

## Close-Up

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sions are frequently merged.

In previous lectures and discussions he has said, "Being an artist, you draw upon what you are, or what you imagine you are. My images, my fantasies, my nostalgia transcend what my past really was."

Despite the fact that he only attended school for five months each term, Andrews was able to earn a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the Chicago Art Institute in 1958.

He has taught at numerous colleges and lectured at art exhibits and museums across the country.

Yet it is not these things that Andrews feels make him suc-

cessful. Rather, he feels that success is an attitude.

"I don't think a lot about whether or not I am successful," he says. "I always wanted to be an artist and to create, and I do that. It makes me happy, and I get pleasure from it. That means a lot to me. But whether or not it makes me successful in terms of how the art looks at me is probably another question."

Andrews, who has been a very energetic social activist, denies that he has ever truly felt like an outsider in the art world. He considers being an outsider or a revolutionary a subjective perception.

"I don't think I've been an outsider," Andrews says, shaking his head emphatically. "I think when you create something that is outside of the expected mold, you sometimes may be perceived as not being in the mainstream. But art is creative expression, and I maintain my freedom to express myself in my own way. Anything that is different arouses curiosity in the art world and probably in general. What's art to me may not be art to someone else."

**Addressing his lecture topic, "Is There a Black Aesthetic?"** Andrews prefaces his answer by declaring, "I firmly believe that there is."

Some art critics maintain that there is a creative tradition in the black community which is based on an inherent sensitivity. Others say that work by black artists is based on a personal sensibility that is irrelevant to their race.

"The whole question came up about 10 years ago when people started trying to classify and categorize works by black artists. I can look at that painting there and have no idea whether the ar-

tist is black or white," says Andrews, pointing to a painting hanging in SECCA's library.

"I don't think that there are any tangible characteristics that you check off one by one to determine if a black artist's work has aesthetic value," he says. "Aesthetics for one group of people do not necessarily have to be the same for another group of people."

"Black art draws from a unique set of aesthetics," he continues. "To say that they are not aesthetically valuable simply because they are different is unfounded."

Andrews' point raises the question of whether the art world has been able to successfully overcome any prejudices it may have had with respect to black artists.

Andrews argues that if there is any prejudice, it is based more on economic factors than on race.

"The simple fact is that people are not buying what the art world knows as 'black art,'" Andrews says. "Black people don't buy a lot of art, so the galleries don't exhibit a lot of it for sale; and if the galleries don't exhibit works, the odds are slim of them getting critical reviews in art industry

magazines, so there are not a lot of thriving black artists. I think there is more an economic consideration than a prejudiced one."

Andrews, a soft-spoken and insightful man, resists and resents any labels that may be placed upon him by society and the field that he has given himself to.

He is black and he is an artist, but he says that he, too, is confused about the term "black art."

"I'm not sure myself what they intend by 'black art,'" he says. "You have situations where an artist is black, but his work does not fit into any cultural expression. Then there is the situation when a non-black artist can create something distinctively related to black culture. Is that black art?"

"I think the most important thing to realize is that each person brings his background to what he does, but that doesn't have to limit him. A blind pianist can play music that people who are not blind can understand and enjoy. He is a pianist, not a blind pianist. True, he is influenced by his background, but he can still be a good pianist."

"Leontyne Price is an opera singer. She is a black woman, but she sings Italian operas. She doesn't have to be labeled a 'black woman who sings Italian opera songs.' She's an opera singer, period. An Irish woman could sing the same Italian operas."

"The operas are the same, and they don't have to be Italian to sing them," he continues. "When you hear both women sing, you know that Leontyne Price brings her black background to the song and the Irish woman brings her Irish culture to the song, but that doesn't really change the song."

For the time being, Andrews plans to continue to do what he loves best -- being an artist. This year he plans an exhibit with other members of his family which will display some of his father's works.

In January 1984 Andrews told New York art critic Janet Heit about his personal and professional philosophy.

"I use my past as part of the now," he said. "And I have my dreams about the future. What I do in the present, that's the experimental phase."

## Graves

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the primary culprits for the perpetuation of institutionalized ignorance; an ignorance of African American life and culture which, sadly, yet permeates this nation's miseducational system.

Because of his untiring sacrifice and commitment to truth, Woodson is hailed as the "Father of Black History," and is credited with the establishment of Black (or African American) History Month.

While, arguably, there were other black historians who were more scholarly (W.E.B. DuBois, Charles Wesley) or more renowned (John Hope Franklin, Benjamin Quarles), no one can deny the depth -- the significance -- of the contribution to our people, and this country, by Carter G. Woodson.

To be sure, I concur with those critics who contend that African American History should be taught and celebrated year round, and not cramped into the shortest month of the year.

Moreover, I agree that the struggle must continue for the comprehensive integration of African and African American achievements and contributions into every field of study presently taught in the U.S. educational system, from pre-school to postgraduate.

Now, let us not be naive. For no people -- especially an oppressed people -- willingly abdicates the responsibility of teaching its history to the oppressor. Thus, the onus is on us.

We must re-educate the miseducated and the miseducators. We must realize that it is our individual and collective responsibility to educate ourselves and our children about the glorious past and heroic struggles of our ancestors.

Our preachers and teachers, mammas and daddies, Greeks and Links, Masons and Eastern Stars, athletes and entertainers, Ph.Ds and "no Ds" must keep the torch of enlightenment -- the flame of inspiration -- burning in the souls of our youth.

The onus is on us (as my friend, the great actress/writer/Renaissance woman, Maya Angelou, is fond of saying) to teach the children about the heroes and the she-roses in our struggle. Heroes and she-roses like Chaka the Zulu and Nefertiti; Cinque and Toussaint L'Ouverture; Martin Delany and Sojourner Truth; Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman; W.E.B. DuBois and Mary Church Terrell; Marcus Garvey and Ida B. Wells-Barnett; Benjamin Mays and Mary McCleod Bethune; Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks; Charles Drew and Constance Baker Motley; A.G. Gaston and Madame C.J. Walker; Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks; Malcolm X and Fannie Lou Hamer.

Just a few of the countless who challenged the status quo and charted new courses on behalf of our people. (By the way, if any of the above are unfamiliar to you, go research now!)

Celebrate and commemorate African American History Month 365 days a year. Celebrate in your homes and schools, in

churches and on street corners.

We owe nothing less to our ancestors, our children and ourselves.

Winston-Salem native Clifton Graves is an attorney who is director of university relations at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, Ala.

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