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**The American Socio-cultural Perception of Graffiti:  
Swinging between an Expressive Art Form and an  
Urban Blight**

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## **Abstract**

Graffiti, as a form of public expression, has been a subject of intense debate in American society. This dissertation explores the dichotomy surrounding graffiti, specifically examining the perception of graffiti as either artistic expression or vandalism. This research provides a holistic understanding of the American perspective on graffiti and the tensions that arise when viewing it through contrasting lenses. The study begins with a historical overview of graffiti in America, tracing its evolution and development as a means of creative expression. Influencing factors on graffiti culture, such as hip hop, street art movements, and youth subcultures, are explored to understand its complex origins and growth. This research exposes the divergent viewpoints regarding graffiti, analyzing the various factors that influence its perception. Cultural influences, societal norms, media portrayal, and public opinion all shape the way graffiti is viewed in American society. Illustrations of selected cities give a clear picture on how different approaches and policies towards graffiti impact its perception and treatment. Moreover, this study investigates how graffiti can serve as a catalyst for social change, empowering individuals and acting as a tool for social activism. This study contributes to the broader comprehension of public art and challenges existing assumptions about artistic expression through addressing the American perception of graffiti. The findings reflect the complex relationship between graffiti, society, and urban environments.

## ملخص

كانت الكتابة على الجدران المجردة ، كشكل من أشكال التعبير العام ، موضوع نقاش مكثف في المجتمع الأمريكي. تستكشف هذه المذكرة الانقسام المحيط بالكتابة على الجدران ، وتدرس على وجه التحديد تصور الكتابة على الجدران (الجرافيتي) كتعبير فني أو تخريب. يوفر هذا البحث فهما شاملا للمنظور الأمريكي حول الكتابة على الجدران والتوترات التي تنشأ عند مشاهدتها من خلال عدسات متناقضة. تبدأ الدراسة بنظرة عامة تاريخية على الكتابة على الجدران في أمريكا ، وتتبع تطورها وتطورها كوسيلة للتعبير الإبداعي. يتم استكشاف العوامل المؤثرة على ثقافة الكتابة على الجدران ، مثل الهيب هوب ، وحركات فن الشارع ، والثقافات الفرعية للشباب ، لفهم أصولها المعقدة ونموها. تكشف الدراسة وجهات النظر المتباينة فيما يتعلق بالكتابة على الجدران ، وتحلل العوامل المختلفة التي تؤثر على تصورها. تشكل التأثيرات الثقافية والأعراف المجتمعية والتصوير الإعلامي والرأي العام الطريقة التي ينظر بها إلى الكتابة على الجدران في المجتمع الأمريكي. توفر الرسوم التوضيحية لمدن مختارة صورة واضحة عن كيفية تأثير الأساليب والسياسات المختلفة تجاه الكتابة على الجدران على تصورها ومعالجتها. علاوة على ذلك ، تبحث هذه المذكرة كيف يمكن أن تكون الكتابة على الجدران بمثابة حافز للتغيير الاجتماعي ، وتمكين الأفراد والعمل كأداة للنشاط الاجتماعي. من خلال معالجة التصور الأمريكي للكتابة على الجدران ، تؤدي هذه الدراسة إلى المساهمة في الفهم الأوسع للفن العام وتحدي الافتراضات الحالية حول التعبير الفني. ستعكس النتائج العلاقة المعقدة بين الكتابة على الجدران والمجتمع والبيئات الحضرية.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One: The Historical Significance, Stylistic Evolution, and Sociocultural Impact of American Graffiti</b> .....	5
1.1 A Historical Chronicle: Tracing Graffiti Origins .....	5
1.1.1 Early Forms of Graffiti .....	6
1.1.1.1 Ancient Origins .....	6
1.1.1.2 The Emergence of Modern Graffiti .....	9
1.1.1.3 Hip-Hop and the Rise of Street Art .....	10
1.2 Definitions and Key Concepts in the United States .....	13
1.2.1 Graffiti Terminology .....	13
1.2.1.1 Tagging and Throw-ups .....	13
1.2.1.2 Stencils and Wheat Pasting .....	15
1.2.2 Legal Definitions of Graffiti.....	16
1.3 Contemporary Graffiti Techniques .....	17
1.3.1 Traditional Techniques .....	18
1.3.1.1 Spray Paint .....	18
1.3.1.2 Marker Pens .....	19
1.3.2 Innovative Techniques .....	19
1.3.2.1 3D Graffiti .....	20
1.3.2.2 UV Graffiti .....	21
1.3.3 Collaborative Techniques .....	21
1.3.3.1 Group Murals .....	21
1.4 Graffiti's Urban Canvas: Cultural Impact .....	22
1.4.1 Graffiti in Pop Culture .....	22

