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The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry

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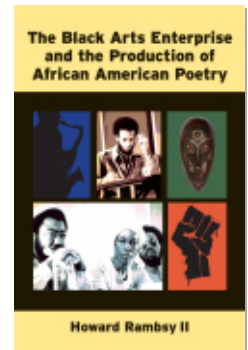
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1 • Getting Poets on the Same Page

The Roles of Periodicals

The efforts of prolific poets did not dictate the extraordinary proliferation of black poetry during the 1960s and 1970s. That is to say, the presentation of hundreds of poems in centralized sites of publication was hardly achieved because of poets' prolificacy and desire to reach large numbers of readers. Writing regularly and having a strong desire to get published does not always translate into publication results. In fact, the belief that writing hard and writing well will necessarily lead to publication is as flawed as the dream that states that hard work will automatically lead to wealth. Writers, as we know, need more than a strong work ethic to develop distinguished publication records. Literary artists of the black arts era, consequently, relied heavily on a network of supportive publishing institutions and editors to ensure the broad circulation of their works.

"Nowhere is the new Black Renaissance more evident than in the number of talented poets who are emerging upon the scene," announced an introductory note to the 1968 annual special section on poetry in *Negro Digest*. Most of the poets "are confronting their experiences and giving vent to their imaginations without apology," explained the editors, "thanks—in large measure—to the growing number of literary outlets for their works."¹ The editors of the magazine were reminding its readers that the emergence of new black poets was being facilitated by black publishing venues. According to literary critic Carolyn Gerald, "The direction and developing quality of black literature can be but imperfectly seen if these journals are ignored." She goes on to write that African American literary magazines and journals "are an important index of the measure and meaning of the sixties."²

The selection and presentation of poems, the promotion of poets,

and the assessment of volumes of poetry constitute central activities performed by periodicals in the material production of verse. In addition, literary magazines and journals serve as those indispensable outlets that mediate poets' initial exposure to large readerships. Nonetheless, relatively little scholarship has examined the essential roles of periodicals in the publication of African American poetry. Taken together, writings produced by James Hall, Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson, Eugene B. Redmond, and Julius Thompson do offer a useful set of historical surveys of literary magazines in general.³ More detailed analyses will be necessary, though, in order to account for the role of periodicals in the representation of poets and the broad circulation of poetry during the era.

Literary magazines such as *Liberator*, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Negro Digest/Black World*, *Black Dialogue*, *Soulbook*, and *Freedomways* were collectively and largely responsible for providing widespread exposure to both the writings and the activities of black poets during the 1960s and 1970s. The tendency of these publications to publish a common group of writers who wrote on overlapping, culturally distinct topics actually advanced the pervasive sense of "nationality," as Redmond observes, that characterized black arts discourse.⁴ The literary magazines and journals published poems, articles on poetics, reviews of poetry, and news regarding African American literary activities and thus operated as invaluable venues for the presentation and appreciation of black poetry and poets. In many instances, these periodicals served as the preliminary site of publication for poems that would later appear in anthologies and volumes of poetry. Moreover, periodicals regularly participated in augmenting the messages of poems, as editors of publications made key decisions concerning presentation.

For instance, Mari Evans's poem "The Black Woman" appears on the cover of the September 1969 annual poetry issue of *Negro Digest*, joined by a photograph of the author, thus showcasing the poet and her poem for readers in ways that Evans could not have done alone. The appearance of the poet and her poem on the front cover of the magazine in 1969 also provided Evans with major publicity for her then upcoming volume of poetry *The Black Woman* (1970). *Negro Digest's* method of presentation also prompted reader-viewers to link the words of the proud and strong black woman in the poem with the accompanying image. Similarly, *Black Dialogue's* presentation of Sonia Sanchez's "a ballad for stirling street" juxtaposes poem and image and thus complements the poet's words with a concrete vision. "Someone shud write" a book

about “stirling street,” proposes Sanchez, to showcase the street’s “beauty of blk / culture” and to celebrate “brothers / TCbing on stirring street.”⁵⁵ Sanchez’s poem is accompanied by a photo of two black men, one playing a guitar and another one dancing. The image prompts readers to conclude that the street in the background is the “stirling street” that Sanchez refers to in her poem and that the men pictured are taking care of business. As the presentations of Sanchez’s and Evans’s poems suggest, magazine editorial decisions such as the fusion of poems and photographs in the presentation of literary art can influence how audiences perceive poets’ works.

Of the several periodicals that contained verse, *Negro Digest/Black World* was arguably the most influential venue for the publication and discussion of African American poetry and poets. The magazine’s wide circulation, its inclusion of so many leading poets, and its prominent role initiating and showcasing particular concerns related to black writers made it a defining outlet in the transmission of black literary art and an important social force for getting poets on the same page. This magazine was actually one among a number of publications, including *Liberator*, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Soulbook*, *Freedomways*, and *Black Dialogue*. These and other publications were certainly important to the presentation of black verse as well. However, *Negro Digest/Black World* requires special attention for understanding the production of black poetry during the 1960s and 1970s.

Setting the Stage for Black Arts Literature

According to Larry Neal, *Negro Digest/Black World* “had the most consistent effect on contemporary black letters.” Neal goes on to observe that the magazine’s “strong influence on the new literary movement derives from the fact that it is the most stable and widely read of the magazines concerned with the full range of issues confronting the black artistic community.”⁵⁶ The editorial staff of the magazine included Hoyt Fuller, David Llorens, Carole Parks, Herbert Temple, Ariel Strong, and Robert Fentress. Fuller, Llorens, and Parks, in particular, assisted in increasing the visibility of black poets and poetry by providing coverage of literary conferences and events during the era. The collective efforts of these writers and editors served as a foundation for the reports and editorials focusing on black artistic production presented in the magazine. The editorial staff, or more specifically the design and layout artists, created dy-

namic displays of poetry and images appealing to a black nationalist ethos.

Among other African American literary magazines of the era, *Negro Digest/Black World* “had more tangible marks of outward success: a longer history and a larger circulation and readership,” observe Abby Johnson and Ronald Johnson.⁷ John H. Johnson’s financial backing gave the publication unparalleled resources, especially for a magazine that regularly featured writings and news on African American literary art. For example, the periodical had a circulation of thirty thousand, by far the largest circulation among magazines that regularly published black poetry. The relationships between *Negro Digest/Black World* and other African American literary magazines of the era were often interactive. The smaller publications influenced and were influenced by the Johnson-financed magazine.

Although Abby Johnson and Ronald Johnson’s assessment that *Negro Digest/Black World* had more outward markers of success than other magazines has some validity, it is worth noting that *Liberator*, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Freedomways*, and *Black Dialogue* served different purposes and should perhaps be evaluated in slightly different categories. *Liberator*, for instance, concerned itself with concentrated regional interests. In particular, the editors oriented their material to the arts and political scenes of New York and especially Harlem. In the process, the magazine appealed to its local readership and offered publishing opportunities more frequently to those in the area. The *Journal of Black Poetry* also tended to have a regional focus, this one on the West Coast, though the periodical did have a news and announcements section that provided national news on literary events. As the title of the publication suggests, though, the *Journal of Black Poetry* concentrated primarily on African American verse. The magazine effectively published a range of materials by established and emergent poets; the publication’s attention to verse meant that it would present a large number of writers in each issue. To the extent that the material from so many of the African American periodicals of the era influenced a common group of poets and readerships, viewing their overall achievements as interrelated is necessary.

Published monthly, *Negro Digest/Black World* could be found on newsstands and in bookstores across the country in major black-populated areas. First published in 1942, *Negro Digest* thrived in securing a large African American middle-class readership, as its owner Johnson capitalized on “an almost insatiable thirst by African Americans to hear about themselves.”⁸ Indeed, Johnson, who later founded *Ebony*, *Jet*, and

Tan, proved to have keen insight and much success in black capitalist enterprises. As James Hall notes, “Johnson perceived potentially lucrative opportunities in packaging a product sensitively aimed at the social, cultural, and psychological particularities of the black consumer.” Johnson’s major accomplishment was therefore “his significant insight into the psychology of American capitalism.”⁹

Modeled on *Reader’s Digest*, *Negro Digest* initially reprinted news articles focusing on African Americans from a variety of sources.¹⁰ The publication became profitable early on but was surpassed by Johnson’s “picture-focused periodical” *Ebony*, which began in 1945. With the rising interest in *Ebony*, Johnson discontinued publication of *Negro Digest* in 1951 because of a decrease in profits. The magazine reappeared in 1961, however, with Hoyt Fuller as its new managing editor. “Fuller transformed *Negro Digest* from a publication that merely reprinted articles to one that showcased all forms of original scholarly and creative expression,” writes literary historian Clovis Semmes (xi). As managing editor of a widely distributed magazine that gave substantial coverage to African American literary culture, Fuller, according to Semmes, “became a major architect of the Black Arts and Black Consciousness movement of the mid-1960s and 1970s” (xii).

