CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Discussions

Volume 20 | Issue 1 Article 3

2024

Black Nationalism and Black Power's Influence on Karamu House

I'Maya Gibbs
Case Western Reserve University

Recommended Citation

Gibbs, I'Maya (2024) "Black Nationalism and Black Power's Influence on Karamu House," *Discussions*: Vol. 20: Iss. 1, Article 3.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.28953/2997-2582.1043
Available at: https://commons.case.edu/discussions/vol20/iss1/3

Credit: Mariana Parilli-Castillo

Black Nationalism and Black Power's Influence on Karamu House

DOI: https://doi.org/10.28953/2997-2582.1043

I'Maya Gibbs

ABSTRACT: This article will explore the impact of the Black Nationalist and Black Power Movement on Karamu House, the oldest Black theater in America. Karamu House, initially established as an integrated settlement house in 1915, later became an influential community theater in Cleveland, Ohio. By examining how an integrated theater shifted into prominently producing radical Black artistry, this article will uncover how Black Nationalism and Black Power changed the leadership, artistry, and goals of Karamu House. Furthermore, studying this shift highlights Black artists' historical utilization of theater as a form of resistance against racial oppression and Karamu House's participation in this artistic protest.

With 108 years since its inception, Karamu House has been recognized as the oldest Black theater in America and an exemplar of integration and Black arts. Karamu, founded in 1915, was a racially integrated settlement house that featured children's dance, music, art, and theater programs. Although Karamu initially fought to advocate coexistence between Black and White people, mid-twentieth-century shifts in racial relations pushed Black artists to change the focus of Karamu. Racial pride, Black identity, and an attention to inequality took precedence over coexistence as the Black Nationalist (BN) and Black Power (BP) Movements influenced the leadership, artistry, and goals of Karamu House.

BN was a Midwest movement rooted in twentieth-century notions of Black separatism from the 1930s to the 1970s, and was later redefined by The Nation of Islam (NOI), a prominent Black Muslim political organization (Blake, 1969, p. 18). The NOI advanced Black Nationalism with tenets of self-determination, racial uplift, and economic and political freedom independent of White people (Blake, 1969, p. 18). Contrastingly, the BP Movement was a zeitgeist catalyzed by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a significant college-student activist group in the 1960s (Joseph, 2009). The BP Movement was codified and centralized in 1966 by the Black Panther Party (BPP), a West Coast Black militant political organization that promoted Black pride, self-defense, and racial equality (Joseph, 2009). Moreover, both of these movements ignited the Black community across the country and galvanized Black organizations, significantly Karamu House, to actively resist racism.

Early History of Karamu

Before Karamu's radical shift, it was founded on progressive ideals of racial integration. Created by recently married Oberlin graduates Russel and Rowena Jellife, it comes as no surprise that, from its inception, Karamu advocated for integration. Oberlin was the first American college to admit Black students in 1835 (Waite, 2001). The Jelliffes, influenced by their alma mater, reached out to people across socioeconomic, religious, and racial boundaries within their community in inner-city Cleveland. They asserted that integration was integral to the betterment of society (Silver, 1961, p. 25). Therefore, Karamu was founded on principles of equality and integration that would define its legacy.

Continuing to advance its integrationist values, Karamu House innovatively bent casting conventions with colorblind casting. Karamu House was the first theater in the United States to cast regardless of race. During a 1920 children's production of *Fairies*?, rather than casting Black kids as "brownies" and White kids as "fairies", the director swapped both roles in the show (Silver, 1961, p. 55). Karamu's engagement in colorblind shows was groundbreaking, setting a precedent for other theaters and defied segregation in Cleveland. During the early to mid-twentieth century, segregation and racial bias were at their zenith, especially within the city of Cleveland. Moreover, with an increase in Black migrants to the city due to the Great Migration between the 1910s and 1930s, there was a rise in racial tensions between Black and White communities (Phillips, 1996). Thus, Karamu House invited Black and White Clevelanders to perform together, making the theater function as an agent of social change. Altering casting conventions boldly conveyed the message that Black and White people were equal and deserved to share the stage. Further, swapping roles alluded to the idea that race was not a defining characteristic for characters onstage, and by extension, not in society. Pursuing its mission of racial inclusion, Karamu remarkably implemented color-conscious casting within its shows, radically challenging racism and segregation.

