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Title: A Necessarily Beautiful Black Radical Tradition: Reorienting Black Art Theory

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This project asks whether Black art should be used primarily for artistic expression or to deconstruct racial ideas concerning the nature of Black life? After establishing characteristics of Black art set forth by major 20th century thinkers promoting both positions, this project outlines a theory of Black art that embraces both objectives as part of a continuum of Africana intellectual creative expression.

Art has been used historically as an expression of culture and a reflection of African conceptualizations of the world. Black art often combines carefully constructed aesthetic principles integrated expertly with representative elements of African culture. Black artists have often been classified as being either on the side of art created for culture and propaganda, or art for the sake of artistic expression.

The project begins with an examination of what it means to be an African artist in defense of culture as a dimension of the post-enslavement era “Black Radical Tradition” outlined by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*, and demonstrated in the creative and critical work of W. E. B. DuBois. This perspective is juxtaposed against the art-as-artistic expression work and ideas of James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston. Source material for the study includes print articles, publications and audio or video representations, used in order to create an accurate representation of each thinker’s ideas. By creating a novel approach to Africana artistic production that embraces elements of both positions, this study draws attention to the need for artists to refrain from unnecessary dichotomizations.