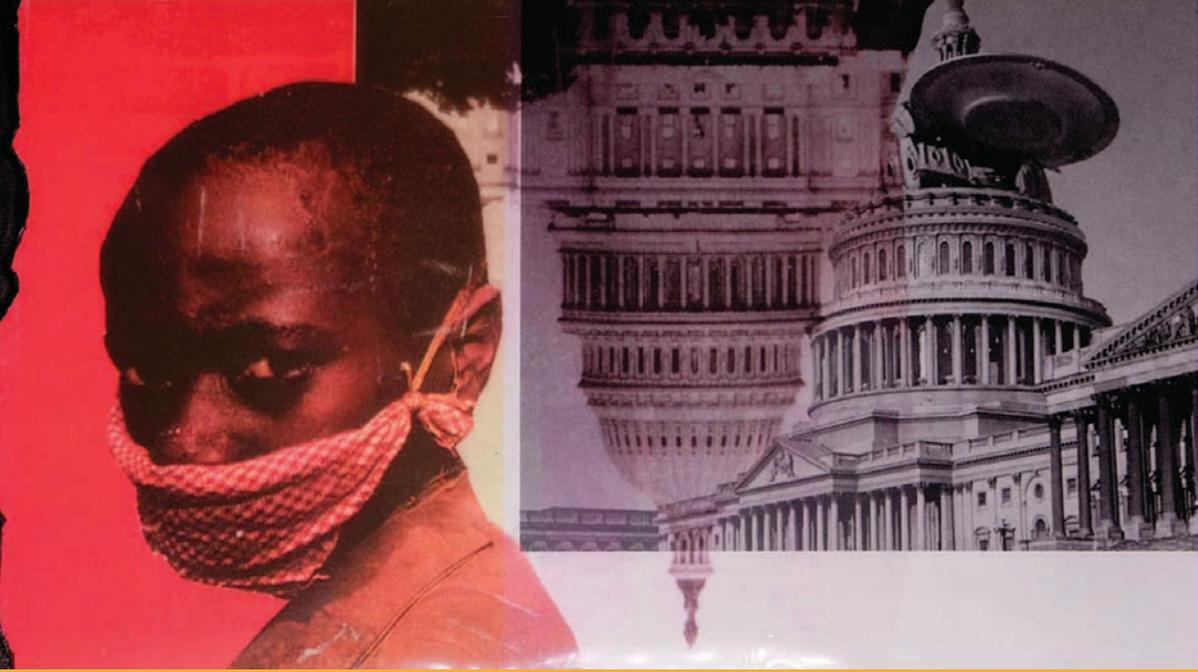
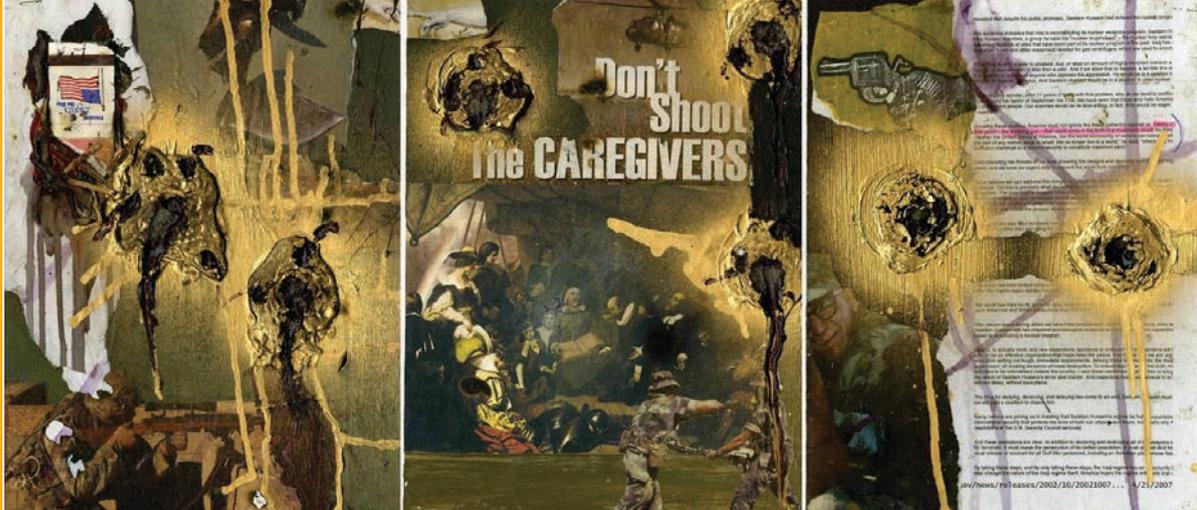