Trailblazing with its integration and colorblind casting, theater at Karamu rose in prominence and further cemented the organization. The children's theater program laid the foundation for the Black adult theater troupe—the Dumas Players, later known as the Gilpin Players—in the 1920s (Silver, 1961, p. 65). The Dumas Players was a group of Black actors who, on watching children's theater, believed that they could also contribute to Karamu's mission through the art form (Silver, 1961, p. 64-65). Performing an array of popular morality plays, such as W. H. Smith's *The Drunkard*, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, and Langston Hughes's *Little Ham*, the troupe introduced to people within the Cleveland community the art of theater (Silver, 1961, p. 492). Combining entertaining plays and a talented troupe of Black actors, Karamu legitimized itself as a communal theater organization, successfully producing over thirty consecutive seasons.

Despite Karamu's success, the theatre received widespread criticism for its depiction of African Americans. Karamu's shows elicited a mixed range of emotions from Clevelanders, but specifically sparked tensions within the Black community. Black leaders and newspapers viewed Karamu's shows as offensive. Regarding shows like Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* produced in 1931, which depicted a Black Pullman porter going to the West Indies and becoming an exploitative and raging emperor, Black voices expressed outrage regarding its harmful content. Civil Rights advocate, Ohio state legislator, and editor of *The Cleveland Gazette*, Harry C. Smith expressed "Both of Eugene O'Neill's plays, *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and *Welded*, [sic] were built for the purpose of increasing prejudice against our race" (Silver, 1961, p. 117). In O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, the titular Black role was written and performed as an "animalistic" and "wild" beast. Moreover, it harkened to the Black brute stereotype, which was the portrayal of a "dangerous," "savage," and "menacing" African American male. Characterizing a Black man onstage as "bestial" and "brutish" played into racial stereotypes racist views on the "savagery" and "inferiority" of Black men, which angered Black Clevelanders.

> "Karamu House was the first theater in the United States to cast regardless of race."

In addition, the mirroring of minstrel dialects in the dialogue—nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century shows in which White actors presented themselves in Blackface and comically performed offensive racial stereotypes—further elicited discriminatory views of African Americans. Quoting Harry C. Smith's lengthy tirade on the show, "...The value of the plays as artistic efforts, on the part of both author and actors, pales into [sic] insignificance, as far as we are concerned, when the harm their presentation does the race is taken into consideration" (Silver, 1961, p. 117). Therefore, when seeing the negative stereotypical performance of *The Emperor Jones*, many Black Clevelanders felt insulted by the disparaging representation of African Americans. It further limited Black people artistically within the public and relegated them to one detrimental image. Controversy continually arose from Karamu's content, direction, and depiction of Black people. Furthermore, with the continued progression of Black thought and consciousness, the rise of Black freedom movements thirty years later would continue to incite Black protest at Karamu.

> "Karamu's shows elicited a mixed range of emotions from Clevelanders, but specifically sparked tensions within the Black community.."

The Rise of Black Nationalism and Black Power

The later rise of the BN and BP movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s signified a shift in Black consciousness. The BN and BP movements came from and were an extension of the Civil Rights Movement. Many Black Americans, particularly those outside of the South, became disillusioned by the Civil Rights Movement and saw that, despite fighting for equality and integration, their goals would not be fully reached because of the remaining racism and discrimination within schools, housing, and the job market. In particular, despite Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protected employees from racial job discrimination, a majority of Black Americans were still unable to access jobs with higher positions and meaningful wages (Aiken et al, 2013). Additionally, despite the passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which prohibited discrimination in the sale and renting of homes, many Black Americans still found themselves confined to inhospitable low-income housing in segregated and red-lined neighborhoods (Massey, 2015). The lingering inequities within the Black communities on the West Coast and in the Midwest sparked two movements, the BN and BP movements, that were distinct but comparable in goals and values.