Under Fuller’s leadership, *Negro Digest/Black World* was a premier magazine that published a tremendous amount of poems and articles related to poetry. Kalamu ya Salaam observes that Fuller “published a variety of viewpoints but also insisted on editorial excellence and thus made *Negro Digest/Black World* a first-rate literary publication.”¹¹ To be sure, between 1965 and 1976, *Negro Digest/Black World* published over three hundred poets and more than 750 poems.¹² Fuller’s column “Perspectives (Notes on Books, Writers, Artists, and the Arts)” informed readers about publishing opportunities, upcoming conferences, and the latest book releases. In his column, Fuller presented the names of writers in bold lettering, which highlighted artists and creative intellectuals of the era. He also provided mailing addresses of black-owned presses, making them more available to potential book buyers. As the facilitator of such an expansive site regarding African American literature and the contemporary arts scene, Fuller established the publication as an invaluable resource and venue for black literary art.

Fuller also utilized his column to celebrate and critique trends in the literary marketplace and to warn African American writers and readers in general about what he viewed as the antiblack racist practices of the mainstream publishing industry. In the December 1970 issue of the

publication, Fuller placed an inquiry in a small box at the bottom of the first page of his column: “Question: Why would a writer who makes a big production of being ‘just a writer, not a Negro writer,’ accept a contract from a publisher to collect material for—and serve as editor of—an anthology of Afro-American literature?”¹³ The question and critique most likely referred to Robert Hayden, who had edited *Kaleidoscope: Poems by American Negro Poets* and who had also been criticized for taking a seemingly conservative position regarding his racial identity as a writer. Fuller’s question functioned to raise suspicions about writers who avoided being referred to as “black” yet still pursued opportunities to profit from labeling their works under categories related to African American literature. Fuller’s critique echoed 1960s debates, as well as prior disagreements regarding how African American writers should define themselves and their relationship to white and black audiences. Langston Hughes addressed the degree to which black writers embraced their cultural and racial identities in his essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” initially published in 1926. The appearance of Fuller’s critique in such a popular venue gave potential editors and writers a sense of the consequences that might befall them if they misaligned themselves with black militancy.

Negro Digest/Black World increased the visibility of black writers in a number of ways. For one, the magazine published poems, short stories, and essays by leading black writers, including Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Nikki Giovanni, Dudley Randall, Haki Madhubuti (Don Lee), and Sonia Sanchez. The periodical also published reports on literary conferences, publicized events organized by writers, and announced the publication of recent books and recipients of literary awards. Further, the periodical published articles focusing on African American literature and hundreds of reviews. Finally, the magazine regularly published photographs of black writers and thus familiarized readers with visual images of literary artists. The “Perspectives” section of the July 1968 issue of the magazine, for example, announced that “the first Conrad Kent Rivers Memorial Fund Award was presented to Carolyn Rodgers” and included a photograph of the poet alongside the announcement.¹⁴ The constant presentation of poet photographs greatly increased poets’ popularity, making it possible for audiences to establish visual connections with the black literary figures.

Like most magazines, *Negro Digest/Black World* utilized images to accentuate the writings in the publication and to appeal to both the linguistic and the visual sensibilities of readers. The editors often relied on

black-inflected images that project the spirit of nationalism that pervaded the era and thus occasionally complemented poems with photographs and illustrations. Stanley Crouch's "Howling Wolf: A Blues Lesson Book," which memorializes the blues musician, features a photo of Howling Wolf, singing and dancing expressively.¹⁵ In the July 1968 issue of *Negro Digest*, the title of LeRoi Jones's "Who Will Survive America? Few Americans Very Few Negroes No Crackers at All" appears above the poem on a drawing of a sign stuck into the ground, implying that the poem is a kind of public notice.¹⁶ Finally, Mari Evans's "A good assassination should be quiet," which memorializes Martin Luther King Jr., includes a photo of the slain leader and appeared in the May 1968 issue of the magazine, a month after King's assassination.¹⁷ Complementing poems with these kinds of images allowed the editors to expand the ways that audiences could experience poems. The presentation of a photograph alongside a poem heightened the degree to which the overall piece might be *read*. In effect, *Negro Digest/Black World* was transforming select poems into vibrant mixed-media texts—fusions of words and images.

The presentation of images represented one important method that the editors used to transmit their political positions and values concerning literature and culture. The front covers of the magazine included photos or illustrations of well-known black historical figures and writers, including Malcolm X, Duke Ellington, and Martin Luther King Jr. Photos of poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Carolyn Rodgers, and Amiri Baraka appeared on the covers as well. In addition to images of authors and historical figures, the publication also presented photos of African masks and sculptures on its covers, thus situating a sense of Africa in an African American site. Looking through dozens of issues of *Negro Digest/Black World* reveals that the publication did not rely only on words to convey ideas.¹⁸ Instead, the cover images reflect the editors' allegiance to a nationalist ethos and commitment to celebrating black people and culture.

Hoyt Fuller and his editorial staff created especially striking covers for the November and December 1970 issues of *Black World*. Under the direction of Herbert Temple, who served as the publication's art director, the November issue, "The Harlem Renaissance Revisited," featured photos of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Arna Bontemps, and Sterling Brown on the cover. The December issue, "Ralph Ellison: His Literary Works and Status," featured a drawing of Ellison on the cover. In an interoffice communication to John Johnson,

Fuller attached the November and December covers of *Black World* and explained that “both issues are designed as collectors’ editions.” He went on to write that “no other magazines have ever presented this kind of celebration of [writers of] the Harlem Renaissance or of Ralph Ellison and his work.”¹⁹

As Fuller suggested, the magazine’s focus on historical writers was fairly unique among publications that also promoted emergent black poetry. Many of the smaller periodicals were more likely to devote much of their space to publishing articles on contemporary figures or recently deceased icons, in the case of the pervasive tributes to Malcolm X. Again, the resources available to *Negro Digest/Black World* in this regard were crucial; the publication could afford to pay and draw on a wide range of poets, academic literary critics, and various other writers. In his letter to Johnson regarding the Harlem Renaissance and Ellison issues, Fuller proposed that “increasing the size of the two special issues will pay off both in money and in prestige.” Apparently, Johnson agreed, because the November and December issues of 1970 were expanded from the publication’s usual 98 pages to contain 130 pages each.²⁰

The collage on the cover of the February 1970 issue of *Negro Digest* served to display the publication’s interest in presenting black history and documenting acts of antiblack racism. The cover of that issue was “a montage of scenes depicting events and individuals of great importance in the history of Africans in America.” Included in the montage were pictures of leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr.; illustrations of the landing of the first twenty enslaved Africans at Jamestown; a Ku Klux Klansman posing before a burning cross; and a photo of an Alabama policeman encouraging his dog to attack a black demonstrator in Birmingham in 1965. Referring to the images on the cover, the editors of *Negro Digest* explained, “No other group in the history of this continent has experienced such degradation as the Africans at the hands of Europeans. The Africans have survived; we will endure.”²¹ Ultimately, the front cover designs served as important sites for envisioning nationalist values and black aesthetics.

The back covers of *Negro Digest/Black World* made direct and indirect appeals to concerns of black community. The back covers of the magazine contained messages that encouraged readers to develop consciousness by reminding them, with recurring tags, that “Knowledge is the key to a better tomorrow. Read Negro Digest,” and later, “Read Black World.” Also, similar to the front covers, the back covers were de-

signed to display the political stance of the publication and appeal to a distinct sense of racial pride and solidarity. “‘Universality’ doesn’t exactly preoccupy BLACK WORLD,” wrote the editors on the back cover of an issue, “but unfettered dialogue within the Black family is our specific concern.”²² James Hall explains that the back covers of the magazine “were incredibly witty, often caustic, a clever combination of eye-catching graphic and prose, both celebratory and confrontational.”²³ In short, the back covers coincided with the larger, prevalent concepts of Black Power.