THEODORE A. HARRIS: *The Capitol Vetoed* and other works



Exhibition runs from
October 1st to 31st, 2023
Theodore Johnson
Endowment Lecture,
Artist talk
October 10th, 2023

Exhibition hosted by the Office
of Inclusion (IMQ) and the
artist lecture is sponsored by
Theodore Johnson
Endowment.



Acknowledgments

It is my honor to be delivering the Theodore Johnson Endowment Lecture and mounting an exhibition in the Office of Inclusion here at Northern Arizona University. The invitation came from Professor Greg McAllister who I first met at the Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center in Colorado where he delivered a talk on John Taylor, a Buffalo soldier who in the 1870s settled among the Southern Utes in southwest Colorado. His talk was given in collaboration with other historians. This event was convened for the six artists, including myself researching the history of the Buffalo Soldiers for our exhibition at the Fort Garland Museum titled *buffalo soldiers: reVision*.

Here I want give an enormous thanks for the team effort that went into bringing me here to mount the exhibition and to deliver my talk; Thank you Louis Gregory McAllister for the invite, Debra Edgerton for bringing her experience as a veteran artist to work on the installation of this exhibition in non traditional space, to John for working with Debra to create the plexiglass framing for the work, Jose Gomez Moreno thanks for your fortitude with securing the funding and keeping the train on the track, and big ups to Traci Gleason for the invite for me to share my work with the students, whom I hope, have dedicated themselves to living a life of the mind, with the goal to use the degree they earn, to see it as a paton passed onto them to create a world where the scales of justice are truly blind and even for everyone.

Peace

Theodore A. Harris
Philadelphia, PA.
2023



We Wear Our Flesh Like Flames,
1999, 22"x 30" mixed media
collage printed on Arches paper,
collection of the artist

HUNTED EVERYWHERE: COLLAGING THE CAPITOL, A MANIFESTO

This was the house of liberty. And it had been built by slaves. Their backs had ached under its massive stones. Their lungs had clogged with its mortar dust. Their bodies had wilted under its heavy load-bearing timbers. They had been paid only in the coin of pain. Slavery lay across American history like a monstrous cleaving sword, but the Capitol of the United States steadfastly refused to divulge its complicity, or even slavery's very occurrence.

~Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*

I'll begin by discussing my use of one of the symbols of our republic; the United States Capitol Building, and the effect poetry has had on my work. When people ask me why I turn the image of the U.S. Capitol Building upside down in my collages, as if it were a bomb, my short answer is: "It's upside down because they're upside down." As an example of this upside – downness, I can point to the 2000 presidential election of George W. Bush by the Supreme Court and NOT THE PEOPLE! (I can't think of anything more upside down than that.) But before I could make these kinds of statements in my work, there were visual artists such as Charles White, Diego Rivera, Howardena Pindell, John Abner, Melvin Edwards, Pablo Picasso, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, John Heartfield, Charles Alston, Vincent Smith, Hans Haacke, Juan Sanchez, Leon Golub, Pat Ward Williams, Jacob Lawrence, John Wilson, Reginald Gammon, Ernest Chichlow, Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, Adrian Piper, Cavin Jones, Leroy Johnson, and the writers such as Sonia Sanchez, Lamont B. Steptoe, Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Pablo Neruda, Ernesto Cardenal, Haki R. Madhubuti, Frank M. Chipasula, Dennis Brutus, and David Diop. Through their work, these anti-imperialist artists taught me how to use metaphor and content in a powerful way, enabling the viewer to go beyond the surface and look deeper.

