

Pink Triangles and Raised Fists: Framing of ACT UP and BLM through Graphic Art Activism

Pink Triangles and Raised Fists: Pembingkai ACT UP dan BLM melalui Aktivisme Seni Grafis

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Abstrak:

Seni grafis bertahan sebagai salah satu instrumen nirkekerasan gerakan sosial sehingga menjadikannya pantas untuk dikaji ulang. Artikel ini maka hendak menginterogasi apa yang bertahan dan berubah dalam aktivisme seni grafis dengan mengobservasi seni grafis milik AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) pada tahun 1980-1990-an dan Black Lives Matter (BLM) pada tahun 2020-2021. Dalam rangka meneliti relasi antara seni grafis kedua gerakan tersebut, artikel ini memanfaatkan teknik analisis diskursus dalam mengaplikasikan teori *framing* Benford & Snow. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa ACT UP dan BLM memberikan atribusi *framing* yang mirip pada seni grafis mereka, yakni *frame* ketidakadilan yang menekankan tuntutan keadilan bagi komunitas teropresi, baik oleh pihak yang berkuasa maupun oleh masyarakat umum; meruntuhkan narasi dominan milik publik; serta menggugah resonansi emosional. Persamaan ini membuktikan bagaimana seni grafis terus berlanjut memiliki kekuatan transformasi sosial dalam gerakan sosial.

Kata-Kata Kunci: Aktivisme Seni, Seni Grafis, ACT UP, Black Lives Matter, Framing

Abstract:

Graphic art persists as one of the non-violent devices for social movements and is thus worthy of a re-evaluation. This article thus aims to interrogate what has stayed or changed in graphic art activism by scrutinizing the graphic art of two successful transnational movements: AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) during the 1980-90s and Black Lives Matter (BLM) in 2020-2021. To examine the connecting thread between the two movements' graphic art, this article utilizes discourse analysis and Benford & Snow's framing theory. This study further reveals that ACT UP and BLM employ similar framing attributes as portrayed in their graphic art, particularly the injustice frame that emphasized the demand of justice for the oppressed by both ruling bodies and the general society, subverted the public's dominant narrative, as well as provoked emotional resonance. Those similarities testify to how graphic arts continue to possess the power of social transformation at the heart of movements.

Keywords: Art Activism, Graphic Art, ACT UP, Black Lives Matter, Framing

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Introduction

Art is viewed to hold social and political relevance, notably in social movements. As stated by Michael Shank, in times when social movements are getting more driven by emotions, art is a suitable tool to win hearts and minds (2004). It is not just about how persuasive art can be but also how instrumental art is in attaining a movement's objectives (Adams, 2002). When art becomes a political tool, it is foregrounded in the collective consciousness to convey particular value systems, aspirations, and goals to influence another constituency's consciousness (Sharp, 2020). This means that through art activism, a movement has one more tool in its toolbox to confront dominant narratives, showcase shared subscribed vision of a utopian world, prompt the powerful to listen, give voice to the voiceless, shift awareness, deepen community within the movement, and eventually mobilize mass in demanding social justice (Desai, 2020; Milbrandt, 2010; Reed, 2005; Shank, 2004). Art, then, possesses the power to galvanize social dissent and effect social change.

A strong example of a contemporary transnational movement whose art activism is deemed by many as influential, both to the eventual effectivity of the movement and to the history of social movements in its larger part, is the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). ACT UP is seen as "almost without peers in prioritizing *culture* as a form of resistance" (Lampert, 2013, p. 380). Emerging out of the ongoing health crisis and lack of information surrounding human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) throughout the 1980s-90s, members of the movement launched protest arts, from visual art to films and performances, which were put up for public consumption on the streets, museums, nightclubs, and other public spaces (Schulman, 2021). Although the definitive power of ACT UP's art activism can only be fully assessed through the cumulative forms of art it has produced, a prominent part of what conjured ACT UP's public image as it is known for today, arguably, is the movement's use of graphic arts (Reed, 2019). The artist collective Gran Fury cannot be remiss when it comes to the graphic designs of ACT UP. Adapting the visual language of commercial advertisement as well as the aesthetic style of the New York art scene at the time, the eleven-person collective helped shape the identity, mandate, and tactics of ACT UP for eight years since 1988 (Crimp & Rolston, 1990; Lampert, 2013). However, Gran Fury was not the sole creator responsible for ACT UP's noteworthy graphic art activism. Artists worldwide contributed to the presentation and elevation of ACT UP. This is

viewed as a reflection of ACT UP's queer and marginalized origins and its aspirational impulses (Schulman, 2021), as well as the urgency that came with the rapid transmission of HIV/AIDS on a broader global landscape. Art in ACT UP is, then, regarded as one of the movement's most remembered and celebrated legacies. Researchers echo that movements of the 21st century are indebted to ACT UP for underlining the impossibility of separating a movement's cultural and political dimensions (Reed, 2019).