The name change from *Negro Digest* to *Black World* reveals how the editorial staff sought to attract and identify with popular and progressive black radical perspectives. In a press release announcing the name change, Fuller explained that one of the reasons the editorial staff decided to make the change from *Negro Digest* to *Black World* “had to do with the current disfavor in which the word ‘Negro’ has fallen among the magazine’s audience. Many Blacks, particularly the intellectual and the young, find ‘Negro’ offensive [for] a number of reasons.” According to Fuller, “The word [Negro] belongs to another period in the struggle of Afro-Americans, and that is not the period with which the magazine’s contents or its editorial stance are identified.”²⁴ Through the process of renaming, the editorial staff transformed *Negro Digest* to *Black World* and thus situated the magazine more noticeably among several overlapping radical discourses and social narratives of the era, including Pan-Africanism, Black Power, and nationalism.

With the title *Black World*, the magazine promoted its connectedness to black diasporic politics and liberation movements. The title of the periodical also reflected the kind of celebration of blackness presented in the writings of the New Black Poets such as Haki Madhubuti, Sonia Sanchez, and Mari Evans, to name a few. The May 1970 issue of the publication marked its name change, and Fuller explained, “*Black World* will routinely publish articles which will probe and report the condition of peoples and their struggles throughout the Black World.”²⁵ According to Fuller, in *Black World*’s first issue under the new title, the editorial staff sought to demonstrate their commitment to addressing concerns of “two principal centers of Black population in the world, the African continent and the United States of America,” by publishing poems by an African American, Haki Madhubuti, and by an African writer, John Okai.²⁶

Compared to other black publications and white-owned mainstream literary periodicals in general, the number of writings by and

about black women writers in *Negro Digest/Black World* was notably significant. The magazine published the literary art of a range of women, including Mari Evans, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Carolyn Rodgers, Carolyn Fowler, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Like most publications of the era, the magazine published more essays by men. However, reviews by Nikki Giovanni, Julia Fields, and Johari Amini, as well as critical essays by Fowler and Rodgers, show that despite the attention placed on male critics, women writers contributed frequently to the presentation and assessment of poetry.

Rodgers, a mentee of Hoyt Fuller, contributed poems and a series of articles on black poetry and African American expressive culture, such as her well-known essay “Black Poetry—Where It’s At,” which provided insightful descriptions of contemporary African American poetry and expressive forms. Nikki Giovanni’s popularity as a poet during this time allowed her to bring more attention to the lesser-known poets whose volumes of poetry she reviewed for the periodical. And finally, Carole Parks, who served on the editorial staff of the publication, assisted in the operations of the magazine, and she also covered and published articles on African American literary activities and cultural events. Reviewing issues of the magazine confirms that these and other women actively participated in constructing views of African American artists and poetry of the time period. Looking back, *Negro Digest/Black World* serves as an important site for viewing the contributions of women in shaping the directions of black arts discourse. Indeed, few publications offered such visibility and space to such a large number of black women writers.

But the periodical was not free from all problematic representations of African American women. Generally speaking, men and masculine paradigms dominated the Black Arts Movement, and as critics have pointed out, many leading black artists did not critique sexism with the same consistency and rigor that they challenged antiblack racism.²⁷ Nonetheless, observing the degree to which women were involved with the operations of a major periodical such as *Negro Digest/Black World* disrupts generalizations that suggest the movement was entirely male dominated. Moreover, some critiques of sexism in the movement made by black artists reveal that not all participants accepted the oppressive practices operating in African American discourse communities.

As literary critic Virginia C. Fowler explains, Nikki Giovanni, for one, was quick to express “her concern about the basic sexism in the movement.”²⁸ To support her claim, Fowler cites two different articles

that Giovanni published in *Negro Digest*, in 1966 and in 1969, that criticized the chauvinism of male cultural nationalists. In “First Steps toward a True Revolution,” Giovanni asked, “Is it necessary that I cease being a Black woman so that he [a black man] can be free?”²⁹ Here, in the pages of *Negro Digest*, Giovanni articulated concerns about the relegation of black women to less important roles in the movement in the interest of advancing black men. In her essay “Black Poets, Poseurs and Power,” Giovanni questioned the “latent militarism of the artistic community.” According to Giovanni, at a conference in Philadelphia, all the artists had military attachments. “The conference had guards; the artists had guards; the guards had guards,” wrote Giovanni comically. Giovanni concluded that this “artist-guard syndrome” resulted from black male artists wanting to impress “the white community with [their] militancy and the guards [wanting to] impress the Black community with their power. It’s a sick syndrome with, again, the Black community bring the loser.”³⁰

Overall, Giovanni’s comments in “Black Poets, Poseurs and Power,” as well as in her 1966 article “First Steps toward a True Revolution,” are notable in that they demonstrate the willingness of a leading black arts poet to critique sexism in the movement. Moreover, the appearance of her article in *Negro Digest* demonstrated the publication’s willingness to provide a platform for the kinds of ideas expressed by Giovanni. *Negro Digest* apparently offered Giovanni an opportunity to critique the sexism of black men in the midst of the movement. As a result, the publication provided space for both the promotion and the critique of leading black artists and African American cultural figures in general. Clearly, *Negro Digest/Black World* made expanding the views of African American cultural figures and literature one of its central missions.

Contemporary critics often charge that black arts writers lacked appreciation for the African American writers who preceded them. However, these critics seem to have overlooked the editorial practices of *Negro Digest/Black World*. The articles and special issues published in the magazine on writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Sterling Brown, and Harlem Renaissance writers reveal that recovery projects constituted a major aspect of Fuller’s editorial vision. Also, notably, in terms of representing black women literary predecessors, Alice Walker has often been credited with “launching a [Zora Neale] Hurston revival” with the publication of her article on Hurston in *Ms. Magazine* in March 1975.³¹ In praising Walker, however, the critics fail to point out that *Black World* played a role in that “revival” with its August 1974 issue,

which carried a photo of Hurston on the cover with a caption reading “Black Women Image Makers.” The late literary critic Barbara Christian took interest in the edition of *Black World* featuring Hurston because of “the tone of the individual pieces,” which were by and about African American women, “and the effect of their juxtaposition.” According to Christian, “What the configuration of the August 1974 *Black World* suggested to me, as I am sure it did to others, was the growing visibility of Afro-American women and the significant impact they were having on contemporary black culture.”³² The editorial leadership of Hoyt Fuller and his staff at *Negro Digest/Black World* contributed to this increased exposure of black women writers. Whereas the publication performed many services in the presentation of African American literary art and artists of the 1960s and 1970s, the periodical was especially important for displaying and promoting black poetry.

Transmitting the New Black Poetry

As mentioned, *Negro Digest/Black World* published a few hundred poets, reviews of volumes of poetry, and essays on poetics. Where else but in *Negro Digest/Black World* could issues regarding black poetry receive a regular readership of thirty thousand? Few popular venues in the history of African American literature dedicated so much space to black poets and their writings. The editorial staff utilized several modes of transmission in order to shape views of African American poetry. In particular, the timing and arrangement of poems presented in the periodical, the recurring types of poetry published, the number and popularity of the magazine’s contributors, and the wide-ranging coverage of issues pertaining to poetry in general represented central editorial practices utilized by *Negro Digest/Black World*. These editorial practices, in short, mediated the publication, circulation, and reception of black poetry.

As the crucial links between poets and readerships, magazine editors played major roles in how poems would be presented and possibly interpreted. The dates or the timing of publication in *Negro Digest/Black World* constituted a subtle yet significant factor in a poem’s delivery. LeRoi Jones’s “A Poem for Black Hearts,” which memorializes Malcolm X, appeared in the September 1965 of *Negro Digest*, seven months after the leader was slain, thus placing Jones, his poem, and the site of publication in the forefront in terms of the flood of elegies to Malcolm that would follow.³³ In February 1966, *Negro Digest* commemorated the one-

year anniversary of Malcolm's assassination by publishing David Llorens's memorial poem dedicated to the Muslim leader, entitled "One Year Ago."³⁴ A month after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the May 1968 issue of *Negro Digest* published poems by Mari Evans and Zack Gilbert focusing on King's life and death.³⁵ The July 1968 issue of *Negro Digest* published Joseph Bush's "Trane's Tracks," while the September–October issue of 1968 contained LeRoi Jones's "The Evolver." Both poems pay tribute to John Coltrane. Interestingly, the publication of Bush's tribute poem in July marked the one-year anniversary of Coltrane's death, and Jones's poem about Trane appeared in the special September issue, the month of the saxophonist's birthday.

