Introduction

*Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* offers a focused look at painting, sculpture, graphics, and photography from a decade defined by social protest and American race relations. In observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, this exhibition considers how sixty-six of the decade’s artists, including African Americans and some of their white, Latino, Asian American, Native American, and Caribbean contemporaries, used wide-ranging aesthetic approaches to address the struggle for racial justice. Many individuals, groups, and events were pivotal in propelling the civil rights movement forward, and some were right here at Dartmouth College.

I’m Jessica Womack, Dartmouth Class of 2014. As part of my year as the Levinson Intern at the Hood Museum of Art, and in consultation with museum staff, I worked on creating this audio tour in response to student feedback about what they would like to know about the civil rights movement. This audio guide, narrated by five current Dartmouth students and two recent alums, of-
fers descriptions of select moments that inspired some
of the artists in this exhibition and highlights events that
took place here at Dartmouth.

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1965 March from Selma to Montgomery

In 1963, members of Alabama’s Dallas County Voters
League partnered with the Student Nonviolent Coordi-
nating Committee to fight for African Americans’ right
to vote. Because government resistance against the
movement was strong, the group asked Martin Luther
King Jr.—at this point a recognizable leader of the Civil
Rights Movement—and the Southern Christian Lead-
ership Conference for assistance. The organizations
planned a march from Selma to Montgomery (the state
capital) on March 7, 1965, to protest African Ameri-
cans’ lack of voting rights and the death of Jimmie Lee
Jackson, a black man who was shot and killed a month
earlier by Alabama State Troopers after demonstrating
for the right to vote. On that day, now deemed “Bloody
Sunday,” police attacked the approximately six hundred
marchers with tear gas and nightsticks before they had
even left Selma. This violence enraged and galvanized
people nationally and led to two subsequent marches
from Selma to fight for equal civil rights. The final one, from March 21 to 25, 1965, proceeded all the way to Montgomery.

1965 Watts Uprising

On the night of August 11, 1965, Lee Minikus, a white police officer, stopped 21-year-old African American Marquette Frye in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, on suspicion of being drunk. The two had a long altercation that also involved Frye’s brother and mother and required backup police. A crowd gathered to observe the confrontation and witnessed the family’s battery and harassment. Appalled by the scene, onlookers yelled at the police, threw objects at them, and a riot broke out. The Watts Uprising lasted for six days and caused over forty million dollars of property damage. Thirty-four people died, and over a thousand people reported injuries. For African Americans in Los Angeles, who had been struggling because of poor-quality housing, inadequate education systems, and high unemployment rates, Frye’s arrest was the last straw. The Watts Uprising is considered “the largest and costliest urban rebellion of the Civil Rights era,” and demonstrates how
high the tensions were between African Americans and the predominately white police force. Many artists, including John T. Riddle and husband and wife Daniel LaRue Johnson and Virginia Jaramillo, were present at the Watts Uprising.

AfriCOBRA
(African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists)

AfriCOBRA, or the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, was an artist collective based out of Chicago. Jeff Donaldson, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Gerald Williams founded the group in 1968. According to their mission statement, AfriCOBRA came together in order to develop and assert “an approach to image making which would reflect and project the moods, attitudes, and sensibilities of African Americans independent of the technical and aesthetic strictures of Euro-centric modalities.” Members of AfriCOBRA sought to assert the power and relevance of works made by African American artists, as well as to elevate art that depicted the lived experiences of black people. Members of AfriCOBRA were artist-activists; they used
their art to fight for social, political, and economic equality for members of the black race.

Black Power Movement

The Black Power movement gained prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Inspired by the political slogan “black power,” and characterized by racial pride and declarations for black autonomy, participants in the Black Power movement fought for the formation of black economic, social, and political institutions that would allow for the advancement of African Americans. According to Stokely Carmichael, Trinidadian-American leader in the civil rights movement, “‘Black Power’ means black people coming together to form a political force and either electing representatives or forcing their representatives to speak their needs.” While some members of the Black Power movement supported a non-violent approach to advocate for equal rights, others rejected what they considered “accommodationist” strategies to attain civil rights and instead endorsed armed self-defense in concert with their protests.
Civil Rights Act of 1964

