years are marked with life in larger, urban areas. In 1993, she moved with her family to the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas metroplex. After graduating high school in 1999, she moved to Austin, Texas. In 2004, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and history, with a minor in women's studies, from The University of Texas at Austin. In Fall 2019, she enrolled at The University of Texas at Dallas, in the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History (EODIAH) as part of the program's second year cohort. She completed her thesis, *Sublime Dissonance: Art, Politics, and Historical Record on a San Francisco School Wall*, and matriculated with a Master of Arts in Art History in the Spring 2021 semester. She lives in Arlington, Texas with her husband of 16 years and two insane cats.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Megan Frances Refice

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EDUCATION

MA in Art History, The University of Texas at Dallas,

Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History (EODIAH) – May 2022 (anticipated)

Thesis: Sublime Dissonance: Art, Politics, and Historical Record on a San Francisco

School Wall

Continuing Education courses, Tarrant County Community College – 2016 – 2019

(Studio art, art history, and French)

Alternative Teaching Certificate, English Language Arts (ELA) 8-12, Texas Teachers - 2008

BA in English & History, The University of Texas at Austin – May 2004

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Student Research Assistant, The University of Texas at Dallas – May – December 2020

Conducted research and created PowerPoint presentations for Professor Bonnie Pitman,

Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History, and

Director of Art-Brain Innovations at the Center for Brain Health.

Instructional Aide, Dual Credit, Tarrant County Community College - July 2017 – October 2019

Advised students, created materials, and archived information. Aide to the VP of

Academic Affairs during file consolidation project.

Teller, Fort Worth Community Credit Union – December 2015 - June 2017

Library Assistant, Hurst Public Library – June 2015 – October 2015

* Awarded COIN for excellence in service from the City of Hurst.

Data Analyst, Nielsen (TV Ratings) – February 2011 – May 2015

* Awarded Circle of Excellence – Impact Player representing the Western Region, 2012.

Teacher (English Language Arts), Harmony Science Academy – August 2009 – July 2010

Yearbook Creative Manager and Co-Instructor of the Art Club.

Teacher (all ages and subjects), Huntington Learning Center – March 2007 – July 2009

Certified SAT/ACT prep instructor (Reading & Writing sections).

* Voted Teacher-of-the-Month (multiple occasions).

RESEARCH INTERESTS

My research interests are public art, murals, monuments, Medieval manuscripts, and photography, with a focus on visual culture, iconography/iconology, and transmit nonverbal communication.

GRANT SUBMISSIONS

Travel Research Grant, Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History (EODIAH), at The University of Texas at Dallas.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Typing Speed: 50 wpm

Software: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Adobe, Visio

LANGUAGES

Spanish (semi-fluent speaking, reading, writing); French (reading and some speaking); Italian (some reading); Former education in Chinese and Latin

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

College Art Association (CAA) - since 2020

Public Art Dialogue (PAD) - since 2020

KERA - National Public Radio, Dallas, TX, Member and Volunteer, since 2010

ACTIVITIES CONCURRENT WITH PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Substitute Teacher, HEB ISD, North Texas, 2007 – 2009.

Freelance writer/editor/researcher, artist, website content developer, photographer (wedding, graduation, band, and fine art photographer), and tutor, ongoing since 2005.

SCHOLARLY PURSUITS CONCURRENT WITH UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Led a discussion group on *Animosity Between Women*, for the first *Ladyfest*, Texas - 2003

Non-fiction book researcher for Anna Holmes (*Hell Hath No Fury*), primary documents - 2001

REFERENCES

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