The BN Movement was a socio-political movement that focused on Black Americans' social improvement. Prior to the 1960s, BN was advanced by Marcus Garvey, the prolific founder of the United Negro Improvement Association in

1914 (Blake, 1969, p. 18). Garvey's ideas of a united African diaspora, a celebration of Black pride and culture, and Black separatism defined Black nationalism and inspired the larger 1960s movement (Blake, 1969, p. 18-19). Entering the 1960s, the NOI spearheaded Black nationalism and spread its influence throughout America. The NOI unified Black nationalism under its principles of self-determination, morality, and separatism and promoted its message within Black communities and mosques. Most importantly, Black Nationalists believed that separating from White society would advance the Black community economically, politically, and culturally due to the pervasive racism, inequality, and oppression Black Americans endured at the hands of White people. With thousands of Black members of the NOI Black Nationalist movement, Black nationalism exerted a significant influence on Black American psyches during the 1960s and 1970s.

Conversely, the BP Movement was a primarily youth-led West Coast movement officially organized by the BPP (Joseph, 2009). In 1966, the phrase, "we want Black power" was belted by Stokely Carmichael, an influential Civil Rights activist and Chairman of the 1960s college student activist group, the SNCC (Joseph, 2009). The chants for Black power and Black freedom were echoed back through the country; however, the most notable response came from Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seales in Oakland, California. Newton and Seales were Black militant Oakland activists who created the BPP, a Black political organization that advocated for Black people to have the freedom to determine their own future socially, economically, politically, and educationally (Joseph, 2009). The BPP specifically called for social betterment within every aspect of Black lives and outlined the tenets of Black Power within their historic "10 Point Plan," which crystallized the BP Movement. With goals of empowering the Black community, putting an end to Black oppression and inequality, centralizing Black education, and ensuring welfare in the Black community, the call for Black Power encompassed an array of issues that impacted the community.

Black Nationalism and Black Power's Impact on Karamu House

The influence of the BN and BP movements effectively changed Karamu House's leadership. Both movements created a zeitgeist in the 1960s that defined the period as one rooted in Black identity, power, and upliftment. Before the 1960s and for over 50 years, Karamu House was primarily led by all-White leadership organizing Black artists. However, a rise in BN and BP consciousness immensely shaped the theater. The 1965 assassination of BN leader, Malcolm X, sent shockwaves throughout the nation and caused a massive resurgence in Black nationalism. Nationalist beliefs, in particular Malcolm X's belief in Black separatism, began to spread around the country within African-American communities and it encouraged Black militancy in response to racism (Blake, 1969, p. 15). The separation of Black people from White people was championed as a solution to the racism, inequities, and discrimination that Black Americans experienced in White American society.

"With goals of empowering the Black community, putting an end to Black oppression and inequality, centralizing Black education, and ensuring welfare in the Black community, the call for Black Power encompassed an array of issues that impacted the community."

Thus, in 1966, Black Karamu artists responded to these growing Black nationalist beliefs and protested for the removal of White Executive Director Olcutt Sanders, who was previously a high-ranking administrator for the American Friends Service Committee, a global social justice organization (*J. Olcutt Sanders*, 2013). By ousting Sanders, Karamu artists were engaging in Black separatism as a means to improve and develop Karamu as a Black performing arts organization. Moreover, in installing a new Black executive director, J. Newton Hill, the former director of the Lagos Office of African-American Institute, Karamu artists asserted that with a Black leader, Black issues, experiences, and perspectives would better be addressed within Karamu and advance African Americans societally (J. Newton Hill, Aesthetics of African Art lecture, 1968). Therefore, Karamu artists were inspired by the BN Movement and appointed a Black executive director to enact Black separatism.

Karamu's shift in leadership was further motivated by the BP Movement's promotion of Black communal and political agency. The birth of BP and the BPP occurred in 1966, the same year that Karamu artists protested for a new Black leader. Additionally, in 1966 the Hough Riots broke out within a predominantly Black Cleveland community after a Black man was denied entry into a White restaurant (Lapeyrolerie, 2001, p. 5). As a result of heated racial tensions, the Hough Riots signified a frustration with and resistance to the racist treatment of Black Clevelanders. Therefore, these racial tensions within Cleveland produced a Black community

which sought to gain political power and fight against racism; they were thus primed for the BP Movement. The movement's goals to empower Black people to take control of their neighborhoods, economics, education, and social justice resonated within Black communities, especially at Karamu House.

