

African Americans and the Arts
(Daryl Scott)

Black Arts (music, arts, folklore, preservation, cultural heritage, ethnomusicologists)

In the mid-1960s, African Americans experienced a cultural flowering known as the Black Arts Movement, which highlighted the role of Black people in cultural production across the whole gamut of the arts. A product of the Black Power Movement, African American theater, poetry, and literature thrived bringing us household names like Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonja Sanchez. Coming a half-century after the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro generation, the movement reaffirmed the cultural importance of people of African descent to American culture and the power of the Black Arts and artists world history. ASALH dedicates its 98th Annual Black History Theme to African Americans and the Arts.

For centuries Western intellectuals denied or minimized the contributions of people of African descent to the arts as well as history. When we get beyond the long history of denial, we can see the unbroken chain of Black art production from antiquity to the present, from Egypt across Africa, from Europe to the New World. In colonial America, before the founding of the United States, enslaved people, like their ancestors before them, continued their contributions to the arts. Prior to the American Revolution, enslaved Africans of the Low Country began their more than a three-hundred-year tradition of making sweetgrass baskets, revealing their visual artistry via craft. The suffering of those in bondage gave birth to the spirituals, the nation's first contribution to music. Since the founding of the United States, African Americans, as individuals and a people, have excelled at the arts as they developed nationally. Beginning with Phyllis Wheatly, Black poetry, essays, autobiographies, and novels issued forth from black writers such as David Walker and Maria Stewart. Black aesthetics manifested themselves through sculptors like Edmonia Lewis and painters like Henry O. Tanner. By the twentieth century a foundation had been laid in many fields that would make possible the world-renowned art movements of the twentieth century.

In celebrating the entire history of African Americans and the arts, ASALH puts into the national spotlight the richness of past and present with an eye towards what the rest of the twentieth-first century will bring.

The Penultimate Paragraph for the Academic Theme Used for the conference at the Annual Meeting.

Looking back on this long tradition, the ASALH also highlights the participation of the institutions and individuals who preserve and tell the story of Black peoples in the arts throughout the African diaspora. From the antebellum era's Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People to the modern Black research centers and museums of today what we know is

made possible by cultural workers and scholars. ASALH 108th Annual meeting is also dedicated to them.