Among the modern social movements is Black Lives Matter (BLM) which became a more recent example of the close link between art and social movement. Ahmaud Arbery's murder, followed by Breonna Taylor's, George Floyd's, and multiple others at the hands of police at the beginning of 2020, led to the resurgence of the movement and, by extension, art activism ranging from music photography, murals, graffiti, to defacement of monumental statues (Mobaraki, 2021). Since the launch of #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter (now X) in 2013, the discourse of Black Lives Matter in 2020 started to take place mainly on Instagram (Chang, Richardson, & Ferrara, 2022). Along with Instagram's visual-based platform with cultural relevance and appeal, graphic art in the activism of BLM quickly became prominent (Woolfenden, 2020). Black Lives Matter's branding was initially defined by the graphic arts of Design Action Collective (Wong, 2020), but in the age of rapid globalization where online mediums are democratized for all to express ideas and feelings, the art of the individuals—tailored to the individuals' own style and not necessarily adhering to the original brand aesthetic of BLM—began to flood social media (Wally, 2020). Those graphic arts that are shared to condemn the racial injustices Black people experience all around the globe then became a crucial aspect to the movement as it is a method to demand gazes in a world driven by the rise of virtual and visual social media in the 21st century (Henderson, 2020). In addition, art as a political expression is integral to the movement because art is a cultural production inseparable from Black Lives (Lebron, 2023).

As previously established, ACT UP and BLM are both successful global movements that, in their respective resistances, have utilized graphic art as part of their resistance labor. At each movement's height, ACT UP and BLM's graphic art activism took off and became the movements' vital element. Thus, this research asked the question whether there's any thread that connects the two movements' graphic art activism considering they're both successful movements with similar approaches whilst occurring a couple of decades apart. By observing

how each movement framed itself by way of graphic art, the factors that contribute to the resonance of those movements and the strategies used to construct and present socio-political issues are within grasp—revealing what has or has not stayed relevant in the graphic art activism of ACT UP and BLM. This research is further propelled by the inadequate research in the pertinence of graphic art activism and how one movement's graphic art influences another, particularly between movements representing groups of minority. On top of that, despite the massive presence of the BLM movement in social media, its graphic art is still under-researched in the scientific community.

Framing Theory

In this research, we utilized framing theory to help unpack how movement narratives work at their core. Rooted in the concept originated by Erving Goffman, frames offer findings to the questions of the reality of a phenomenon, its meaning, and how people should act or respond to it (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). The functions of frames as elaborated by David Snow (2004) are, first, to engage people's attention to a focused message or, essentially, to what is "in-frame." Second, frames serve as articulation mechanisms in order to accentuate elements selectively, thus presenting a cohesive version of those elements into a set of meanings as not to indicate another. In addition, frames have a transformative function in reconstructing how objects are viewed and understood by each other or the actor. Therefore, frames in the context of collective action are headed toward mobilizing people and converting bystanders into adherents (Snow, Vliegenthart, & Ketelaars, 2019).