Diop, a poet writing in the time of the Negritude literary revolution, wrote in a stanza from his poem "For a Black Child":

*In the land where houses touch the sky But the heart is not touched
In the land where hands are laid on the Bible
But the Bible is not opened.*¹

Sounds like he's describing the religious right, but Diop wrote these clear-visioned words in response to the lynching of fifteen year-old Emmett Till, who was killed in Money,

Mississippi, in 1955 by two white men, Roy Bryant and his stepbrother, J. W. Milam – for "wolf whistling" at Bryant's wife. Neither murderer ever served a day in jail for the crime.

Professor Clenora Hudson-Weems has written a detailed account of the Till case in *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement*. While reading the book, I came across a photograph that is what I'd call the perfect picture of irony. It is of Mamie Bradley, Till's mother, with relatives and a bishop climbing the steps of the Capitol Building, pointing at it, with looks of hope on their faces.

These seekers of justice and democracy knew America had not outlawed lynching! My point is that most great artists, such as David Diop, record the time in which they live, and I aim to do this with visual art, to make social commentary in a visual language.

Whenever I'm watching the news on television being reported from the nation's capital, the reporter and the U.S. Capitol Building are consistently in the frame, as backdrop, set design, in the theater of white supremacy (and conquest) as I watch, I hear the words from a Sonia Sanchez poem titled *right on: white America*

*this country might have been a pio neer land once. But
there ain't no mo indians blowing custer's mind with a
different image of america. this country might have
needed shoot outs/ daily/ once. but. there ain't no mo real/
white/ allamerican bad/ guys. just. u & me. blk/ and un/
armed. this country might have been pion eer land. once.
and it still is. Check out the falling gun/ shells on our blk/
tomorrows.*²

After reading this consciousness-raising poem, I felt as if I was being hunted everywhere. I had to check out my surroundings: where was I being hunted, why was I being

hunted, for how long? What I found out early on was that our blood is the mortar, and the bricks of our black and red bones built this country's capitol and its capital. From then on, I knew I had to strike back with the only weapon I have—art. With my pen and scissors I will avenge the senseless deaths of my ancestors, I would indict America in the courtroom of my own opinion,

**HERE IN THESE UNITED-AGAINST-US STATES
WHERE INTERROGATION ROOMS NEVER CLOSE,
POLICE AT THE MOUNT CALVARY CORRECTIONAL
FACILITY PUT SILENCERS ON CRUCIFIXION NAILS,
BEAT US INTO INTERSTELLAR SPACE WITH WET
TELEPHONE BOOKS, GIVE RECTAL EXAMINATIONS
WITH TOILET PLUNGERS IN THEIR PRECINCT
BATHROOMS!**

When I look at the history of this country and our involvement in it as African Americans, I see us always struggling to get out from under the slave ships, the rapes, the whips, the chains, the prisons, the nightsticks, the Patriot Act police, and Campus Watch, which aid in “the nazification of America” according to Toni Morrison,³ by detaining independent thinkers in jails of character assassination, rulers with bombs and bullets of imperialism aimed at unarmed protesters fire-hosed with the slobber of barking dogs!

It is because of this I became a confrontational collagist, engaged in visual warfare, decolonizing the mind through collage. For my question is, who is going to fight in the visual arts and literature against the gargoyles of the world, who have made it clear that our vetoed dreams don't count.

As Amiri Baraka said, “Every day what becomes clearer and clearer is the desperation of this system. The United States bourgeoisie reminds me of a man running away from a lion, who keeps throwing out pieces of meat until finally his little bag is empty and the only piece of meat left is himself.”

Or, in the words of Ngugi Wa Thiongo “Art is more powerful when working as an ally of the powerless than it is when allied to repression. For its essential nature is freedom. While that of the state is restriction and regulation of freedom.”

Both points are further illustrated in the April 2003 issue of Harper's Magazine, which reported, “On January 27, 2003, a tapestry of Pablo Picasso's epic painting *Guernica* that hangs at the entrance of the Security Council of the United Nations in New York City was deemed an inappropriate background for press briefings about the possibility of a war in Iraq. It was therefore draped.” These actions by the state only confirm to me that I'm aiming my combative collages in the right direction.