Conventional analyses of the aforementioned poems might provide an understanding of the writers' individual, isolated messages. Yet analyses of only the poems and not the timing of publication overlook the efforts made by editors to situate poems and poets within distinct social and historical narratives. Making publishing decisions based on noteworthy dates in African American history enabled the editors to display some of the poems they published in accordance with a black "cultural calendar."³⁶ Strategically publishing poems to coincide with the chronology of significant events constituted an editorial practice that kept noteworthy African American events and persons on the mindscapes of audiences.

In many instances, the timing and arrangement of poems in the periodical contributed to the messages and values the editors conveyed to their audiences. In the September 1970 issue of the magazine, *Black World* published poems by Charles Moreland and Charyn Sutton that publicized the deaths of members of the Black Panther Party.³⁷ Notably, Moreland's and Sutton's poems appear next to each other in the publication, thus amplifying the documentation of violence committed against African Americans, as well as the willingness of the editorial staff to catalog such injustices. The editors could present their own disdain for the plight of black activists by endorsing these kinds of poems. In the January 1976 issue of *Black World*, the magazine covered the tenth-anniversary celebration of Broadside Press.³⁸ Before and after the article on the celebration, poems by Sterling Plump and Gwendolyn Brooks paid tribute to Broadside Press founder Dudley Randall and thus indicated *Black World's* appreciation for the publisher/poet.³⁹ Fuller and his staff frequently published tribute poems like those by Plump and Brooks to convey their overall valuation of notable figures, and in the process they helped raise the visibility of poetry.

The note for Haki Madhubuti's poem "One-Sided Shoot-Out," published in the January 1970 issue of *Negro Digest*, reads, "(for fred hampton & mark clark, murdered 12/4/69 by chicago police at 4:30 AM while they slept)."⁴⁰ Notably, the poem appeared a month after the two men were killed. In the poem, Madhubuti explains that despite all the "rhetoric and seriousness," the murder of Hampton and Clark provided evidence that black people were not taken seriously by most Americans. Madhubuti explains that the two men would be memorialized in the usual ways that African American victims of violence were memorialized, yet the violence against black people would continue. In retrospect, the appearance of the poem so shortly after the incident reflects a swift collaboration between *Negro Digest* and Madhubuti in contributing to the wide range of publicity of the murders of Hampton and Clark. Unfortunately, these murders were not officially recognized as crimes by the government until decades later.

Similar to Madhubuti's "One-Sided Shoot-Out," the note for June Jordan's "Poem," published in the March 1973 issue of *Black World*, reads, "On the Murder of Two Human Being Black Men, Denver A. Smith and Leonard Douglas Brown, at Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, November 1972."⁴¹ With a bitter and sarcastic tone, Jordan addresses the killing of the two student protesters, noting that their lives and the lives of black people in general are viewed as "light-stuff" in comparison to the private property and "heavy real estate" that belong to those in power. Against private property and heavy real estate, "the lightstuff be quite blown away" (64). Jordan goes on to write, "if you have 300 unarmed students / running away from tear gas fired / by / 150 gorillas decked with shotguns / and / two of the students fall down shot / by shotguns / shot and killed," then the mystery becomes "who shot the two Black men who died?" (64). It is a mystery that "Nobody official anywhere could solve"; however, "the Governor / and the mayor / they said / at anyrate the homicide was justified" (64). Jordan closes her poem informing her audience, "what you have to realize / is / Amerika will kill you / Amerika will kill you / Amerika will kill you / too" (65). Publishing poems such as Madhubuti's "One-Sided Shoot-Out" and Jordan's "Poem" allowed *Negro Digest/Black World* to actively participate in addressing the injustices committed against African Americans. The poems indicate the writers' sense of rage at these acts of violence, and the publication of these poems in such a popular venue shows the extent to which *Black World* could collaborate with poets to address injustice.

Publishing memorial poems that focus on slain activists enabled poets and the editors of *Negro Digest/Black World* to chronicle current tragedies in a widely read venue and highlight a distinct and poetic sense of black anger. Occasionally, the poems also familiarized readers with the plight of African-descended people in countries outside the United States. In his poem “Lumumba Section,” published in the July 1968 issue of *Negro Digest*, the exiled South African writer Keorapetse William Kgositsile laments the 1961 torture and assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the independent Republic of the Congo. “Searching past what we see and hear,” wrote Kgositsile in the poem, which addressed a deceased Lumumba, “. . . We see the gaping wounds where / Those murderers butchered your flesh / As they butchered the flesh of our land.”⁴² The appearance of Kgositsile’s poem on Lumumba reveals *Negro Digest’s* commitment to addressing the struggles and injustices on the African continent. Further, the publication of Kgositsile’s poem anticipates *Negro Digest’s* developing focus on “black world” issues beyond the United States. Overall, *Negro Digest/Black World* honed and amplified the collective rage expressed by several black poets through the publication of numerous poems relating to violence against black people.

In addition to memorial poems, the periodical frequently published tribute or praise poems, which honored the lives and achievements of African American political figures, musicians, and writers. These displays of poems advanced the objectives of celebrating black people, history, and culture and of displacing the dominance of Eurocentricism. As Haki Madhubuti wrote, “We must destroy Faulkner, dick, jane and other perpetrators of evil. It’s time for Du Bois, Nat Turner and Kwame Nkrumah.”⁴³ In terms of tribute poems, the elegies to Malcolm X seemed to predominate. Among the posthumously published poems by Conrad Kent Rivers that appeared in the September 1975 issue of *Black World* was his “Malcolm, A Thousandth Poem.” The poet views Malcolm as a major inspiration: “When brothers build a city / Down in valleys / And through mountains, / Across plains slashed by winds / Forever African; / Your flame fires them on.”⁴⁴ *Negro Digest/Black World* contributed to keeping Malcolm and his black radical vision on the minds of readers. Typically appealing to the visual sensibilities of its audience, the cover of the November 1968 issue of the publication carries a drawing of Malcolm X with the caption “Brother Malcolm and the Black Revolution.”

The editors regularly published poems by poets paying tribute to

fellow writers. In “Don L. Lee Is a Poem,” published in the September 1969 issue of *Negro Digest*, Marvin X describes the walk, talk, and being of Madhubuti as a poem. Marvin X observes that “Don don’t smoke pot / He always loaded / on his poems.”⁴⁵ Alicia L. Johnson’s “To (2) Poets,” published in the same issue, commemorates the deaths of Christopher Okigbo and Conrad K. Rivers. Johnson explains that the poets passed like the wind but would return in new forms: “they are not / dead / they have only passed / through / HEAVENSGATE.”⁴⁶ The magazine also published tributes by poets celebrating the movement’s leading figure, Amiri Baraka. In the August 1968 issue, Lennox Raphael opens his poem “Roi” by pointing out that “LeRoi Jones roams the blues of night with sweet and gentle / courage of awakening, as black, as man, as brother, as Roi.”⁴⁷ Poet-to-poet tribute poems further underscored the periodical’s sense of camaraderie among black writers.

Celebrations of black music and musicians constituted the most frequently recurring types of tributes published in *Negro Digest/Black World*. Etheridge Knight celebrates one of the famous sidemen of John Coltrane in his poem “Elvin Jones: Jazz Drummer.” Jones “has fire and steel in his hands,” observes Knight. “ELVIN JONES / thumps the big circle in bare feet, / opens wide the big arms and, / like the sea, / swallows us.”⁴⁸ In her poem “Tribute to Duke,” Sarah Webster Fabio celebrates the composer Duke Ellington: “Right on, Duke / Do your thing, / your own thing. / And, Man, / the word’s out / when you / get down / Bad / it’s good, / Real good.”⁴⁹ In a reverent poem for John Coltrane published in *Negro Digest*, Amiri Baraka writes, “The power of John Coltrane / The power of God / The worship of Soul-Ra / The worship of God / The feeling of the infinite / The shadows and suns upon our bodies and minds / The power of John Coltrane / The worship of God.”⁵⁰ The editors’ publication of tribute poems extended the widespread practice among creative intellectuals of continually emphasizing the connections between poetry and music. When readers encountered a grouping of poems in *Negro Digest/Black World*, they were likely to come across references to black music.