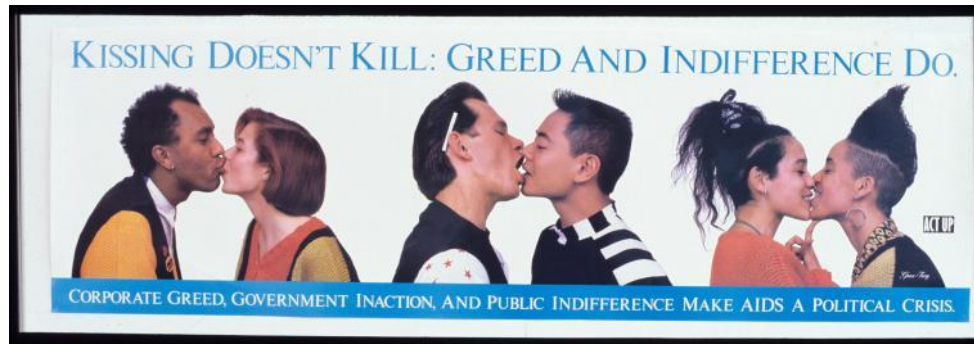
In implementing the frame theory, one must pay attention to the three stages of the framing process: the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational dimensions. To start, the diagnostic element in frame analysis encompasses the identification of actors who are deemed permissible to give their share of opinions (Della Porta & Diani, 2020). Framing consequently comes into play to diagnose the social problem at hand, to identify who the aggrieved population is, and subsequently, the actor(s) that should be held accountable for said problem. The second element, prognostic, refers to the action of solution-searching and how it conveys actors' typically utopian wishful prospect of social behaviors and relations. Often entailed are tactics and plans to bring the proposed solution to life as well as refutation to the opponent's solution. It is also noted that a movement might possess various prognostic elements

simultaneously (Anheier, Glasius, & Kaldor, 2001). Finally, the motivational element in framing tasks is about what moves people to take action collectively. Its framing is designed to construct motives outside of a social movement's diagnostic and prognostic aspects. Call to action is promoted by motivational framing through how a movement paints a sense of severity, urgency, efficacy, moral propriety, and status enhancement in joining their cause (Benford, 1993). Below, we perform a reading of both ACT UP and BLM core narratives as that fall under sequential events.

Graphic Art Framing of AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987-1997

From the top, we begin with diagnostic framing. Diagnostic framing, in essence, answers two questions: "What is or went wrong?" and "Who or what is to blame?" (Snow, Vliegenthart, & Ketelaars, 2019). William Gamson identified the first steps in organizing a political and/or economic movement as an "injustice frame." This mode of interpretation is regarded as the most commonplace frame in social movements, where a problematic condition ceases to become a misfortune and instead the fault of an actor. There is a change of perception toward the seriousness of the situation. In other words, what used to be regarded as a tragic circumstance is transformed into an inexcusable, unjust, and immoral condition (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Behind this framing is the belief that people can be motivated into action when there is a concrete conceptualization of who the hostile aggressor and the innocent victim are (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Figure 1. 'Kissing Doesn't Kill'



Source: Gran Fury, 1989

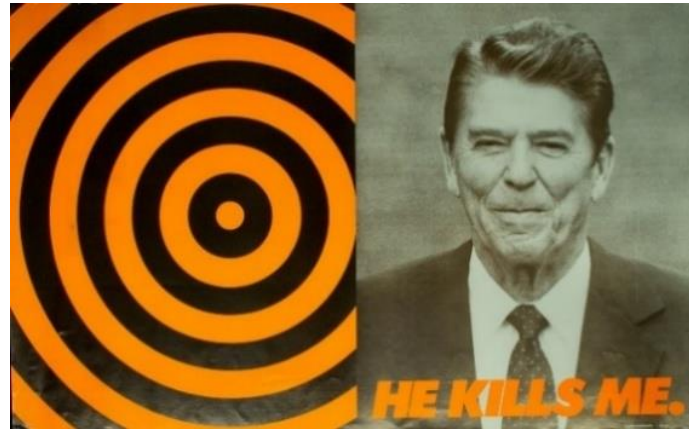
What is perceived as the problem beneath the ACT UP movement? In one of the first successful graphic posters by Gran Fury (Figure 1), ACT UP spelled it out in clear terms. The first issue the poster highlights is how the public was subject to misinformation and a lack of information on AIDS. 'Kissing Doesn't Kill' illustrates one of the widespread myths on how HIV is transmitted through saliva, thus refuting it in bold lettering. Portraying various people across age, sex, race, and sexual orientation also indicates an attempt to reject the notion that only certain groups—namely the LGBTQIA+/queer community, drug users, and people of color—can contract HIV (HIV.gov, 2022). The absence of transparent and correct data on HIV/AIDS origins, transmissions, and treatments by figures of authority and media was what kept AIDS a sustained epidemic (Heller, 2015), leaving 100.000 people infected in 1989 in the United States and thousands more in the years to come (HIV.gov, n.d.). This lack of facts surrounding HIV/AIDS was both the cause and effect of the inattention or blatant ignorance by significant figures, which ties into the second issue: that the AIDS crisis is not merely a health emergency, but rather a political crisis, summarized by Gran Fury as the result of “corporate greed, government inaction, and public indifference.” By pointing this out, ACT UP links the AIDS crisis to the oppressive systems of power in place that are designed to maintain the status quo by prioritizing profits and neglecting marginalized communities. Therefore, the injustice framing was cast by ACT UP to project demand to end the health crisis.