On June 11, 1963, inspired by the National Guard being called to protect two African American students enrolling in the University of Alabama, as well as other events of the civil rights movement, President John F. Kennedy gave a speech advocating for the support of new civil rights legislation. After Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson continued the advocacy for civil rights and signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law on July 2 of that year. Despite a fifty-four day filibuster, the bill passed in the Senate on June 19, 1964, and in the house on July 2 of the same year. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, or religion, and was considered a watershed piece of legislation enacted during the civil rights movement. By asserting and safeguarding the right of African Americans to receive equal treatment during the voting process and in the education system, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a definitive statement that African Americans should have equal access to the benefits of citizenship.
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was a civil rights advocacy organization founded in 1942 in Chicago. CORE was comprised of both white and black members who, inspired by Gandhi’s protest against British imperialism in India, believed that nonviolent civil disobedience could be used as a tool to undermine racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. In 1947, CORE organized a bus ride, the Journey of Reconciliation, from Virginia to North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky, to protest Jim Crow laws’ restrictions on interstate travel for African Americans. The travelers were arrested a number of times for not adhering to the discriminatory policies of the bus companies. Because of their actions and subsequent arrests, the CORE riders received substantial press coverage, and in turn inspired later activists to ride integrated buses into the segregated south on what came to be called “Freedom Rides.”
Freedom Riders

In efforts to protest against discriminatory practices on buses, trains, and in other public spaces, the Freedom Riders organized a trip on interstate buses from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans in 1961. Inspired by the Congress of Racial Equality’s 1947 bus ride and led by CORE director James Farmer, the Freedom Riders, made up of black and white activists, developed strategies—such as having a black rider in the front seat and an interracial pair seated together—to demonstrate their demand for equality in public transportation. When the Freedom Riders reached Anniston, Alabama, they met a mob of Klansmen who slashed the bus’s tires, lit the vehicle on fire, and held its doors shut so the Riders would burn to death. The Riders were able to escape, but they were subsequently denied care at a local hospital, and later beaten with bats, tire chains, and pipes when they reached Birmingham. These abuses did not discourage the Riders, and when Kennedy asked for a “cooling off period” because of the escalating tension, CORE director James Farmer stated, “We have been cooling off for 350 years, and if we cooled off any more,
we’d be in a deep freeze.” The violence and brutality shown by Klansmen and police forces during the ride shocked America and motivated others to participate in the civil rights movement.

Freedom Summer

In the summer of 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations, an umbrella organization that included the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, organized a campaign in Mississippi to register African Americans to vote. This project, called Freedom Summer, was meant to counteract Mississippi’s systematic exclusion of African Americans from the voting process by charging poll taxes and mandating literacy tests. Over the project’s ten weeks, Freedom Summer workers were beaten and arrested, and black churches and homes were bombed and burned. Three civil rights workers, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, while investigating the burning of a local church, were arrested and then released a few hours later. A few hours after that, they were murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan. President Lyndon Johnson compelled the FBI, led by an unsympathetic
director, to investigate the disappearance of the three activists. Eventually, their bodies were found, and seven white men were convicted for their murders. Of the seven convicted, none served more than six years.

10 Jim Crow Laws

Jim Crow laws, enacted between 1876 and 1965, were local and state regulations that mandated racial segregation in the United States. These laws required African Americans to use facilities, such as water fountains, parks, and restrooms, separate from those available to white Americans. Additionally, interracial marriages were prohibited in most states, black people could not live in certain residential neighborhoods, and they had to sit in separate sections of restaurants and buses. In 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American woman, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man to protest the segregationist policies of the Jim Crow American South. Much of the civil rights movement was fueled by activists’ desire to see these oppressive regulations repealed so that African Americans could have full and equal access to American citizenship. The Civil Rights

**Ku Klux Klan**

Veterans of the Confederate Army founded the Ku Klux Klan in 1865 after the American Civil War to intimidate and oppress newly freed black people. Though the Klan disbanded around 1870, the group was revamped during the 1920s to protest the influence of Catholicism in the United States and to advocate for the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol. During the civil rights movement, the Ku Klux Klan’s numbers grew and members wanted to demonstrate their strong opposition to the goals of the civil rights activists. Proponents of segregation, racial purity, and white supremacy, Ku Klux Klan members were responsible for firebombing black churches, schools, and homes, as well as for the kidnapping, lynching, and murders of African Americans. The Ku Klux Klan is still in operation, and in April 2014, a former Klan leader was found responsible for the shooting deaths of three people at a Kansas City Jewish Community Center.
Middle Passage

The Middle Passage refers to the trans-Atlantic slave trading route that brought enslaved Africans to various parts of the Western hemisphere. Depending on the weather, the journey took anywhere from one to six months. Conditions on the slave ships were brutal; enslaved Africans were chained and packed together, fed inconsistently, and subject to illness. According to historians, the Spanish, French, British, Portuguese, and Dutch forcibly brought over ten million Africans to the Americas in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Many died from starvation, disease, and abuse on the journey. If they did reach the Americas, Africans were sold as commodities and were subsequently enslaved by their new masters. Among the colonies and countries that depended on slave labor are the United States, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Haiti.