Praise poems and elegies were hardly the only kinds of poetry published in *Negro Digest/Black World*. However, their strong presence throughout the pages of the publication is quite evident, as is the appearance of these kinds of writings throughout black arts discourse. The types of poems published by the most visible magazine of the era had far-reaching effects. The regular publication of praise poems and elegies in *Negro Digest/Black World* influenced the subject matter that po-

ets chose to write about and helped determine what they eventually chose to submit for possible publication. Based on the large number of elegies and praise poems that appeared in the publication, it seems apparent that the editorial staff of the publication valued these modes of writing. The poems that the magazine decided to publish confirm that *Negro Digest/Black World* was certainly not a neutral venue, seeking to present any and all kinds of writings. Instead, the magazine had an agenda that involved celebrating black historical figures and cataloging injustices committed against African Americans. Further, *Negro Digest/Black World* framed the contours of black poetry by promoting particular kinds of poems.

Whereas the types of poems *Negro Digest/Black World* published are important, the periodical also shaped the production of poetry based on the number of poems it presented and the degree to which the periodical featured black poetry in general. The September issues represented one of the publication's most impressive contributions to the transmission of black poetry. These special issues included between twenty-five and forty poets and articles on major literary figures or trends occurring in literary culture with regard to poetry. The magazine presented poems by writers from all over the country and occasionally from countries in Africa. *Negro Digest/Black World's* presentation, in a single issue, of African American poets who represented various ages, regions of the country, poetic styles, and political persuasions indicated the diversity among black poets. At the same time, the magazine provided a common publishing venue and hence a sense of unity among a variety of different poets and poems. Not all the poets who published in *Negro Digest/Black World* are commonly referred to as black arts poets. For instance, although writers such as Audre Lorde and Michael Harper were published in black publications, they are not usually associated with the same kind of militant stances taken by writers such as Askia Toure, Haki Madhubuti, and Sonia Sanchez. Nonetheless, publishing various kinds of black writers in a common site gave the impression, at least, that there were some commonalities among the poets. If nothing else, these writers met the selection criteria of the editorial staff of *Negro Digest/Black World*.

Presenting a sense of unity among writers was integral to the notion of a black artistic movement. The appearance of several poets at one time in the September issues of the magazine suggested that the writers were on the same page, committed to similar causes. While most issues of *Negro Digest/Black World* dispersed poems randomly and separately

throughout the periodical, the special September issues on poetry always grouped many of the poets together in a section labeled “Portfolio of Poetry.” The poems were displayed using a common format—same typeface and font size, and the author’s name at the end of each poem—making it possible for readers to move easily through the various poems and poets in the magazine. The regular appearance of established and popular poets in *Negro Digest/Black World* contributed to the periodical’s reputation as a major venue for African American literary art. Leading poets of the era—Sonia Sanchez, Haki Madhubuti, Dudley Randall, Amiri Baraka, Carolyn Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni, and Gwendolyn Brooks—all published in the magazine, and writings by the poets appeared in the special September issues. The positioning of their names on the cover and in the pages of the publication demonstrated the periodical’s association with some of the most popular and prominent poets of the time period.

The cover designs for the special issues increased the exposure of poets and emphasized the significance of the New Black Poetry. The cover of the September–October 1968 issue of *Negro Digest* displays an assortment of African American publications, including several volumes of poetry, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, and *Umbra*. Superimposed over the images of the books and magazines, the publication announces, “THE ANNUAL POETRY ISSUE / Black Poets and Their Publications.” The cover goes on to note that the issue contains poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Dudley Randall, Sonia Sanchez, LeRoi Jones, and Mari Evans, as well as articles by Don L. Lee, Sarah Webster Fabio, and Keorapetse William Kgositsile. The cover of the September 1972 issue of *Black World* displays a drawing by Jon Onye Lockard of Gwendolyn Brooks sporting an afro. The cover informs readers that the issue includes an excerpt from Brooks’s autobiography and the annual “PORTFOLIO OF POETRY.” The cover of the September 1974 issue displays a Yoruba sculpture of a “horse and rider.” Along the left side of the cover, the publication announces its annual poetry issue and lists the names of featured poets, including Johari Amini, Alvin Aubert, Gwendolyn Brooks, Julia Fields, Michael Harper, David Henderson, Doc Long, Audre Lorde, Dudley Randall, and Ron Welburn. Placing the names and images of well-known poets on the cover of the magazine simultaneously confirmed and extended the writers’ popularity among readers.

In addition to presenting dozens of poets in the “Portfolio of Poetry” section, the September issues included a “Poetry Features” sec-

tion. This section contained a series of poems by three or more poets, providing them with more space to share their work than the single poems representing other writers in the issue. The annual poetry issue also contained articles on black poetry. Some of the articles focused on historically significant poets such as Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Sterling Brown. The essays in the September issues also addressed contemporary trends in poetry, including discussions of black aesthetics and articles such as “Black Poetry—Where It’s At” and “Images of Black Women in Afro-American Poetry.”

The 1972 September issue contains an excerpt from the autobiography of Gwendolyn Brooks, an article by Ted Joans entitled “The Langston Hughes I Knew,” and an article by Barbara Christian entitled “Whatever Happened to Bob Kaufman.” The “Portfolio of Poetry” section presents thirty-two poets, including Zack Gilbert, Dudley Randall, August Wilson, Sonia Sanchez, and David Henderson. The issue’s featured poets are Julia Fields, Ibrahima Diallo, and Herbert Clark Johnson. The September 1974 issue contains an article on Jean Toomer by Bernard Bell, an essay on the black aesthetic by Addison Gayle, and an essay-review of Sterling Plump’s *Steps to Break the Circle* by Keorapetse William Kgositsile. The “Portfolio of Poetry” section includes twenty-two poets, and the featured poets for the issue are Mari Evans, Alvin Aubert, and Johari Amini. As the tables of contents of these two issues suggest, the special poetry issues showcased a range of issues pertaining to black poetry.

Several poets published reviews and essays in *Negro Digest/Black World*. Carolyn Rodgers, Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, and Larry Neal, to name a few, contributed articles focusing on poetics and poetry. As a result, these and several other poets who published in the magazine contributed to the larger critical conversations concerning African American literary art of the era. Nikki Giovanni, Keorapetse William Kgositsile, Sterling Plump, Dudley Randall, Julia Fields, Johari Amini, and Carolyn Rodgers were among the most frequent reviewers of poetry in the publication.⁵¹ That the periodical’s reviewers were leading poets illustrates that they were actively involved in the assessment and valuation of contemporary black literature. Most important, the regular appearance of poetry reviews gave poets and discussions of verse increased exposure.

Negro Digest/Black World played an especially important role in providing coverage of Chicago-area poets. In particular, the magazine frequently published writers associated with the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC). As a cofounder of OBAC and chairperson

of the writers' workshop for OBAC, Hoyt Fuller was in a position to showcase members of the group in his publication. Indeed, he published members of the workshop regularly in the magazine. Moreover, he provided the group with free publicity. For instance, in an article explaining the origins of OBAC, *Negro Digest* stated that in order to reach the people, members of the writers' workshop "went to taverns where adults congregated and to community centers where young people assembled. Poetry, they found, is welcome entertainment if it speaks to the people."⁵² The anonymous article projected the popular sentiment among writers of the era that African American poets frequently functioned in the role of community activists. As managing editor of a major black arts publication, Fuller ensured publicity and publishing opportunities for members of OBAC.

In the August 1968 issue of *Negro Digest*, the magazine provided a profile article entitled "Chicago's OBAC: Portrait of Young Writers in a Workshop." The article opens by noting that for the OBAC writers' workshop "literature is a truly lively art. For more than a year, the pursuit of literary reflection of The Black Experience has animated the writers and their weekly sessions." With individual photos of over ten writers in the workshop accompanying the essay, the article announces recent and upcoming publications by the group's members, including Jewell Latimore, Don L. Lee, Carolyn Rodgers, and Kharlos Wimberli. Finally, the article emphasizes the group's connection to established African American writers by noting that Gwendolyn Brooks, who "contributed \$200 toward the publication of the group's anthology," also worked closely with the writer's workshop.⁵³ In addition, the workshop members organized a benefit for LeRoi Jones to help pay his court costs in a case in which he was charged with possession of a firearm. Calling attention to their relationship to well-known writers such as Brooks and Jones, and reporting on their activities in the community in *Negro Digest/Black World*, established the image of OBAC writers as committed and politically active artists. Ultimately, the magazine increased the visibility of OBAC members by providing them with regular coverage and publishing opportunities.