Karamu artists realized that Black leaders needed to be at the helm of the theater to ensure its central focus on Black people, identity, and experiences; thus, in response to the strained racial tensions in Cleveland, Black artists took control of the theater by demanding that a Black man become executive director. Moreover, Karamu artists' attainment of power through a Black figurehead paralleled the BPP's first tenet of Black power, "We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community" (Newton, 2001, p. 82-83). Having the power to determine what stories are told, how Black people are seen on stage, and leading the theater through a Black director, Karamu artists were enacting principles of Black Power. For the first time in Karamu's history, Black artists elected a new leader and, similar to BP tenets, determined the destiny of Black people at Karamu and in the Cleveland community.

Following the shift in leadership, the BN and BP movements also drastically influenced the shows produced at Karamu House. Before the 1960s, Karamu produced almost entirely White plays written by White playwrights, with only a few detailing Black stories. From 1960-1969 only 11 out of the 55 plays produced focused on Black lived experiences. Karamu's productions of predominantly White shows facilitated colorblind casting because, unlike Black shows, White shows often did not heavily specify cultural or racial identities within their scripts, which allowed White and Black artists to bend these flexible casting requirements. Nevertheless, Karamu identified itself as an influential theater in Cleveland by producing popular theater by notable playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, George Bernard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, and Samuel Beckett. Karamu's productions of *The Glass Menagerie* (1965), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1965), *Waiting for Godot* (1962), and *Of Mice and Men* (1961) mostly focused on White experiences and the issues and problems faced by White people. With the exceptions of plays such as *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961) and *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (1966) that mentioned race, few plays delved into Black experiences. However, with the emergence of the BN and BP Movement, Karamu began to transform its artistic direction. The BN and BP movements' zeitgeist aided in the progression of the Black Arts Movement which used the arts as an outlet to promote racial pride, uplift Black culture, and fight against racial oppression.

The leader of the Black Arts Movement, playwright Amiri Baraka, established the movement in response to the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 and described its purpose as "to create an art, a literature that would fight for black people's liberation with as much intensity as Malcolm X our 'Fire Prophet' and the rest of the enraged masses who took to the streets" (Baraka, 1985). The Black Arts Movement was influenced by BN and BP which caused the Movement to explode and ricochet across America, setting Karamu House ablaze. With the influence of these Black radical ideas in Black arts, Karamu began producing more works that focused on Black experiences. For example, between 1970 and 1973, 18 out of 39 shows produced focused on Black stories, experiences, and issues. With an emphasis on themes of Black struggles, pride, and identity, Karamu brought the BN, BP, and Black Arts Movement into the Cleveland community.

"Karamu artists realized that Black leaders needed to be at the helm of the theater to ensure its central focus on Black people, identity, and experiences."

Following the Black Arts Movement, Karamu produced a variety of Black plays that offered fresh takes on African-American life and explored the joys, sorrows, and essence of Black experiences. Karamu artists were not just implementing BN and BP ideals within their theater but also performing works by Baraka and Ed Bullins that were formed through the lens of BN and BP. The works produced such as Ed Bullin's *Electronic Nigger* (1970), Joseph A. Walker's *The River Niger* (1970), Ted Shine's *Contributions* (1972), Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship* (1973), and J.E. Franklin's *Black Girl* (1973) were thought-provoking plays calling out Black experiences of racial oppression and inequality. Three of these plays, Shine's *Contributions*, Baraka's *Slave Ship*, and Walker's *The River Niger* exemplify the influence of the BN and BP Movement at Karamu House.

The BN and BP Movement heavily inspired Karamu's depiction of Black militancy and protest within *Contributions*. Ted Shine's creation of the play in 1969 stems from his involvement in the Black Arts Movement; he wrote the play in response to the civil unrest of the 1960s and the anger of some "young Black militants" (1996, p. 831). The play was a product of the Black militant movements in the 1960s, such as the BN and BP Movement, which informed the action and message of the play. *Contributions* dramatizes a Black grandmother, Mrs. Grace Love, and her grandson, Eugene, preparing for

a 1960s protest. The play is embedded with ideas of Black power, freedom, and militancy, which are central BN and BP principles.