Nation of Islam

Wallace Fard founded the Nation of Islam in 1930 with goals to ameliorate economic, political, and social
conditions for African Americans through strict adherence to the Muslim faith. While in prison for burglary, Malcolm Little—who would eventually become Malcolm X—joined the Nation of Islam and subsequently became one of the group’s most influential leaders after his release in 1952. (Later, Malcolm X rejected the group’s teachings). Members of the Nation of Islam did not support the many civil rights activities in pursuit of integration. Instead, they advocated for an autonomous black nation. Commissioned by *Life* magazine, African American photographer Gordon Parks gained the trust of leaders of the insular Nation of Islam in order to photograph Malcolm X. Because of his level of access, Parks was able to document everyday experiences of the group’s members.

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**Sixteenth Street Baptist Church**

The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a headquarters of the civil rights movement located in Birmingham, Alabama. Leaders and activists would convene at the church to strategize and organize their protests. On Sunday, September 15, 1963, several members of the Ku Klux Klan left sticks of dynamite outside the church’s
basement. The dynamite exploded at 10:22 a.m. on the church’s “Youth Day,” killing four young girls and wounding twenty-two others. At the time, Birmingham had been nicknamed “Bombingham” because over fifty bombings of black churches, schools, and homes had occurred since the beginning of the 1960s civil rights movement. Many activists condemned Alabama’s governor, George Wallace, for the white supremacist terrorism and because of his refusal to safeguard the rights of African Americans. The Klan’s violence against children and the girls’ deaths shocked the country, and the bombing served as a catalyst for subsequent civil rights legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Spiral Art Collective

Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston, and Hale Woodruff founded the Spiral Art Collective on July 5, 1963. The group initially came together to plan their trip to Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington, which was to take place in August of that year. However, after this first meeting the group began to discuss artistic concerns and articulate the roles they as artists
could play in the civil rights movement. The members of the Spiral Art Collective aimed to address the dearth of works by black artists represented in major exhibitions and museums. They had their only group exhibition, *First Group Showing: Works in Black and White*, during the summer of 1965. Because the members of the group worked in different styles and media, the group decided to disband, but they continued to advocate for artists’ engagement in the civil rights movement.

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**Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**

After the boycott of the Montgomery bus system (which began when Rosa Parks, a black woman, was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man), Dr. Martin Luther King invited a number of civil rights leaders and activists to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. The SCLC, led by King, advocated nonviolent action, like boycotts and protests, to desegregate bus systems in the South and orchestrated and supported churches’ involvement in the civil rights movement. The Conference and their work received strong opposition from white supremacist organizations like the White Citizens’ Council and the Ku Klux
Klan, as well as the overwhelmingly racist police force in the region. In 1968, the SCLC led the Poor People’s Campaign, in which three thousand people occupied the Washington Mall for six weeks to protest for economic and political equality for African Americans.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was founded in 1960 as a response to Jim Crow laws and the racial segregation of public spaces such as restaurants, libraries, pools, and parks. Made up mostly of college students, SNCC famously staged sit-ins at lunch counters, and the group also participated in Mississippi’s Freedom Summer and the Freedom Rides. Additionally, SNCC helped organize and promote the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his historic “I Have a Dream” speech. According to SNCC co-founder Julian Bond, “A final SNCC legacy is the destruction of the psychological shackles which had kept black southerners in physical and mental peonage; SNCC helped break those chains forever. It demonstrated
that ordinary women and men, young and old, could perform extraordinary tasks.” Though the groups was founded to employ nonviolent strategies to advocate for integration and racial equality, many SNCC members—overwhelmed by the brutality they and others endured because of their protests—became dissatisfied by their nonviolent approach. By 1969, the organization’s name was changed to the Student National Coordinating Committee, and some members even distanced themselves from the SNCC and joined the Black Panther Party.

**Voting Rights Act of 1965**

After the marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to protest African Americans’ exclusion from voting and the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson at the hands of the police, President Lyndon B. Johnson called for a more expansive voting rights bill. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law on August 6 of that year. The Voting Rights Act was a landmark piece of legislation that was meant to address some of the shortcomings of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The new act prohibited discrimination in voting by banning state and
local governments from writing or enforcing any laws that disenfranchised a specific group of people from voting based on their race. The act also declared unconstitutional literacy tests, poll taxes, and other tools meant to make voting inaccessible. Additionally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 mandated that regions with a large percentage of people who speak other languages provide ballots and election materials in those languages.

