

The Black Arts Movement and Afrocentrism

By Joy Pappas



The Black Arts Movement began in 1965 after Malcolm X was killed in February of that year and when the Black Arts Repertory Theater was established in Harlem. The movement lasted about ten years until 1975. The greatest impacts of the movement were seen in poetry and theater, beginning in New York and spreading out to the other coast of the country. In 1969, the first scholarly journal, *The Black Scholar*, was established to promote Black Studies. In the mid-1970s, the movement began to fade as it was being celebrated by and intertwined into the white mainstream. The Black Arts Movement did leave many pieces of poetry, theater, and literature. It also helped to lay foundations for today's spoken word and hip hop. The movement also paved the way for Black women writers such as Sonia Sanchez and June Jordan to rise to fame and popularity. The Black Arts Movement was instrumental in creating a long-lasting literary and cultural legacy for Black people. Before the rise of this movement, however, playwright Lorraine Hansberry was touching on key ideas, especially the ideas of Afrocentrism.

Afrocentrism is a cultural and political movement, mainly by African American adherents who viewed themselves as syncretic Africans and believed that their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values. This idea became a big part of the Black Arts Movement, as it was about placing cultural roots in Africa. In Hansberry's play, this was seen through Beneatha going to Nigeria at the end and celebrating and embracing her culture and heritage. Afrocentrism was influenced by some early Black nationalist movements such as Pan-Africanism. During and after the 1960s, Afrocentrism gained legitimacy from the civil rights movement, the multicultural movement, and the immigration of large numbers of nonwhites into the U.S. This movement helped to establish Afrocentric views and beliefs into the white mainstream continuing into modern time. One example can be found in holiday of Kwanzaa created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga.

Sources

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