When folks view my work, I want them to come away with the strength to keep on, holding on to these fraying ropes of struggle. I hope that what I'm creating is purposeful for people to use in this racial and class struggle, as a weapon in this fight Lamont B. Steptoe labels a “low -intensity war” (personal communication with the author) in which we battle every day for our lives and the lives of our children, living under a government of dangerous philistines.

In my most recent work, an image of the Pentagon building is inverted, after it was blown apart on September 11, 2001, turning it into a collage - wounded guillotine, a reflection of the U.\$ imploting on itself. For my aims, as an anti - imperialist artist is to reflect the reality of our lives, the exiled from exile.

Theodore A.Harris

Slide lecture first delivered March 16th, 2006

ART FOR A PHONEY WAR exhibit

W.E.B. DuBois College House

University of Pennsylvania

The Capitol Vetoed (1995-2023)

The Capitol Vetoed (1995-2023) is an updated version of my 1995 collage Vetoed Dreams in the collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts and now on view in the exhibition Rising Sun: Artist in an Uncertain America. Vetoed Dreams: Public Art in the Age of Insurrection - Rising Sun (risingsunphilly.org). The impetus for updating Vetoed Dreams was when I came across still images from the movie Earth vs the Flying Saucers (1956) The images of the saucers attacking the U.S. Capitol building and other monuments in Washington D.C. are haunting and remind me of the attack on the U.S. Capitol building as if it were a bouncy house, deflated by anti democratic forces to overthrow the current democratically elected President. My use of appropriating a still image from a film made in the mid 1950's is my poetic attempt to create a collage reflecting in it, our republic in a funhouse mirror, becoming unglued in a country whose "think tanks" are anti-intellectual romper rooms.



Still Image from the panel discussion Vetoed Dreams: Public Art in the Age of Insurrection at Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts. The Capitol Vetoed, (1995-2023), 2023, 24"x44", digital print from collage on paper, edition of 50. Collection of Julia Ingersoll and David Castro.

COLLAGE AND CONFLICT: A Triptych Manifesto

It is a new world we want not an endowed chair in the concentration camp...Art must be our magic weapon to create and recreate the world and ourselves as part of it...

-Amiri Baraka

The world within the collage, if it is authentic, retains the right to speak for itself.