The seeming favoritism that *Negro Digest/Black World* showed toward Chicago poets led poets from other areas of the country to critique the publication's preferences. Moreover, despite all of its achievements, the periodical had several limitations. As Eugene Redmond suggested, although the magazine published the widest number of poems and poets, it was less likely than the *Journal of Black Poetry* to publish

experimental verse.⁵⁴ In this view, the publication was not necessarily the most cutting-edge publisher of the New Black Poetry. Looking over past issues of the *Journal of Black Poetry* shows that this publication took a more grassroots and experimental approach to the publication of verse. Joe Goncalves, founding editor of the publication, regularly allowed guest editors to take the lead. Goncalves's publication had a far more limited budget in comparison to *Negro Digest/Black World*. Thus, the *Journal of Black Poetry* relied on seemingly cruder yet more artistically engaging blends of words and images. Rather than printing photographs alongside poems, the *Journal of Black Poetry* was more likely to present drawings and more abstract images to complement poems. As a result, the *Journal of Black Poetry* displayed a more vernacular aesthetic than *Negro Digest/Black World*.

Some observers maintained that the periodical was quite limited in its assessment of the conditions facing African Americans. According to writers Ishmael Reed and Amiri Baraka, its writers offered fairly conventional and thus insufficient critiques of antiblack racism. As Reed explains, "*Black World* thought it was a simple matter of white faces being white racists. It should be so easy."⁵⁵ Reed also suggests that the favoritism shown some writers and schools of thought led the publication to dismiss, if not mistreat, several other writers, including Ralph Ellison, John Williams, and Al Young. Baraka charged that the publication was "schizophrenic," an accusation that "meant that even in the same issue they'd have widely differing stances and attitudes, some positive, some absolutely backwards, some irrelevant, lifeless academic set pieces to get somebody an A+ in Boredom, and now and again a couple fragments, poems, etc."⁵⁶ Moreover, Baraka viewed *Negro Digest/Black World* as "simply the petit bourgeoisie at work, defending as usual, objectively, a bourgeoisie, which is classically their gig." The assessments by Reed and Baraka carried some validity: *Negro Digest/Black World*'s ability to publish such a wide range of writers and views was one of its strengths, but perhaps, the magazine's well-financed capabilities were also a weakness. With such a broad focus and commercial backing, the magazine could certainly not meet all expectations. Further, among the range of writers the magazine did publish, there would inevitably be conflicting ideologies presented. Because Fuller and his staff chose sides and had preferences, they gained supporters as well as detractors.

Along with its strengths and weaknesses, *Negro Digest/Black World* was central to the transmission of new black poetry. The decline of the Black Arts Movement and the demise of *Black World*, in fact, seem in-

terconnected. John Johnson, publisher of the magazine, discontinued the publication after the April 1976 issue.⁵⁷ Consequently, several scholars identify 1976 as a defining year in terms of when the movement subsided. “The death of *Black World*,” explain Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson, “was a convincing sign that the Black Arts movement was no longer the dominant voice in African American literature.”⁵⁸ Hoyt Fuller went on to create another literary journal, *First World*. He drew on the large network of writers and creative intellectuals whom he worked with over the course of his tenure at *Negro Digest/Black World* to found *First World*. Houston Baker Jr., Toni Cade Bambara, Ossie Davis, Sarah Webster Fabio, Addison Gayle, Haki Madhubuti, Kalamu ya Salaam, Geneva Smitherman, Darwin Turner, and Shirley Anne Williams were among the editorial advisors and contributors for *First World*.⁵⁹ Lacking the financial support that Fuller had at *Black World*, however, Fuller’s new publication was far less influential. Thus, the discontinuation of *Black World* in 1976 meant the end of one of the most visible and defining platforms for the publication of African American poetry.

Publicizing Amiri Baraka

Poets who become widely known among the countless number of published writers during any particular era must have an edge. Factors beyond the value of their individual poems and volumes of poetry determine the degree to which these writers might achieve popular and critical acclaim. Consequently, the coverage and publicity provided by magazines serve to increase poets’ popularity among readers and potential book buyers. Few black arts poets were as widely publicized in magazines as Amiri Baraka. There is arguably a direct correlation between his status as the movement’s leading figure and the frequency with which he was featured in various periodicals during the 1960s and early 1970s. A brief consideration of the coverage of Amiri Baraka offers an idea of how magazine exposure presented one poet to a wider readership and conveyed ideas about larger currents in African American literature and culture by highlighting a single writer.

In an article published in *African American Review*, James Smethurst reminds us that Baraka was “but one voice among many” of those who contributed to the Black Arts Movement. Although Smethurst’s article appears in a special issue dedicated to Baraka, Smethurst seeks to “avoid

the sort of great-man theory in which Baraka's work becomes a metonymy for all Black Arts literature, drama, criticism, and so on.⁷⁶⁰ The positioning of Baraka as the movement's representative figure, as Smethurst's comments suggest, suppresses narratives about the diversity among a large number of black writers. Presenting Baraka as a representative black artist also diminishes the numerous contributions of other writers and at the same time overlooks the fact that Baraka's tremendous reception was quite exceptional. His pre- and post-1960s achievements, as well as his extensive and ongoing critical acclaim, make the trajectory of his career uncommon among poets. So whereas Baraka was hardly the leader per se of the Black Arts Movement, he was certainly the era's most revered and *leading* figure. His status as the movement's leading figure might help explain how the methods magazines used to publicize Baraka extended his popularity and simultaneously increased the movement's black radical visibility.

Larry Neal's appraisals of Baraka in magazines were particularly notable since Neal was identifying Baraka as the movement's principal figure just as the movement was unfolding. In a February 1965 *Liberator* review of Baraka's plays *The Slave* and *The Toilet*, Neal praises Baraka's works as "attempts to break down the barriers separating the artist from the audience to whom a work must ultimately address itself." Neal goes on to note that Baraka's "plays are the verbal companions to the expressions that have reached their greatest intensity in the music of Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and more lately Archie Shepp." Neal thus opens his review with assessments that would become recurring themes in black arts discourse, namely, praising writers who directly address black audiences and whose work demonstrates the qualities of music, especially free jazz. Neal closes his review by stating that Baraka's "plays are among the most socially-conscious literary works in the history of Afro-American and American drama. Both are steps toward building a body of literature to which black people can point with pride, and which can be assimilated into the life-and-death drama which is the coming black revolution in America."⁶¹ Here, Neal proclaims the significance of Baraka's plays in literary history, and he also predicts that Baraka's art will prove beneficial to black folks preparing for an imminent revolution in America. Overall, Neal's article promotes Baraka as both an artist who engages African American audiences and an agent for inspiring black political action.

Neal's positioning of Baraka within the unfolding narratives of Black Power and nationalist discourse would become more apparent in

two articles featuring Baraka published in the January and February 1966 issues of *Liberator*. In the first article, Neal opens by pointing out that “LeRoi Jones is Black, is thirty-one years old, is a man dedicated to the liberation of his people by any means necessary.” Again, Neal links Baraka to national political activity; most notably, the “by any means necessary” comment links Baraka to Malcolm X. Neal follows his opening statement by observing that Baraka was actually one of many artists from his generation committed to black liberation. What distinguished Baraka from his contemporaries, however, was “his public image,” as “for about a year now, and especially since Malcolm’s death, Jones has been projected by the news media as a venom-filled monster oozing with hate of the white man.” Neal identifies the *Village Voice*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *World-Telegram*, “and a myriad of television stations” as the news media organizations taking part in the distortion of Baraka’s “public image.”⁶² Notwithstanding the negative attention he was receiving, Baraka’s visibility in media outlets was certainly making him more widely known.