> "Following the Black Arts Movement, Karamu produced a variety of Black plays that offered fresh takes on African-American life and explored the joys, sorrows, and essence of Black experiences."

Eugene's activism evinces strong support for Black freedom and mirrors BN and BP sentiments. For instance, Eugene returns home and recounts his protesting efforts, "He walked up to me and said, 'Boy, what do you and them other niggers want here?' 'Freedom, baby!'" (Shine, 1996, p. 838). Eugene's engagement in protest and declaration of wanting freedom showcases an undeniable message for Black people to fight for their freedom within America. Moreover, Black protesters demanding freedom demonstrates the importance of African Americans collectively confronting racism to attain equality. BN and BP sparked Eugene's resistance because these movements encouraged Black freedom and activism against racism. To illustrate, BP's first tenet directly calls for freedom: "We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community" (Newton, 2001, p. 82-83). BP's call for freedom serves as a powerful tool for African Americans to gain control of their education, economics, and societal treatment. Eugene's call for freedom epitomizes the daring nature, resilience, and vitality of young Black militants and centers Black autonomy as a means to end America's Black racial oppression.

Further, *Contributions* propounds BN and BP beliefs by highlighting Mrs. Love's authentic Black historical experiences. Mrs. Love unveils her racist experiences during Jim Crow, "... Because I'm a tired old Black woman who's been tired, who ain't got no place and never had no place in this country. Don't you think I wanted to have a decent job that would have given me some respect and enough money to feed my family and clothe them decently?" (Shine, 1996, p. 839). Mrs. Love detailing being denied privileges such as getting a "decent job" and receiving "respect" is characteristic of a generation of Black Americans living through Jim Crow. Her inhumane treatment educates audiences on historical Black experiences in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Moreover, her experiences are a performance of the BP tenet, "We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society" (Newton, 2001, p. 82-83). Illuminating Mrs. Love's experiences connects to BP because it reclaims Black historical narratives from dominating White portrayals, empowering Black people to control their own stories. Shine's *Contributions* boldly delineates Black historical experiences as a means to focalize their importance and relevance within modern revolutionary movements.

Correspondingly, Amiri Baraka's 1967 Black radical play, *Slave Ship* also theatrically demonstrates BN and BP ideals. Baraka's involvement in the BP Movement largely influenced his leadership in the 1960s Black Arts Movement and thus overwhelmingly shaped Slave Ship. Baraka retells the African-American experience from their kidnapping to brutal enslavement in the Americas. He depicts the abuse and degrading conditions Africans experienced during the harrowing journey; however, he ingeniously embeds a revolutionary message within the play through an insurrection on a slave plantation. Having slaves denounce and threaten their White master, Baraka (1978, p. 139) strongly employs his characters with a spirit of agency and resistance:

SLAVE 1. Reverend, what we gon' do when the White man come?
SLAVE 2. We gon' cut his fuckin' throat.
SLAVE 3. Devil. Beast. Murderer of women and children. Soulless shit eater!

Baraka reveals an underlying theme of resistance by accentuating the slaves' planning revenge on their master by "cutting his throat" and overthrowing the plantation. He recontextualizes a repressive and dehumanizing setting of a slave plantation as an environment conducive to Black fights against injustice. Through this lens, Baraka's work correlates to the BP and BN sentiment of, "We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community," because Black slaves are breaking free from the shackles of slavery and gaining their liberty from White oppressors (Newton, 2001, p. 82-83).

Additionally, Baraka specifically incorporates BP and BN values of Black empowerment into *Slave Ship*. The entire cast of actors chant for Black resistance, upliftment, and change:

Rise, Rise, Rise
Cut these ties, Black Man Rise....
How far, how long will it be
When the world belongs to you and me
When we gonna rise up, brother
When we gonna rise above the sun
When we gonna take our place, brother

Like the world had just begun? (Baraka, 1978, p. 143)

Singing for the "Black Man" to rise, Baraka's chant operates as a call to action for Black people to "cut these ties" of racial oppression and "rise above the sun" (Baraka, 1978, p. 143). Voicing when Black people will "rise" coincides with the BP and BN movement calling for Black people to fight against racial discrimination and ascend to a higher level, receiving freedom and equal access to, "land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" (Newton, 2001, p. 82-83). Maintaining ownership of Black lives, voices, history, and destinies was integral to the BN and BP Movement, and, therefore, Baraka's lines of "when the world belongs to you and me" promote a tenet of BP in which Black people can control their world. Slave Ship stands out amongst the plays produced at Karamu because it captures the spirit of resistance in such a visceral, innate, and revolutionary way that it effortlessly thrusts audiences into "cutting ties" and jumping into political action.