Figure 2. 'All People with AIDS Are Innocent'

Source: Gran Fury, 1988

As seen in Figure 2, ACT UP provides an unprecedented perception of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). Pre-ACT UP, AIDS was predominantly viewed as a deserving divine punishment to marginalized communities. It justified the “othering” and demonization of those communities. Having to declare innocence suggests that there was guilt attached to contracting HIV (Sontag, 1989), which mirrors the assumption of general society at the time. There was also an alarming lack of acknowledgment and outrage, even among gay communities, regarding the existing propaganda and silence around AIDS (Kramer, 1983). Moreover, the AIDS coverages in mainstream news media were oversaturated with cases of gay men, with buzzwords such as “gay pneumonia,” which fortified the judgment of marginal communities and set off the conviction that the “right” people were dying. Through the graphic act, ACT UP signified that PLWHA is an innocent group of people, not threatening members of society who deserved the denial of rights to the protection of bodily autonomy and integrity.

Figure 3. 'He Kills Me'



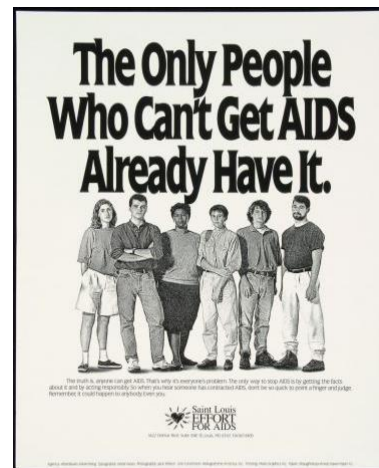
Source: Donald Moffett, 1987

Figure 4. 'Wall Street Money'



Source: Gran Fury, 1988

Figure 5. 'The Only People Who Can't Get AIDS Already Have It.'

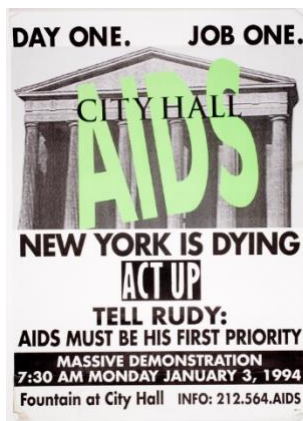


Source: St. Louis Effort for AIDS, (n.d.)

ACT UP's diagnosis of the source of the problem is subsequently exemplified in Figure 3-5. In the graphic poster 'He Kills Me' (Figure 3), it is clear that ACT UP's main target was Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States during the initial rise of HIV/AIDS. ACT UP recognized Reagan's failure to address the AIDS epidemic as he had only mentioned AIDS publicly for the first time in 1985, what many deemed five years too late. Even then, throughout the rest of Reagan's presidency, reports and deaths due to AIDS were still seeing an increasing pattern (CDC, 2001). Additionally, the blame was also casted on the face of institutions as seen in Figure 4 where Gran Fury photocopied thousands of \$10, \$50, and \$100 bills with protest messages at the back for their protest to Wall Street brokers (Lowery, 2022). There was an understanding within ACT UP that the health crisis was the result of corporations profiting off the price of investigational drugs and government funding for research, education, and other

social services. Other than the government and corporations, another targeted group by ACT UP is the public. For generations, stigma and discrimination stuck onto communities that are categorized in HIV/AIDS high-risk groups: queer people, drug users, and people of color. ACT UP presented the public's bias and low awareness as an issue because it perpetuated the collective belief that PLWHA are not entitled to sympathy and high-quality health care, ergo, not allowed to live as thriving members of society. As reflected in Figure 5, public ignorance had real-life consequences on a more significant number of people, including the ones excluded in the HIV/AIDS high-risk groups. ACT UP signaled that one of the major causes of the problem was HIV/AIDS not being treated as a public concern.