Neal’s article indicates that as early as 1965, Baraka possessed what relatively few poets ever obtain: a national public image. If the news media seemed to focus on distorting Baraka’s image by asserting his “hate of the white man,” then certainly magazine articles by writers like Neal were preoccupied with *undistorting* his image by giving attention to Baraka’s commitment to “his people.” An introductory editorial note to the second part of Neal’s series “Development of LeRoi Jones” mentions that these articles on Baraka were necessary “in order to clarify certain misinformation concerning LeRoi Jones. Much of this misinformation has come from the white power establishment which stands opposed to any Black man asserting his manhood and integrity.” Pitting him against white adversaries, the editors of *Liberator* could, in a nationalist context, make Baraka seem more endearing to a black readership. The article also includes a photograph of Baraka surrounded by a group of white men; the photo contains a caption that reads, “LeRoi Jones and his critics.”⁶³

A close inspection of the photo shows that Baraka and the men are in a somewhat relaxed setting, a reception perhaps. They do not necessarily look like adversaries. However, the caption accompanying the photo is clearly designed to convey the idea that whites are hostile to Baraka’s work, which complements Neal’s claim in the article that Baraka was “a welcomed member of the white literary world” when his works were perceived as only *literary* (18). According to Neal, however,

Baraka was less favored by the white literary establishment now that the poet was directing “his tremendous talents, towards meaningful activities in the Black community” (19). Neal’s assessment of Baraka, as well as his contemplations of the radical possibilities of black art in his *Liberator* articles, anticipates his most widely circulated essay, “The Black Arts Movement,” in which he identifies Baraka as the movement’s “prime mover and chief designer.”⁶⁴ Appearing first in the *Drama Review* in 1968, Neal’s “The Black Arts Movement” circulated widely during the 1960s and 1970s. Echoing his comments on Baraka provided in *Liberator*, Neal’s extended and positive treatment of Baraka in the essay helps explain why readers were likely to view Baraka as the movement’s leading figure. “The Black Arts theatre, the theatre of LeRoi Jones,” writes Neal, “is a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre” (33). Linking Baraka’s individual productions to the overall identity and function of black arts theater identifies him as integral to the emergence of the movement.

Neal’s praise for Baraka was infectious. Throughout the era, poets and various commentators extolled Baraka’s talents as an artist and his *by any means necessary* commitments to *his people*. In addition to publishing Baraka’s artistic productions, magazines also frequently published his image. As a result, they gave Baraka—and not simply his writings—increased visibility. Although photographs of writers that appeared in magazines rarely appeared in bibliographies, the pervasive publication of Baraka images certainly had to contribute to how he was envisioned by readers. It would be difficult to say exactly how images of writers influence interpretations of their work. The presentation of Baraka’s images in magazines, however, did suggest to readers/viewers that whoever this artist was, he was important.

Liberator magazine was especially involved in presenting images of Baraka that linked him with black arts activities. An image of Baraka adjoins an article that describes a program produced by “a new theatre group called The Black Arts” in the April 1965 issue of *Liberator*.⁶⁵ Two months later, a photo showing “LeRoi Jones and Hampton Clanton leading the Black Arts parade down 125th Street, New York City,” accompanies Larry Neal’s article “The Cultural Front,” which reports on the opening of the Black Arts Repertory/Theatre School in Harlem.⁶⁶ In the July 1965 issue, a photograph of Baraka and John Oliver Killens appears along with Baraka’s essay “The Revolutionary Theatre.”⁶⁷ And most visibly, a photograph of Baraka speaking assertively into a microphone appears on the cover of the January 1966 issue of *Liberator*. No-

tably, just as the black arts enterprise was getting under way in 1965 and 1966, *Liberator* was publishing Baraka's poems, featuring articles on the implications of his work and trajectory of his career, and also regularly presenting striking photographs of the artist. For *Liberator's* readers, at least, Baraka was easily the most identifiable face of black arts.

With more national exposure than *Liberator*, *Negro Digest/Black World* participated in the presentation of Baraka's images. In a September 1964 report on a writers' conference, *Negro Digest* published various photographs of conference participants. The only photo featuring an individual artist, however, was the image of Baraka, who is shown seated in front of a large window-shaped brick structure. The image—Baraka's juxtaposition with his background—gives the sense that he is sitting on a kind of throne. The caption for the photo reads, "Framed by soaring backdrop, LeRoi Jones ponders questions during one of series of informal seminars. The Dead Lecturer is his latest book."⁶⁸ The April 1966 issue of *Negro Digest* presents an image of Baraka with a group of people on the steps of a building with the Black Arts Repertory Theatre flag; the image adjoins Baraka's essay "In Search of the Revolutionary Theatre."⁶⁹ A photo of Baraka that accompanies his article "Toward the Creation of Political Institutions for All African Peoples," published in the October 1972 issue of *Black World*, promotes Baraka as a political figure more than a conventional writer. In the photograph, Baraka stands at a podium that has several microphones; he is apparently taking questions, as if he is at a press conference.⁷⁰ The top portion of the cover of the November 1972 issue of the magazine shows a profile view of Baraka with an intense look on his face as he sports an afro and full goatee. To the left of his image, the magazine notes, "Position Paper: 'Toward Ideological Clarity' by Imamu Amiri Baraka."

Of course, African American magazines regularly published photographs of black writers and political figures. *Negro Digest/Black World*, in particular, frequently published images of emergent black poets. What distinguished the photographic presentations of Baraka, however, were the methods and frequency with which his images appeared throughout African American publications. More so than the typically static photographs of poets on the back covers of their books, magazines could show artists in a variety of poses and situations. The visual coverage of Baraka often gave special attention to his activist participation and blurred his status as a poet and a political figure. The early presentations by *Liberator* and *Negro Digest* of Baraka as a militant writer

closely associated with black arts activities and committed to the liberation of African Americans contributed to the idea that Baraka was the movement's leading figure. Perhaps the most widely circulating article on Baraka among a black readership—which blended striking images and praises—appeared in *Ebony* magazine.

In August 1969, *Ebony* published an issue entitled “The Black Revolution,” which included articles on jazz and contemporary black poetry by A. B. Spellman and Larry Neal, respectively, as well as a feature article on Baraka by David Llorens—who was on the staff of *Negro Digest/Black World*.⁷¹ With *Ebony*'s wide circulation and notable influence among African Americans, the magazine's profile on Baraka was certain to further increase his national visibility. Llorens's profile, “Ameer (LeRoi Jones) Baraka,” echoes the sentiments of Larry Neal in his essay “The Black Arts Movement” by identifying Baraka as the most prominent figure of the movement. “That LeRoi Jones would be heir to the literary baton that had passed from Richard Wright to Ralph Ellison to James Baldwin became apparent a few years after he set foot on the track. Fools alone doubted his speed and ability,” writes Llorens.⁷² Here, Baraka is favorably identified as the successor to three of the most widely known and established African American writers.

Baraka “is regarded by those closest to black art,” writes Llorens, “as the nation's leading black writer, which of course suggests that no other, however talented, has proven—in this time and place—more valuable to *black people*” (75). Again echoing sentiments expressed by Larry Neal, Llorens associates Baraka's artistry with his *value* to black people. Llorens goes on to describe Baraka's literary career and his role as an organizer. Emphasizing the idea that Baraka represents “the prototype of the poet as newest cultural hero in the black community,” Llorens focuses more broadly on Baraka's political views as opposed to the specifics of his poetry (83).

The images that accompany Llorens's story project a striking visual narrative as well. Beneath the title in bold letters—**AMEER (LEROI JONES) BARAKA**—and below the two opening paragraphs of the article, the first page of the story presents a photo of Baraka that consumes nearly three-fourths of the page. In the photograph, Baraka is looking to his left and smiling at someone in the direction in which he is facing. He has an afro and full beard, wears beads with a medallion, and is dressed in an orange African-style shirt. His attire and appearance project an afrocenic fashion sensibility, which was popular among some African Americans and some nationalists in particular. That the

image of Baraka is in such a prominent position suggests that the image of the writer is as important as the words about him. The design of the page, which emphasizes the photograph of the poet, amplifies or actually anticipates Llorens's opening opinion in the article that Baraka must be *seen* as more than a writer. Other additional photographs in the article show Baraka performing a marriage ceremony, and he is identified in one of the captions as an Orthodox Muslim and "a minister of the Kawaida faith" (76).

Another photograph in the series of images accompanying the story shows black women dressed in African attire—some sport afros, others wear head-wraps. The caption for the photographs informs readers that the women attend classes at an "African Free School where they study works of LeRoi Jones, Maulana Karenga, and other black thinkers of both the New World and the Old" (78). Overall, the photographs of Baraka dressed in African attire, as well as the images of black women, children, and men involved with organizations led by the writer-minister, validate Baraka's role as a committed cultural worker who apparently has a following. Moreover, the attire of Baraka and his supporters, as well as their engagement in cultural activities, presents a visual narrative that emphasizes Baraka's relationship to black people and an African aesthetic. The images indicate Baraka's connectedness to a black nationalist ethos quite vividly.