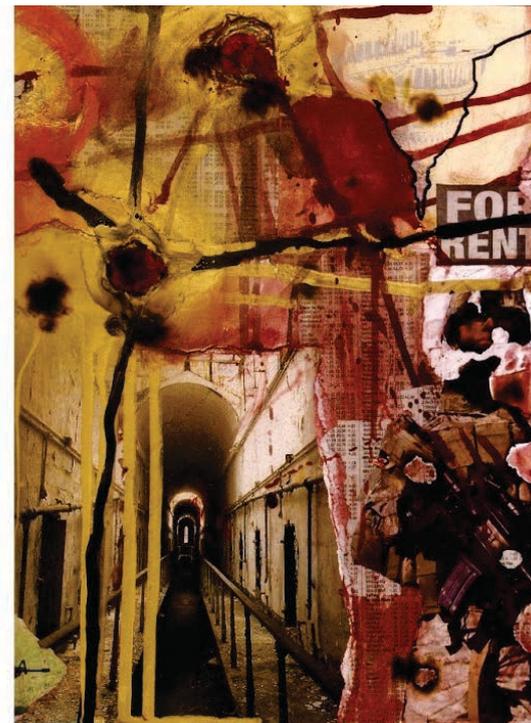
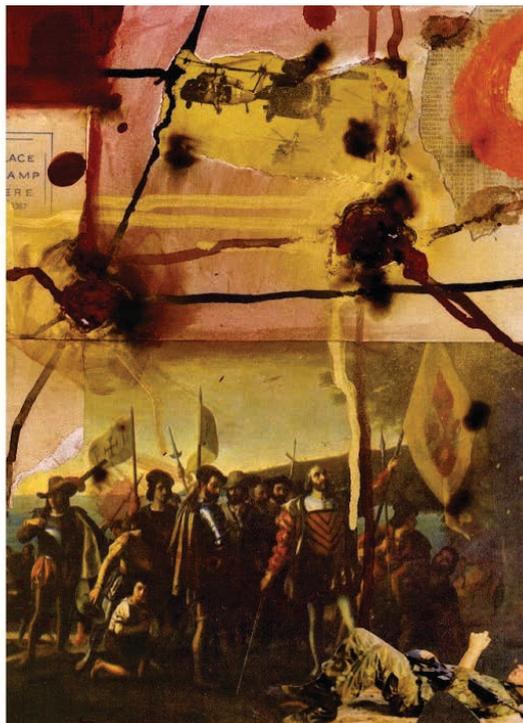
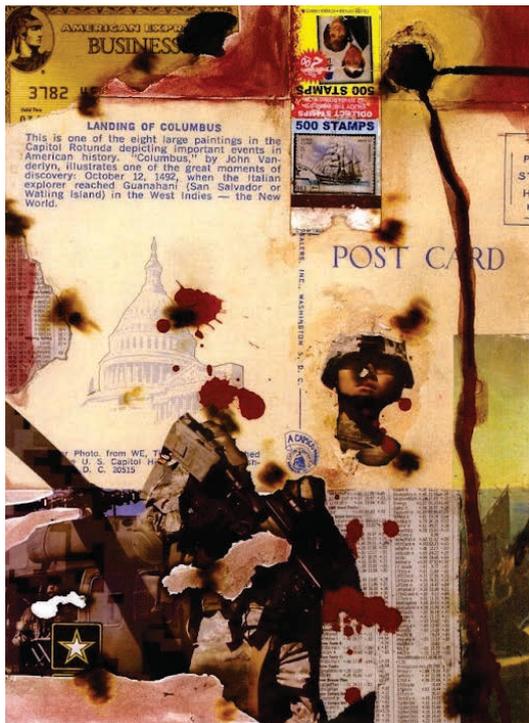
-Romare Bearden

I like to make collages, because it gives me the possibility to insist that we are in one world...And I like to put together what you can not put together... I like to do collages because it means to create a new world with an existing world.

-Thomas Hirschhorn

The world's a plantation where can you run?

-Lamont B. Steptoe



Postcard from Conquest (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, 9"x11" each panel, mixed media collage on board, collection of Beatrice Jauregui and Anand Rao.

1.

As an artist I create work to act as a lobbyist for liberation-not to hold up oppressive regimes and an oligarchy that resolves conflict with sanctions and nooses of war; entering into a konkordat with the church that put silencers on crucifixion nails. The existence of Arlington National Cemetery and the prison industrial complex is evidence enough the scales of justice are not blind and even, those graves are not filled with blue bloods but fresh with our dead, the working poor in this country, deployed to go off and kill the working poor in another country like drones. This is proof the business class only sees life through the narrow profit margin eyeglasses of mercantilism. It is with these conclusions I see war as a map of wounds; turning flesh and bones into glue. This is the reason the protagonists in my confrontational collages are inverted images of the US Capitol and Pentagon buildings, intended to be read as an invective critique of blind patriotism.



2.

War is the Sound of Money Eating after John G. Hall (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, 9"x11" each panel, mixed media collage on board, Collection of Ronald Reed.

Collage is the confrontational voice of easel painting. The collagist is a surgeon with scissors and the glue sticks are gauze and donated blood.

An anti-imperialist collage does not sell Dewars White Label¹ or bail out banks too greedy to fail, it instructs you how to rob them to create a new world out of an existing world.² You don't need x-ray vision to see the fuhrer's spine is made of gold coins, a swastika for a heart, and an iron cross kidney.³

When he reads out loud from his Patriot Act bible his mouth is an oven vomiting municipal waste.

As a lobbyist for liberation, my aim as a collagist is to free the framed political prisoners and fill the cells with wardens and military contractors. These collages are mug-shots of murderers, montages of maggots whose floor plans for our future is the architecture of doom, fashioning flesh into briefcases or furniture for fascists to sit on.

Our bones are not prison bars, yet its bricks and mortar have buried us in a Bermuda Triangle of concrete.