Figure 6. 'Day One, Job One'



Source: ACT UP, 1994

Figure 7. 'Fight Its Opposition to Abortion'



Source: Gagliostro, 1989

Figure 8. 'Silence = Death'



Source: Gran Fury, 1987

In response to the above diagnostic narrative, ACT UP's graphic posters also shed light on the prognostic framing of the movement. Figures 6 and 7 demonstrate how ACT UP believes strongly in taking direct and concrete action to manage their opponents on the AIDS issue. Therefore, graphic arts posed demands specific to what ACT UP deemed to be the government or institution's inadequate policy at that time. This response was primarily directed at the problems of the dangerous spread of misinformation and inattentiveness by highly influential entities. Since prognostic framing also includes articulating plans to attack or strategies for carrying out the plan (Benford & Snow, 2000), gathering masses and taking to the streets were ACT UP's choice of methods for pressuring the government into changing their policies on AIDS. It showcases people's ownership in fighting for their cause through the bottom-up approach.

Since unresponsiveness by governments, institutions, and bystanders had brought casualties, speaking up and taking political action—the opposite of silence—is the most suited and urgent step for all actors to enforce (Figure 8).

Figure 9. ‘Condoman Says: Don’t Be Shame, Be Game. Protect Yourself’



Source: Australia Department of Community Services and Health, 1991

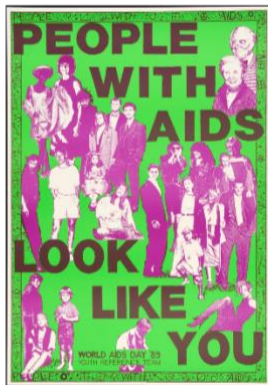
Figure 10. ‘Another Myth Down the Drain’



Source: West Virginia State Department of Health, 1988

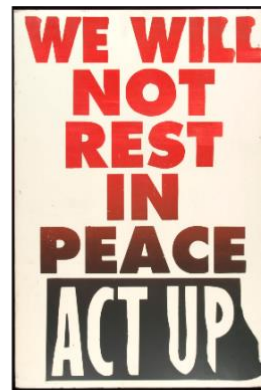
Another prognosis ACT UP put forward, as seen in their graphic posters, is raising the public’s awareness of AIDS. Engaging the public in education about how HIV is transmitted, where to go for any HIV inquiries and assessments, and how to care for PLWHA is inferred to be the solution to ending the AIDS crisis, as well as increasing the acceptance of PLWHA. Figures 9 and 10 depict several examples of how the public has been misinformed about AIDS. Safe sex was one of ACT UP’s major campaigns, as it was not a widespread and commonly understood practice prior to the AIDS epidemic (Blair, 2017). Dispelling misconceptions about AIDS, such as how the virus can be transmitted by drinking the same source of water as PLWHA (Figure 10) as well as cutting all means of contact with PLWHA (Figure 11), also functions in prognostic framing as counter framing to refute the opponent’s rationale for the solution to the problem at hand (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Figure 11. 'People with AIDS
Look Like You'



Source: Youth Reference Team, 1989

Figure 12. 'We Will Not
Rest in Peace'



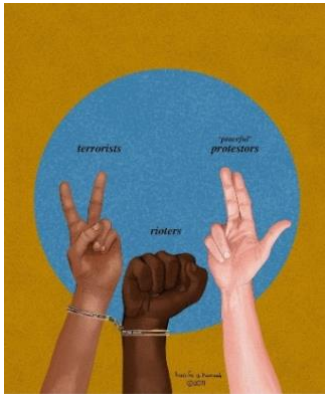
Source: ACT UP, (n.d).

ACT UP's final core framing task, motivational framing, is captured in the graphic arts above. The framing that no one is exempt from HIV/AIDS (Figure 11) despite their gender, race, sexuality, class, or other defining socio-economic attributes became a "call to arms." Figure 12 then reinforces the underlying destruction and injustices PLWHA had experienced or were about to experience, motivating people to take action. In addition, ACT UP's graphic posters were frequently informed by queer culture through the application of campy humor, as exemplified in Figure 9. While ACT UP is not an exclusively queer social movement, it heavily drew on queer institutions, forms, and styles. The playful, campy humor strengthened the movement's collective identity and maintained an exuberant sense of life while coping with a raging epidemic (Reed, 2019). This fits into how motivational framing relies on connection based on shared identity (Della Porta & Diani, 2020) or referred to as the "agency" component of collective action frames (Gamson, 1996).