1.4.2 Graffiti as a Form of Expression .....	23
1.4.2.1 Artistic and Political Expression .....	24
1.4.2.2 Graffiti and Free Speech .....	25
<b>Chapter Two: Graffiti as a Form of Artistic Expression: Breaking Stereotypes and</b>	
<b>Challenging Norms .....</b>	<b>27</b>
2.1 Graffiti Pioneers and Artists .....	28
2.1.1 Graffiti Pioneers .....	29
2.1.2 Cornbread .....	30
2.1.3 Taki 183 .....	31
2.1.4 Dondi (1961–1998) .....	32
2.2 Graffiti Artists and Their Artistic Styles .....	33
2.2.1 Keith Haring: A Pioneer of Street Art and Social Activism .....	33
2.2.2 Jean-Michel Basquiat: A Revolutionary Artist and Cultural Icon .....	35
2.2.3 Lady Pink: A Female Force in Graffiti .....	37
2.2.3.1 Graffiti and Gender .....	38
2.2.4 Futura 2000: Merging Abstraction with Street Art .....	39
2.3 Exploring Social Commentary and Identity: Beyond Aesthetics .....	41
2.3.1 The Graffiti Scene in New York: Exploring the Borders of Trains and	
Identity.....	41
2.3.2 Concurrent Identities and Affirmations of Being .....	42
2.3.3 The Influence of Graffiti on Social Movements: Advocating for Justice.....	43
2.4 Graffiti as a potent form of resistance and a vehicle for artistic expression .....	43
2.4.1 Graffiti Promote Communal Engagement .....	43
2.4.2 Graffiti’s Positive Effect on Society .....	45
<b>Chapter Three :The Legal and Social Implications of Graffiti: Is it Vandalism</b>	



<b>or Art?</b> .....	48
3.1 Vandalism Laws, Property Damage, Public Opinion on Graffiti .....	49
3.1.1 Vandalism Laws .....	49
3.1.2 Property Damage .....	52
3.1.3 Public Opinion on Graffiti .....	53
3.2 Graffiti and Urban Revitalization: Transforming Communities through Street Art.....	54
3.2.1 Community Engagement .....	54
3.2.2 Beautification Projects .....	55
3.2.3 Positive Impact of Street Art .....	57
3.3 Bridging the Gap: Finding Common Ground between Artists and Authorities .....	58
3.3.1 Legal Walls for Graffiti Artists .....	59
3.3.2 Collaborative Projects with Local Governments .....	60
3.4 The Complexity and Diversity of Graffiti as an Artistic Medium in the USA .....	61
3.4.1 The Intersection of Graffiti and Urban Subcultures .....	62
3.4.2 The Commercialization and Mainstream Acceptance of Graffiti .....	63
3.4.3 The Future of Graffiti as an Artistic Medium in the USA.....	65
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	68
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	71



## Introduction

Graffiti, in its various forms, holds a prominent position in human expression, despite its temporary nature. It represents the creativity and individuality of artists, as they transform walls and surfaces into platforms for visual storytelling and personal messages. This art form has thrived in regions where human society flourishes, leaving a lasting impact on the cultural level. From its earliest origins to the present day, graffiti continues to captivate and inspire, offering a unique perspective on the evolution of artistic expression.

Graffiti has a long-standing presence across diverse regions globally throughout history, ranging from ancient cave paintings to inscriptions on urban walls. In the United States, this practice emerged during the antebellum era, with individuals marking boxcars that traveled the nation. During times of economic depression, gang-affiliated graffiti gained prominence, particularly in California and the Southwest during the 1920s and 1930s. Notable instances included the widespread presence of “Kilroy was here,” which originated near Boston and became emblematic of a specific generation. However, the late 1960s witnessed a remarkable surge in graffiti culture in Philadelphia and New York, marking a critical moment in American graffiti history. Between 1971 and 1975, a new generation of young artists transformed simple signatures into wonderful murals that adorned entire subway cars, ushering in a transformative phase in the world of art.