Furthermore, Joseph A. Walker's *The River Niger* advances BN and BP beliefs. Published and set in 1973, the play centers on a Black working-class family awaiting the return of their son, Jeff, from the Air Force. With Jeff's return home and the introduction of his childhood friend group of Black Panther-esque revolutionaries, the play tackles issues surrounding race, politics, and the American Dream. Returning home, Jeff expresses how he abandoned his coveted role within the Air Force because of the treatment he experienced, which ultimately disappoints his parents. Describing his experiences of having to constantly prove himself to his White counterparts, Jeff details his distaste with the Air Force, "Don't baby me, Mama. I still think I'm the baddest, but I ain't—nor do I want to be a supernigger, 'cause that's all a supernigger is, a *supernigger*. Someone who spends life trying to prove he's as good as the Man." (Walker, 1973, p. 128). Feeling the constant comparison and pressure to "be as good as the Man" in the Air Force, Jeff believes that he competes to ascend to the stature of White men. When Jeff rejects his role as a "supernigger", he is rejecting White supremacy and making Black people rather than White the standard to look up to. Uplifting Black people and the Black identity is a core value within the BP and BN movement. Thus, Jeff's renouncement of being a "supernigger" is a powerful action that directly links to the centrality and primacy of Black people within African American revolutionary movements.

In conjunction, Jeff's Black Panther-esque childhood friends significantly depict and participate in Black radicalism. Jeff's best friend, Mo, is the leader of a Black revolutionary group that practices self-defense tactics and fights against police brutality. He argues for revolution and organizes a violent political plot against police officers; "I'm talking 'bout revolution, man … Black people have been shucking and jivin', passing the buck. Well, we are the buck-ending committee… And in a few days we gonna serve notice on Whitey that the shit has only begun to hit the fan." (Walker, 1973, p. 97). Mo's endeavors to create "revolution" and "serve notice to Whitey" convey a strong revolutionary message for political activism. Moreover, identifying "Whitey," a racial slur for White people, as the receiver of a warning indicates hatred and opposition to White people. Therefore, Mo's calls for revolution are directly aimed at destabilizing White people's political and social structures, which is similar to the BP and BN's goals of decentering White society and breaking its oppressive structure.

Additionally, Mo's idea that Black people have been "passing the buck," but that his organization is the "buck-ending committee" draws upon Black people's exploitation and racism. Black people "shucking and jivin'" and "passing the buck" relate to Black Americans' historical economic exploitation

"Mo's calls for revolution are directly aimed at destabilizing White people's political and social structures, which is similar to the BP and BN's goals of decentering White society and breaking its oppressive structure."

by White society. Building upon this, the phrase "we are the buck ending committee" expresses that Mo's group will end Black people's exploitation, which is a core aim for the BP and BN movements. Further, "we are the buck ending-committee" is also a double entendre for a racial slur. The term "Black Buck" was a demeaning nineteenth–century racial slur used to describe "bestial" Black men who were destructive to White society (Kocić, 2017). Thus, Mo's statement that "we are the buck ending committee" linguistically communicates that his efforts will end White society's racist categorization of Black men as "bucks." *The River Niger*'s depiction of Black revolutionaries emulates and aligns with the radical practices of BP and BN.

Black radical movements' influence on Karamu plays and leadership fundamentally shifted the goals of Karamu House. Rather than continuing to promote racial integration, Karamu's aim solely centered on uplifting and supporting the Black community. For example, Karamu's new Black leader, J. Newton Hill made executive decisions for the organization that were Black-minded and considered the impact programs

and shows would have on the Black community. In addition, the concerted production of Black plays by Black playwrights signified Karamu's artistic focalization of Black experiences. Karamu's change in leadership and production of Black plays expressed new goals for Karamu that no longer highlighted White artistry, but specifically uplifted Black Karamu artists.