Graphic Art Framing of Black Lives Matter in 2020-2021

In the momentous second wave of Black Lives Matter, graphic art resurfaced as an instrument to enact social change due to the movement's popularity on Instagram, a visual-based social platform (Wong, 2020). Similar to the ACT UP movement, we look at the three framing stages in this particular movement below.

Figure 13. 'terrorists, rioters, 'peaceful' protestors'



Source: Instagram (@colorsofhoney), 2021

Figure 14. 'A.C.A.B'



Source: Instagram (@migrant_illustration), 2020

Figure 15. 'Justice for Bennie Edwards'

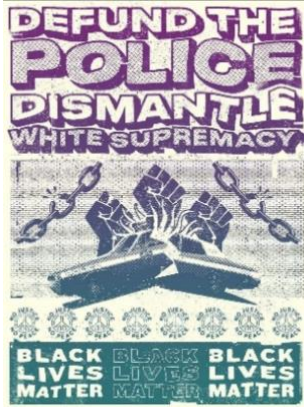


Source: Instagram (@alex.albadree), 2020

Based on their graphic art, Black Lives Matter adopted the injustice framing as their diagnostic frame. Evidence of this can be identified in Figure 13, where two Brown and Black arms raised to protest and promote peace are titled 'terrorist' and 'rioter,' while the White hand raised in the shape of a gun is labeled as a 'peaceful protestor.' This existing stigma of people of color being more corrupt than white people has been incorporated in the veins of society for generations and has cultivated into incidents of racial-based hate crime and police brutality, which eventually set off the movement (Patel, 2013). It led to what Black Lives Matter deems as the core problem: the violence enacted by the police on Black people is intentional and motivated by racism, and essentially goes with little control and accountability (Hillstrom, 2018). Police then are exposed for their racial bias in conducting order, as seen in Figure 14, where the artist echoes the chant popularized by BLM: 'ACAB' or 'All Cops Are Bad/Bastards,' accompanied by the message "No racism for humankind." This is a conscious framing effort by BLM to paint cops as the source of the problem in contrast to the broad presumption that a police officer is an honorable individual with responsibilities to protect and serve the community. Black Lives Matter brought forward the idea that the problem of disproportionate racial-based violence by police officers is not an isolated case but a systemic condition to serve the interests of those in power. On the receiving end of said violence, Black individuals are framed as the innocent victims of systemic injustice. As reflected in the graphic poster to demand justice for Bennie Edwards (Figure 15), activists

have turned Black people who were victims of police brutality and/or hate crime into symbols of political uprising.

Figure 16. 'Defund the Police Dismantle White Supremacy'



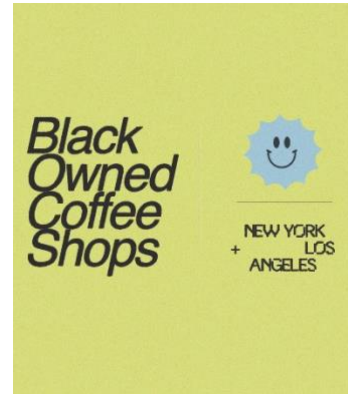
Source: Instagram (@pkreizenbeck), 2020

Figure 17. 'Am I Addressing the Roots of Racism'



Source: Instagram (@courtneyahndesign), 2020

Figure 18. 'SUPPORT BLACK OWNED COFFEE SHOPS'



Source: Instagram (@futura____free), 2020

Shaped by the diagnostic frames on how the existing police system is fundamentally designed to mistreat people of color, Black Lives Matter’s prognostic framing, as seen in their graphic art, entails several solutions. Figure 16 posits the notion of defunding the police. It refers to a justice reinvestment by reducing and reallocating government budgets for the police into other crucial public sectors, such as education and health services, which are relatively underfunded in the United States. This idea arises by bearing witness to the US’ lack of active investment in communities and its increased spending on policing despite constant academic findings showing that increased spending does not equal less crime (Cobbina-Dungy & Jones-Brown, 2023). Furthermore, systemic racism—embodied in white supremacy—as the core source of conflict, as previously established, must be dismantled, which means that all actions taken, including the act of defunding the police, are serving the larger goal of eliminating white supremacy. This prognostic framing reverberates in other solutions offered by BLM, such as elevating the public’s consciousness of racism by centering Black emotions, cultures, and context-specific accommodations (Figure 17), as well as incorporating support of Black individuals and communities in one’s day-to-day life (Figure 18). Those actions are directed toward building a world where Black people are upheld as worthy members of