Graffiti has persistently been a subject of controversy and discord, fueling intense discussions about whether it should be considered a valid artistic form or a criminal act of vandalism. Therefore, the objective of this scholarly study is to analyze the various interpretations of graffiti and the numerous challenges and controversies inherent in its societal context, which has prompted a multitude of questions.

Such study questions arise regarding whether graffiti is art or vandalism: Is graffiti a form of artistic expression or an unauthorized defacement of property without the owner’s

consent? Should the illegal nature of most graffiti automatically classify it as vandalism, regardless of its artistic merits? How can society establish a fine line between the desire for creative expression and the need to enforce laws against property damage? The issue of who holds the authority to determine what constitutes aesthetically pleasing or culturally interesting art also comes into play. Does the underlying intent behind graffiti have a substantial impact on its classification as art or vandalism? Can graffiti be viewed as an integral component of a community's cultural heritage and identity, despite technically violating property laws? How should society undertake the preservation and safeguarding of graffiti works that hold historical or cultural significance? To what extent should graffiti's influence for social commentary and its ability to raise awareness on important matters be taken into consideration when evaluating its artistic value or legality?

For several decades, the perception of graffiti as either a legitimate art form or a form of vandalism has been a topic of both national and international interest, sparking intense arguments and dividing opinions across diverse communities and cultures. While the argument over whether graffiti is an art form or an act of vandalism continues, a important and diverse body of literature has evolved to educate and deepen this research.

One notable contribution is Nicholas Ganz's work entitled "Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents." That shows graffiti art from around the globe, examining its cultural relevance and artistic merit, and challenging the notion of graffiti as mere vandalism. In their extensive volume, *The History of American Graffiti*, Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon trace the origins and evolution of graffiti in the United States, analyzing its impact on urban landscapes and the ongoing debates around its legitimacy as an art form. The book provides a thorough examination of graffiti's progression across American culture, adding greater discernment into its beginnings, development, and influence. Whereas Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant's *Subway Art* documents the emergence of graffiti art in New York City

during the 1970s and 1980s. The seminal book captures the vibrant visual language that originated from the streets, particularly from the subway trains that were used as canvases by graffiti artists. It convincingly presents a strong case for the artistic value of graffiti, revealing the creativity, skill, and innovation of the writers who transformed the cityscape with their unique styles and compositions. Despite the controversy surrounding graffiti as a form of vandalism, *Subway Art* features the subculture's energy and spirit, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression in the face of societal and legal challenges.

In his paper titled "From Primitive to Integral: The Evolution of Graffiti Art," Ashanti White explains that graffiti art, which has its roots in ancient history and hip-hop culture, is a controversial form of expression that blurs the boundary between artistic innovation and societal transgression. This multidimensional art form, encompassing a range of techniques, appeals to a diverse audience. However, its unauthorized presence on public or private property raises questions about consent and legality, and can diminish the aesthetic appeal of neighborhoods.

The dual-method approach, combining both historical approach and qualitative method, is particularly effective in facilitating the exploration of graffiti's rich and varied history. The historical approach allows for a chronological examination of graffiti, tracing its roots and evolution over time. It provides a detailed understanding of the historical context in which graffiti emerged and developed, including the sociocultural factors that influenced its stylistic evolution. It also enables the researcher to challenge common misconceptions about graffiti, such as the notion that it is merely vandalism, by providing historical evidence of its importance as an art form. Whereas the qualitative method complements the previous approach by providing a deeper, more elaborate understanding of graffiti. It allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives on graffiti, including those of artists, critics, and the public. Broadly, the adopted methodology also enables the researcher to conduct critical

analyses of graffiti, examining its aesthetic qualities, symbolic meanings, and sociocultural impact. Finally, its integration eventually offers a well-rounded and in-depth understanding of graffiti's place in American society and a way to clarify the classification of graffiti as either a form of artistic expression or an act of illegal destruction.

The dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first chapter, entitled "The Historical Significance, Stylistic Evolution, and Sociocultural Impact of American Graffiti" exposes and explains the rich and diverse history of American graffiti art, challenging the common misconception that it is mere vandalism. It tackles the evolution of graffiti, from its early beginnings to its current status as a thriving art movement. A thorough understanding of graffiti's roots may be gained by looking into its artistic and technological progressions, and researching the social and cultural issues that impacted it.

The Second chapter entitled, "Graffiti as a Form of Artistic Expression: Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Norms", explores graffiti as a form of artistic expression, tracing its journey from marginalized art to a powerful tool for questioning societal norms and stereotypes. Originating in New York, graffiti artists transcended traditional boundaries, using their art for self-affirmation and exploration. The movement has advocated for justice, amplified marginalized voices, and sparked societal transformation. The chapter shows how this movement has brought attention to the way graffiti can inspire communal engagement and ignite discussions about public art.

Under the title of "The Legal and Social Implications of Graffiti: Is it Vandalism or Art?" The third and final chapter discusses not only the relationship between graffiti and vandalism, focusing on the legal and sociological repercussions associated with it but its illegal character, which endangers both property owners and artists. Regardless of public perception, graffiti may revitalize neglected regions, improve community spaces, and instill pride. The chapter simply compromises between municipal governments and street artists.

## **Chapter One**

### **The Historical Significance, Stylistic Evolution, and Sociocultural Impact of American Graffiti**

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the rich and diverse history of American graffiti art, challenging the common misconception that it is mere vandalism. It analytically traces the evolution of graffiti from its ancient origins to its current status as a thriving art movement. An examination of the stylistic and technological advancements within graffiti, as well as an exploration of the social and cultural influences that have shaped it, provide a profound understanding of its origins. Key terms associated with various styles and techniques employed in this art form are introduced. Beyond the art itself, the chapter extensively explores the wide-ranging impacts of graffiti on American society, investigating its influence on popular culture and its role in urban environments. The present study provides a viewpoint that goes beyond the labeling of graffiti as mere vandalism. Ultimately, the aim is to highlight the historical significance, artistic merit, and social impact of this ever-evolving art form.

#### **1.1 A Historical Chronicle: Tracing Graffiti Origins**

Many historians and art enthusiasts debated the origins of graffiti art for decades. The roots of graffiti go back to ancient civilizations, where wall signs were used as a means of communication, storytelling, and political expression. From cave painting in Lascaux, France, to inscriptions on ancient Roman walls, people have left their mark on the world for thousands of years. However, the contemporary graffiti movement as it is known today emerged on the streets of Philadelphia and New York in the early 1960s. During the 1980s, there were some interesting visual representations of the growing Hip-Hop movement which was referred to as Graffiti. Curators have proven that Graffiti art existed long before the 20th century (Patterson). Graffiti also gained attention as a means for gangs to mark their territory

in urban areas.

### **1.1.1 Early Forms of Graffiti**

What use did these prehistoric inscriptions serve? It is probably going to have a lasting effect on a person's life. Research into historical graffiti reveals that nomads have been leaving scratch marks on stones since the Neolithic era, as a testament to their survival and successful migration. Two talented scribes who were passionate about public engagement left ink marks at their feet during their visit to the Egyptian pyramids 3,500 years ago (Pereira 16). The city walls of ancient Athens provided a safety net for the desires and imaginations of its people. On the walls of Pompeii, political, romantic, and humorous markings were common under the Roman Empire (Pereira 16).

Referring to Marcovitz in 1940 on the walls of the Lascaux caves in southwestern France colorful images of bulls, bison, and other animals were discovered by archaeologists who have determined that the images are dating to twenty thousand years old, and historically known as the Paleolithic era, or the Stone Age (10). Lascaux's images therefore perhaps represent one of man's first attempts to create Art (10). According to experts, the drawings on the Lascaux cave walls, as well as in caves discovered elsewhere on the planet, suggest the roots of modern graffiti can be traced to prehistoric times. "I am not saying that Paleolithic art is exactly like modern graffiti," says University of Alaska zoology professor R. Dale Guthrie (10). The core idea suggests that human tendency to create visual representations and outline surfaces has a long history, prior to the emergence of contemporary graffiti culture.