> "... the concerted production of Black plays by Black playwrights signified Karamu's artistic focalization of Black experiences."

Conclusion

Consequently, the BN and BP Movement's influence on Karamu House's leadership, plays, and goals provides important insight into the relationship between Black radical movements and Black theater. Karamu's radical shift examines how powerful the BP and BN Movement were in galvanizing Black people and encouraging them to use every platform to resist systems of oppression. Rather than social movements existing solely within political contexts, they also manifested in Black plays and on Black stages. Moreover, Karamu produced politicized theater that called out racism, discrimination, and inequities present within the African-American Cleveland community and throughout America's Black neighborhoods. Thus, Karamu House's radical shift encourages further research specifically within the larger Black Arts Movement to gain an in-depth understanding of the BP and BN Movement's shaping of Black arts.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Renee Sentilles and Dr. Heather Burton for their invaluable guidance and support during my capstone research paper.

Author Biography

I'Maya Gibbs is a Case Western Reserve University senior majoring in Theater and History with a minor in Africana Studies. Originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, I'Maya gained her love of the arts and history from her unique and eclectic upbringing in her hometown. Moreover, inspired by her passion for African American history and theater, I'Maya combines her interests by studying African-Americans' historical use of theater as a form of political protest. Outside of historical research, I'Maya has appeared in over four CWRU Theater Department shows and has studied abroad at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Furthermore, I'Maya endeavors in her future career to historically highlight overlooked Black artists within the Black Arts Movement and beyond.

References

Aiken, J. R., Salmon, E. D., & Hanges, P. J. (2013). The Origins and Legacy of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 28(4), 383–399. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24709875

Baraka, I. A. (1978). Slave Ship. In Baraka, I. A. (Ed.), *The Motion of History, and other plays* (pp. 129-149). William Morrow and Company, Inc.. (1967)

Baraka, A. (1985). The Wailer. *Callaloo*, 23, 248–256. https://doi.org/10.2307/2930501

Blake, J. H. (1969). Black Nationalism. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 382, 15–25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1037110

Cleveland Museum of Art. (1968, June 20). *Lecture - The Aesthetics of African Art by J. Newton Hill : Cleveland Museum of Art : Free Download, borrow, and streaming*. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/cmapr1711/mode/2up.

J. Olcutt Sanders. Square Dancing in the 1800s. (2013, November 14). https://fredfeild.wordpress.com/j-olcutt-sanders/

Joseph, P. E. (2009). The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field. *The Journal of American History*, 96(3), 751–776. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25622477

Kocić, A. (2017). *From the violent "black buck" stereotype to the "Black Hero": Representations of African Americans and black masculinity in American cinema.* Facta Universitatis, Series: Linguistics and Literature. http://casopisi.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/FULingLit/article/view/2303

Lapeyrolerie, O. (2015) ""No Water for Niggers": The Hough Riots and the Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement". *Cleveland Memory*. 28. https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clevmembks/28

Massey D. S. (2015). The Legacy of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. *Sociological forum (Randolph, N.J.)*, 30(Suppl 1), 571–588. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12178

Newton, H. P. (2001). *War against the Panthers: A study of repression in America*. Writers and Readers.

Phillips, K. L. (1996). "But It Is a Fine Place to Make Money": Migration and African-American Families in Cleveland, 1915-1929. *Journal of Social History*, 30(2), 393–413. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3789386

Hatch, J. V., and Shine, T. (1996). Contribution. In Hatch, J. V. (Ed.), *Black Theatre USA: Plays by African Americans* (pp. 831–839). Free Press. (1970)

Silver, R. (1961). *A history of the Karamu Theatre of Karamu House*, 1915-1960 [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1237655647

Waite, C. L. (2001). The Segregation of Black Students at Oberlin College after Reconstruction. *History of Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 344–364. http://www.jstor.org/stable/369200

Walker, J. A. (1973). *The River Niger*. Samuel French.