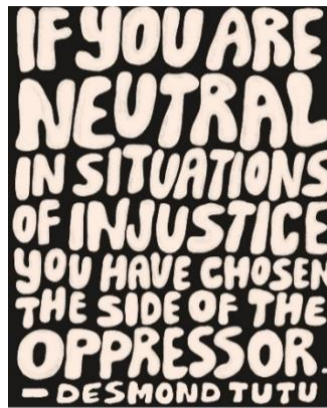
society, liberated from racism and oppression at the individual, institutional, and structural levels.

Figure 19. 'BLM'



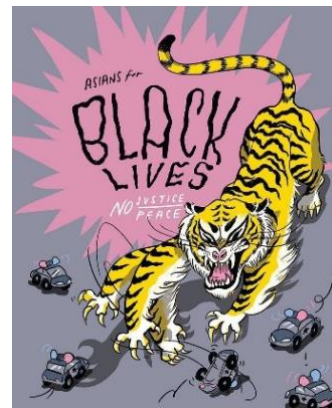
Source: Instagram (@jbggraphicdesign), 2020

Figure 20. 'If You are Neutral in Situations of Injustice'



Source: Instagram (@stuffgracemade), 2020

Figure 21. 'Asians for Black Lives'



Source: Instagram (@madcrush_), 2020

What becomes the motivational framing of BLM is also presented in the graphic arts produced. In Figure 19, the word “Breath” repeated six times behind a silhouette of a Black man with his back turned and arms embracing his bare torso refers to George Floyd’s haunting last words: *“I cannot breathe.”* This symbolic elaboration reveals the vulnerability of Black people to the killing and injustice targeted at them, thus functioning as a trigger for people to join BLM’s cause. BLM also highlights the moral responsibility of society to take an anti-racist position actively (Figure 20). By framing people who do not use their privilege to take a stand against anti-Black racism as equal to the oppressive force, there is pressure for onlookers to transform in a direction that favors the movement. Additionally, in Figure 21, support within marginalized communities tightens solidarity and a sense of belonging. In this particular poster, Asian people showed their unity and allegiance in opposing racial discrimination against Black people. This framing invites more people within the Asian community to join their fellow Asians in standing behind the movement.

Sequential Narratives of Marginalized Minority in ACT UP and BLM’s Graphic Art

In this part, we compare the graphic art framing of ACT UP and Black Lives Matter to seek out any similarities or differences to gain insights into the relevance of graphic art activism. First, both movements’ diagnostic frameworks raise a similar frame of injustice in which they laid out who has a role in

committing casualties. ACT UP and BLM both identify marginalized communities—queer people, drug users, and people of color for ACT UP; Black people for BLM—as the actors experiencing said injustice. The meaning attributed to those communities resulted in them becoming the main interest of each respective movement. In their process of constructing the problem, the injustice issues each movement raised are effectively captured in political symbols rooted in history. ACT UP inverted the pink triangle Nazi intended as a badge of shame for gay men in concentration camps (Jensen, 2002), as seen in Figure 8. At the same time, BLM inherited the raised fist icon from the Black Power movement to symbolize their determination to organize and defend Black communities' interests and values (Hillstrom, 2018) as seen in Figure 13. This reveals the long-standing oppressions that add to the movements' injustice framing.

Similarly, upon framing what is presented as the problem, ACT UP and BLM focused on flipping dominant narratives. Therefore, there is a shift of attributional orientation that leads to the development of this injustice frame. ACT UP, through its graphic arts (for example, Figures 1 & 2), tried to break society's stigma of high-risk groups, specifically queer communities, which barred those who are most vulnerable to accessing health care. Many ACT UP posters contain messages in support of the queer community, such as celebrating sexuality and calling out homophobia. Moreover, since the initial conception of *Gran Fury*, uplifting queer communities have been at the forefront of its objectives (Speretta, 2014). Similarly, BLM reveals violent practices of racism that are committed by law enforcement institutions (Figure 14). This framing starkly contrasts how the public has since viewed the police. In doing this, the movement proposed a challenge toward the power structure existing in the societal justice system.