3.

The Giant Triplets for Dr. King and Ewuare X. Osayande, 2008, triptych, 9"x11" each panel, mixed media collage on board, Collection of the artist.

Create a new world out of an existing world where collages wrestle the keys, handcuffs, and guns from the jailers and lock them in the Basement of Night⁴, without parole under the weight of Heartfield's guillotine scissors and Bearden's theory, crushing missiles with our hands as if they were death's teeth⁵, coming apart in four panels like the Destruction of the National Front.⁶ In aesthetic and political terms Collage and Conflict aims to de-collage this war, to free our Limbs from the Dissertation of a Rhodes Scholar.⁷

Theodore A. Harris
2010
Philadelphia, PA.

Collage and Conflict: A Triptych Manifesto

Notes

This manifesto was first published in the Left Curve Journal, No. 35, 2011
www.leftcurve.org

1. This line makes reference to the 1976 Dewars White Label ad that profiled Painter Barkley L. Hendricks. The ad appears in the catalog of his Retrospective *Birth of the Cool*, Eds, Barkley L. Hendricks, Trevor Schoonmaker. Raleigh North Carolina. Nasher Museum of Art Duke University, 2008, p.118
2. This quote is from the artist Thomas Hirschhorn at a talk he delivered as part of the Former West International Research Project. Hirschhorn makes large scale installation collages. Formerwest.org
3. John Heartfield, *Adolf as Superman: "He Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk"*, photomontage, 1932. published in AIZ.
4. Theodore A. Harris, *Basement of Night*, mixed media collage on paper, 17 1/8" x 24", 2007. Collection of the artist
5. Peter Kennard, *Crushed Missile*, photomontage, 1980.
6. Eddie Chambers, *Destruction of the National Front*, collage, four panels, each 35 x 20 cm, 1979-80, collection of Tate Modern, London.



For John Taylor and the Patriotic Syringe of Settler Colonialism, 2023, 24"x44" each panel, collaged postcards printed on paper, collection Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center

Fort Garland Museum & Cultural Center Fort Garland, Colorado

Today, visitors to Fort Garland (est. 1858) can explore life in a nineteenth military fort by walking the parade grounds and touring five of the original adobe buildings.

Dear John Taylor,
I have a question from
the future looking back.
Would you agree or
disagree that Manifest
Destiny was the
architecture of doom?

Peace!
Theodore



In my practice as a visual artist and poet I treat visual art as poetry and poetry as visual art. And with that in mind I made a few drafts for this project but it was the collaging of the postcards from the Fort Garland gift shop that best suited the economy of language needed, to reflect the horrific history of settler colonialism; now called gentrification with less blood on the ground. It is a symptom of a system that has a jones for displacing the Indigenous population by deputizing its former enslaved African population to carry out the evictions and (at times guarding them from the settler class), ripping apart families and tearing up of treaties, making *Manifest Destiny the architecture of doom* envisioned in this triptych postcard *To John Taylor and the Patriotic Syringe of Settler Colonialism*.

Statement on the commissioned artwork for the group exhibition; *buffalo soldiers: reVision* mounted at the Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center. Fort Garland, CO.

THEODORE A. HARRIS: The Capitol Vetoed and other works

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. *The Capitol Vetoed* (1995-2023), 2023, 24"x44", Digital print from collage, collection of the artist.
2. *We Wear Our Flesh Like Flames*, 2005, 22"x30", mixed media collage printed on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
3. *Collaged Eulogy for Amadou Diallo*, 1999, 22"x30", mixed media print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
4. *Our Bones Have Numbers on Them*, 2000, 22"x30", mixed media print from collage on paper, collection of the artist.
5. *Strange Justice*, 1995, 22"x30", print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
6. *2a.m. September 11, 2001*, 22"x30", mixed media print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
7. *The Pentagon is a Wounded Guillotine*, 2004, 22"x30", mixed media print from collage, collection of the artist.
8. *Appeal to the Secretary of the Lower Intestine*, 2003, 22"x30", print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
9. *Collage for a Phoney War*, 2003, 22"x30", print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.
10. *Resistance to Repression*, 2003, 22"x30", mixed media print from collage on Arches paper, collection of the artist.