Presenting black poets as politically engaged, socially committed activists became the recurring practice of a number of magazines. In addition to the article on Baraka, *Ebony* ran feature profiles on Haki Madhubuti and Nikki Giovanni; the profile articles assisted in confirming and extending the importance of these leading poets as popular cultural figures. In the photographs that accompany the article on Haki Madhubuti (then known as Don Lee), the poet sports an afro, an African-print shirt, and dark sunglasses as he stands at a podium. The image of Madhubuti is accompanied by a photograph of an auditorium crowded with white people. Later in the article, Madhubuti is pictured reading his work to a group of African Americans. Collectively, the photographs project the idea of Madhubuti's wide appeal.

Llorens opens the article by reporting Gwendolyn Brooks's complimentary appraisal of Madhubuti as a poet and militant. According to the article, when an observer informed Brooks that Madhubuti "frightens me," Brooks responded, "He should."⁷³ That opening exchange between "an ingratiating black matron" and Brooks presents Madhubuti as a poet who makes some viewers and listeners uneasy. The idea that

his persona and poetry might frighten some observers would give Madhubuti more credibility as a militant figure. Continuing the depiction of a defiant poet, Llorens characterizes Madhubuti and his work as “transcending customs. Niceties. Platitudes. Seeking no approval. No applause. No contest. Just making people hear their own silence. A disquieting experience” (72). Later, Llorens points out that Madhubuti’s work reflects “a revolutionary black consciousness” (75). Throughout the article, Llorens intersperses excerpts from Madhubuti’s poems to support observations about the political position of the poet. Linking Madhubuti’s overall objectives with those of other black artists of the day, Llorens notes that “the young writers with whom [Madhubuti] shares fraternity have in no uncertain terms declared white critics unqualified to evaluate and judge their works. They have rejected, as parochial, the Western theory of an aesthetic.” Instead, black poets’ “consciousness is directed toward a *black aesthetic*.” That aesthetic involves Madhubuti and others “communicating with black people” (77).

Presenting Madhubuti as a militant poet, showing his popularity among large audiences, and revealing his specific concerns with a black aesthetic and the conditions of African Americans, Llorens actually promotes the idea of Madhubuti as a major force in black poetry. Like his profile of Baraka, Llorens’s feature article on Madhubuti in *Ebony* reports on and ultimately expands the poet’s popularity for a black readership. Whereas Baraka and Madhubuti were widely known in literary and cultural circles by 1969, the *Ebony* articles projected complimentary descriptions and striking visual images of the poets on a larger black stage. In the February 1972 issue of *Ebony*, the magazine ran a similar feature profile on Nikki Giovanni.

Similar to the articles on Madhubuti and Baraka, the profile on Giovanni foregrounds her connections to black nationalist sensibilities visually and linguistically. Like Madhubuti and Baraka, Giovanni is African American, sports an afro, and is pictured interacting with various groups of black people. The profile also shows a private side to Giovanni. A full-page photograph of Giovanni sitting on the floor of an apartment reading a book to a toddler, identified in the caption as her son, Tommy, adjoins the first page of the article. The caption for the photo explains that Giovanni authored a children’s book, *Spin a Soft Black Song*, “because I wanted Tommy to have something to read and relate to.” Another photograph shows Giovanni and actor Ossie Davis being interviewed on the set of a New York television show, *Straight Talk*. The caption notes that Giovanni “has been increasingly busy since

release of her successful record album, *Truth Is On Its Way*.” At the bottom of the page, a note in bold letters points out that “poetry excerpts [that will appear in the article] are from *Black Feeling, Black Talk/Black Judgement* by Nikki Giovanni (William Morrow & Co., Inc., New York, 1970).”⁷⁴ In the process of documenting her accomplishments, the profile effectively provides publicity for Giovanni’s current projects.

Slightly deviating from the articles on Madhubuti and Baraka, the profile on Giovanni presents her differences from leading male black artists. For one, in the title, Giovanni is quoted as saying, “I Am Black, Female, Polite.” The foregrounding of “female” and “polite” do not fit neatly within the masculine and militant paradigms associated with black radical nationalism. Furthermore, whereas Baraka, Madhubuti, and black activist-poets in general were presented as selfless cultural workers for black people, Giovanni is presented as something of an individualist. “I write out of my own experiences—which also happen to be the experiences of my people,” Giovanni is quoted as saying. “But if I had to choose between my people’s experiences and mine, I’d choose mine because that’s what I know best. That way I don’t have to trap the people into some kind of *dreams* that I have about what they should be into” (49). Here, Giovanni’s comments provide a critique of seemingly overbearing, confrontational black militant *spokesmen* who were proscriptive regarding what black people should do. “Unlike some I-am-a-Black-Militant speakers,” explains Bailey, Giovanni “does not seek to make young blacks feel that they are traitors for even being in college” (50). Bailey’s comments present Giovanni as distancing herself from several of her more militant counterparts.

Unlike the typical presentation of a militant black poet, the Giovanni article foregrounds the poet’s profeminist consciousness. Other leading black women poets, such as Sonia Sanchez, Carolyn Rodgers, and Audre Lorde, provided critiques of masculine paradigms in their work. However, the high visibility and commercial success of Giovanni made her critiques of black male nationalist ideology especially notable. The last page of the profile on Giovanni shows another photo of the poet with her son. The caption notes that Giovanni “was not married when her son was born” and quotes Giovanni as saying, “I had a baby at 25 because I *wanted* to have a baby and could *afford* to have a baby. I didn’t get married because I didn’t *want* to get married and I could *afford* not to get married” (56). Giovanni suggests that her desires and financial success provided her with a degree of autonomy from men and traditional ideas of family. The feminist consciousness displayed by Gio-

vanni would represent a kind of threat to the more traditional concepts of black nationalist ideology.⁷⁵

Another major factor that placed Giovanni at a distance from several other leading black writers, if not at odds with them, and that at the same time gave her more popularity as a leading poet related to her album *Truth Is On Its Way*. On the album, Giovanni reads her poetry and is accompanied by a gospel choir. The album was a huge commercial success, selling thousands of copies. Whereas militant poets tended to distance themselves from Christian ideology, not only does Giovanni's *Truth Is On Its Way* include gospel music, but the music, in fact, holds as prominent a place on the album as Giovanni's poetry. According to Giovanni, utilizing gospel music ensured that she could appeal to an older generation who usually felt alienated by young and militant black poets. Producing works that might appeal to an older generation, as well as publishing children's books, accounted for Giovanni's wide-ranging popularity among African Americans. Giovanni's commercial success certainly drew critiques. As one anonymous observer associated with "the black power literary establishment" is quoted as saying, Giovanni's "talent doesn't match her reputation. She needs to retire for a while and develop her talent rather than continue the quest to be a personality" (52). Whatever the case, what remains notable about the profile on Giovanni in this context is that Giovanni is described as a figure who both embodies and pushes the limits of what it means to be a black arts poet. Like the previously discussed articles on Baraka and Madhubuti, the coverage provided by *Ebony* assisted in expanding Giovanni's popularity for a large African American readership.

Ebony feature articles on Baraka, Madhubuti, and Giovanni provided the poets with significant exposure. The striking visual narratives and complimentary words utilized to describe the poets in *Ebony* projected them in a positive light for an African American readership much wider than the readership for typical black arts publications. The feature profiles in *Ebony* were unique opportunities for these three poets in particular and the larger movement among black poets in general. The favorable coverage provided readers, including other writers, with an idea of what it meant to be leading black poets.

Liberator, *Black Dialogue*, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, and especially *Negro Digest/Black World* regularly provided photographic and journalistic coverage of poets engaged in activities and political organizing. While scholars commonly document the critical attention placed on writers, the recurring and highly visual coverage of Baraka in particular suggests

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that his popular appeal, not simply his critical acclaim, deserves notice as well. In many respects, given the early coverage of Baraka, he became a visible blueprint, a model even, for what a black artist should look like and do. More important for the purposes of this study, the coverage of Baraka confirms the defining role that magazines played in popularizing a select group of artists. *Negro Digest/Black World's* wide circulation, its commitment to a black readership, and its ability to present a wide range of issues pertaining to African American verse enabled the publication to establish itself as one of the most influential vehicles for the production of black poetry. The magazine served as a crucial common venue for the publication of hundreds of poets, and by continually publishing essays and reviews focusing on poetry, as well as presenting photographic and journalistic coverage of writers, *Negro Digest/Black World* increased the visibility of poets, their writing, and their allegiances to black militant causes. Under Hoyt Fuller's direction, the periodical significantly shaped black arts discourse, and *Negro Digest/Black World* ultimately contributed to the enterprise of getting poets and their readers on the same page.