Additionally, both ACT UP and BLM decided that the chief characters, the sources of conflict, hence the primary focuses of their movement, are governments and institutions whose actions, or rather inaction, created barriers in actualizing their movement's goals (Figure 3-4, 6-7, 14, and 16). Targeting the powerful can shift an individual's worldview and, eventually, the larger public to support the movements. As Benford and Hunt (1992) stated, a critical mass of people—that is, the actors enacting framing—must define a situation as ripe for collective action and convince others that the truth lies in their reality.

When answering the question “what actions are needed?”, ACT UP and BLM proposed solutions that were directed both upward to the government and institutions and downward to the general society. The movements’ graphic arts have exhibited this prognostic framing. In ACT UP, posters in Figures 6 and 7 address the government and the church by first, making the movement’s demands known—that is, to propel them into taking action toward solving the AIDS epidemic quickly and effectively; and second, by calling the public to be present in supporting protests. Other posters (Figures 10 and 11) indicate another proposed solution for the public in the form of informational data on handling the AIDS crisis. Meanwhile, in BLM, Figure 16 communicates that Black Lives Matter has a consensus that a radical alteration to the law enforcement system is necessary. Moreover, in Figures 17 and 18, graphic arts were generated to educate the public on the various ways to support Black people and realize an anti-racist world, as it is also seen as the answer to the problem diagnosed previously.

To generate the motivation and incentives necessary for action, the two movements utilized graphic art by revealing to the public the weight of injustice and discrimination the “victims” experienced, portraying the range of impact and turning it into a collective problem, making the marginalized community identity known, and provoking emotional resonance. The notion of emotional resonance in social movement framing, as developed by Shrock et. al., refers to the link between targeted recruits’ emotional lives and the emotional messages delivered by social movements (2004). Based on Wolkomir’s analysis of emotional resonance (2001), it can be inferred that ACT UP and BLM both utilized emotional resonance as a tool of motivational framing in order to minimize undesired emotions, such as shame and helplessness, and instead maximize desired emotions, such as anger, self-esteem, and solidarity. By making the onlookers realize the urgency of man-made mortality in both movements’ conflicts (for example, Figure 8, 12, 19, and 20), the movements’ graphic arts move people closer to their sense of justice and humanity. This makes people united in anger, thus transforming the emotion into action based in and for solidarity. The graphic parts also allow people to step into a more confident position in their identities and ideas. In Figure 11, ACT UP strengthens the comprehension that no matter their backgrounds, everyone belongs to the group of people at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. In Figure 21, Asian people received the message that Asians must make the BLM’s struggle their common cause.

Conclusion

Through the framing employed in graphic arts produced by the global movements of ACT UP in 1987-1997 and BLM in 2020-2021, we can see how graphic art remains suitable, even thriving, as a device of social transformation to articulate movements' ideas. In using graphic arts for their diagnostic framing, the two movements assigned meaning to injustice, which prompted people to grasp the depth of repression in marginalized communities and challenge the existing dominant narratives. ACT UP and BLM also have a multisectoral approach in their prognostic framing. The solutions proposed are demanded to be applied at the level of ruling bodies (such as governments and institutions) and at the level of the general public. Lastly, as people are incentivized to act out of the emotional components (such as anger and self-esteem) outside the recognition of the problems itself, the graphic arts provide an opportunity for a collective mobilization. As we live in a socio-political climate where social movements continue to emerge and persevere, it remains an important work to reconsider the relevance of strategies taken by social movements, including the utilization of graphic art.

There are limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First, the sample of the graphic arts was not fully representative as there are hundreds to thousands of ACT UP's and BLM's graphic arts. Sorting the graphic arts to see which ones were the most received by the public, had the most impact, or best represent the movement's ideas becomes a challenging task, specifically with the graphic arts of Black Lives Matter, which primarily exist in the digital sphere as the current Instagram feature does not allow its users to see top posts on its search result. Additionally, this study has barely scratched the surface of the effect of social media on graphic art activism. Future research may benefit from a deeper examination of the relationship between social media and graphic arts production due to social platforms becoming the new public space, making it easier for people to boost graphic art contents. Lastly, to better understand the relevance of graphic art activism in social movements, there needs to be a more comprehensive comparison between movements across time, space, issues, contexts, effectiveness, and other factors considered to be necessary.

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