Collage and Conflict series

11. *End this War... after Shirley Chisholm*, from the (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on board, each panel 9"x11", collection of the artist.
12. *Don't Shoot the Caregivers*, from the (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on board, each panel 9"x11", collection of the artist.
13. *War Chest*, (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on panel, 9"x11", each panel. Collection of the artist.
14. *The Giant Triplets* (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on panel, 9"x11", each panel. Collection of the artist.
15. *Small Arms Review* (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on panel, 10"x11" each panel, Collection of the artist.
16. *Stop this War after Shirley Chisholm* (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, mixed media collage on panel, 9"x11" each panel, Collection of the artist.

Source links to videos, interviews, and reviews

Vetoed Dreams: Art in the Age of Insurrection - YouTube

//// Forward Slash Manifesto - YouTube

Our Flesh of Flames: Collages by Theodore A. Harris and Captions by Amiri Baraka

Poet, AMIRI BARAKA and visual artist, Theodore A. Harris - YouTube

The Truthoscopic Collage Art of Theodore Harris Overview | The Truthoscopic Collage Art of Theodore Harris (haverford.edu)

ENDLESS SHOUT ICA Philadelphia ENDLESS SHOUT: Ashon Crawley and Theodore Harris (vimeo.com)

NONsite.org

Art as Seeing Through Neoliberal De-reification – Nonsite.org

FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism Interview with Theodore A. Harris | FIELD (field-journal.com)

Oregon Arts Watch

Raise a Voice: Art as Social Praxis | Oregon ArtsWatch (orartswatch.org)

2022 Center For Emerging Visual Artists Fellow (CFEVA)

Theodore Harris — The Center for Emerging Visual Artists (cfeva.org)

BOMB Magazine Online Interview

BOMB Magazine | Form and Politics: Theodore A. Harris Interviewed

Third Text Art Space

Third Text

Archives ASAP/J

Theodore A. Harris Archives - ASAP/J

(asapjournal.com)

BIO

Theodore A. Harris is a Philadelphia-based visual artist and poet. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is in private and public collections such as Fort Garland Museum and Cultural Center, University of New Mexico Art Museum, Saint Louis University Museum of Art, La Salle University Art Museum, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, McGill University Visual Arts Collection, Center for Africana Studies; University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center Rare Books and Manuscript Library; University of Pennsylvania, Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art, and the Winston and Carolyn Lowe Collection. Harris is the co-founder of the Anti-Graffiti Network/Philadelphia

Mural Arts Program. Harris has also co-authored and authored books including *Our Flesh of Flames* (2019), *Malcolm X as Ideology* (2008) with Amiri Baraka, *TRIPTYCH* with Amiri Baraka and Jack Hirschman (2011), *i ran from it and was still in it* with Fred Moten (2007), and *Thesentür: Conscientious Objector to Formalism* (2017). He is the Founding Artistic Director of the **Institute for Advanced Study** in **Black Aesthetics**. He is a 2022 Center for Emerging Visual Artists Visual Artist Fellow (CFEVA).

Contact

Theodore A. Harris

THEODORE A. HARRIS - Home (weebly.com)

Cover art

Top image

Theodore A. Harris, *The Capitol Vetoed* (1995-2022), 2023, print from mixed media collage on paper, Collection of Julia Ingersoll and David Castro.

Bottom image

Theodore A. Harris, *Don't Shoot the Caregivers* (Collage and Conflict series), 2008, triptych, 9"x11" each panel, mixed media collage on board, collection of the artist.

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Design, editing, and formatting by Stephen Paulmier

THEODORE A. HARRIS: *The Capitol Vetoed* and other works

Exhibition hosted by the Office of Inclusion (IMQ) and the artist lecture is sponsored by Theodore Johnson Endowment in collaboration with **Institute for Advanced Study in **Black Aesthetics** founding artistic director Theodore A. Harris.**

Back cover art

Theodore A. Harris, *Collage for a Phoney War*, 2003, 22"x30", mixed media collage on paper, Collection of Saint Louis University Museum of Art.