The Children’s Crusade

By 1963, interest in and commitment to the civil rights movement was waning as activists were increasingly being harassed, beaten, and killed for their involvement. In attempts to reinvigorate the movement, civil rights leaders attempted to find new populations for potential activism. Led by Reverends James Bevel and Martin Luther King Jr., hundreds of Alabama youth missed school in May of 1963 to protest the segregationist policies of the Jim Crow-era South in what has been deemed the Children’s Crusade. During the Crusade, African American students marched to Birmingham to protest peacefully, but they were met by white police officers who beat them, blasted them with
high-pressure fire hoses, used police dogs to intimidate them, and arrested them. Photographs of these events, like that by Charles Moore in this exhibition, sparked national outrage and urged subsequent action by other activists.

Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism encourages unity among Africans and people in the African diaspora around the world. According to the movement’s ideology, unity among and racial uplift for all black people is contingent upon economic, social, and political agency. Pan-Africanism gained a large following in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as black Americans protested for their own social mobility during the civil rights and Black Power movements.

George Wallace

In his 1963 inauguration speech after winning the governorship of Alabama, George Wallace claimed, “Segre-
“Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” On May 3, 1967, Wallace visited Dartmouth College on his campaign trail as he vied for the presidential nomination on the ticket of the American Independent Party. Students at the College, in opposition to the candidate’s segregationist policies, decided to protest the talk. During his speech, students raided Webster Hall (present-day Rauner Library) and shouted and booed, enraged by the politician’s presence on campus. After Wallace’s speech, students bombarded and rocked the governor’s car. Wallace had to be evacuated from the car and departed campus in another vehicle. This event on Dartmouth’s campus demonstrates how high and far-reaching tensions were during the civil rights movement. Wallace had previously lectured at Dartmouth in November 1963 to no incident.

Malcolm X at Dartmouth

On January 26, 1965, Malcolm X traveled to Dartmouth to deliver a public talk in Spaulding Auditorium and was interviewed by Ken Sharpe, Dartmouth Class of 1966, for Radio Station WDCR, Dartmouth College. In the interview, Malcolm X explored topics related to the libera-
tion movement in Africa, civil rights activities in the United States, and the Black Muslim movement, which he had left at that point. He talked about reframing American civil rights issues as global human rights issues, to be taken beyond the courts of the United States to the United Nations. He stated in response to a question from Sharpe about the necessity of the Civil Rights Bill, “My contention is that if the Constitution in itself is sufficient, you don’t need new legislation. If it is sufficient for foreigners who come here, then it should be sufficient for the Black man who was born here. Plus, the Civil Rights Bill involves new legislation, which means new laws—which are no good unless they can be enforced. And if the Supreme Court desegregation decision came into being as a law in 1954 and has been implemented less than 10 percent in the following 10 years . . . why, it’s a farce to come up with new legislation thinking that this is going to solve the problem of our people in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia . . .” Malcolm X concluded the interview stating, “when humanity looks upon itself not as black men, white men, brown men, red men and yellow men but as human beings, then they will sit down and live together in peace . . . the only time you’ll have a society on this earth when all men will love as brothers will be when all men respect each other and
treat each other as brothers.” Less than one month later, on February 21, Malcolm X was assassinated.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Dartmouth

On May 23, 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Dartmouth to present a public lecture entitled “Towards Freedom” in 105 Dartmouth Hall. His lecture was part of the Great Issues course series at Dartmouth, which was a core part of the education for Dartmouth seniors. In his lecture, he stated, “There is another myth that tends to linger around and for lack of a better term I call it the myth of educational determinism. It is the idea that only education can solve the problems which we face in human relations, so there is no need to talk about Executive Orders from the President of the United States or about legislation. It’s only through the slow process of education and changing attitudes that this problem will be solved. Well, there’s an element of truth in this because education does have a great role to play in changing attitudes. But this is a half-truth. It is not either legislation or education; it is both legislation and education. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the
law cannot make a man love me; religion and education will have to do that. But if it keeps him from lynching me, and I think that’s pretty important also.”

A Better Chance (ABC) at Dartmouth

In 1963, Dartmouth President John Sloan Dickey responded to a letter from President John F. Kennedy calling for equal access to a high quality high school education for students of color with less privileged backgrounds. This led to the foundation of the now national program A Better Chance, or ABC. This program was instituted at twenty-three schools and organized under the College’s leadership. The nation’s first ABC-sponsored program was held at Dartmouth in the summer of 1964, and President Dickey and Charles Dey, Class of 1952 and Dean of the Tucker Foundation at the time, saw this as a tangible way for the College to participate in the civil rights movement. A Better Chance was administered through Dartmouth College until the early 1970s, when it became such a large and wide-reaching organization that its administrative office moved to Boston. ABC celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2014, and the national ABC reunion was held at Dartmouth last July.