#### **1.1.1.1 Ancient Origins**

Protestants committed acts of vandalism against Catholic churches during the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century and they left written records of their accusations behind. These records often disfigured paintings or carvings on the walls served as a vehicle for their complaints and acts of protest against the Catholic Church (Pereira 15). In addition to being a



literal act of vandalism, this act of defacement also served as a symbolic gesture of opposition against the Catholic Church's authority and customs in order to express their disapproval to a broader audience, the Protestants cut phrases into these images, such as "The remains of this rare piece smashed by the wrath of the heretics," to express their frustration. The so-called Age of Enlightenment, which exposed the atrocities of the French Revolution, began in the 18th century. In their writings, inmates of the French king's jail foresaw the impending revolt rebellion (15). Unauthorized public markings and vandalism have historically been used to express disapproval and ideological disagreement.

A typical message at Loches' is dated 1758. "We will soon overthrow these magnificent walls and remove the tortures imposed by weak rulers who were unable to control a populace demanding their freedom." Conversely, risqué marks started to appear on other walls, especially those found in churches and cemeteries, which indicated the rise of a permissive and libertine subculture: "Asks for a halfpenny to be caressed, Madame la Comtesse; but for a penny, she will do anything." During the heyday of French writing in the 1800s, well-known authors would often mention their observations of graffiti while exploring the city. According to Honoré de Balzac, "There was not a wall in the Rue Pagevin that did not boast a dirty word" in Ferragos. Even the famous Victor Hugo once became a tagger when he and his mistress carved their own initials on the walls of a tower in Jersey (Pereira 16).

Pharaonic Egypt (the Old Kingdom) is where authentic graffiti originated, containing names, personal information, and various images (Lohmann). Similar to contemporary graffiti art, ancient works are not just pictures. Some people find excitement in images, particularly the uneducated. But historians have found a lot of poems that convey love or unhappiness. Graffiti was used in ancient Egyptian art. For example, Pharaohs and other rulers were honored, as well as the sons of the god Ra, with the construction of the Palace of Merneptah. Massive stones were utilized to construct the doors, columns, and entrance, which featured

images of guards, gods, and maidens. These exquisite buildings were not immune to “vandalism.”

Graffiti from Pompeii’s past, like “Rufus Est” and a mocking head, is smaller, has thinner lines, and is less intimidating than graffiti from today. It is important to differentiate these scratches from official inscriptions and Roman wall paintings. As indicated by Youkhana and Förster when ancient civilizations like Pompeii are studied, we tend to project our everyday lives into the past, which makes us believe that people have always been the same throughout history.

Pompeii, a site of the eruption of the Vesuvius in AD 79, is an exceptional example of a city with intact plastered and scribbled walls. After the earthquake of AD 62, the streets became dominated by cook shops, bars, innkeepers, and brothel owners, leading to graffiti, inscriptions, election posters, and advertisements. Modern scholars often define graffiti contextually, but ancient graffiti was not considered illegal or vandalism (Youkhana and Förster). Graffiti’s history shows human desire to impact the world, questioning social norms, inspiring contemplation, and demonstrating art’s ability to transcend time and unite people from diverse eras.

### **1.1.1.2 The Emergence of Modern Graffiti**

Tracing the historical evolution from ancient depictions to the influential pieces by “Cornbread,” the previously mentioned paragraphs emphasize the extensive historical origins of graffiti while contextualizing its contemporary rise as a unique form of artistic expression and subcultural resistance in prominent urban centers of the United States such as Philadelphia and New York in the late of the 20th century.

Graffiti and art have been around for a very long time, with a variety of historical settings and eras contributing to their development. For Pereira, in the 1920s, comical drawings that reflected popular American slang and terminology were used by troops during

World War II and by counter-cultural forces. It is crucial to remember, though, that not all graffiti during World War II was humorous or encouraging for instance, the Nazi regime used propaganda to disseminate hate speech and anti-Semitic ideas (Pereira 18). Nazi propaganda was affixed to walls with phrases and symbols that supported the organization's anti-Jewish and anti-enemy ideologies.

According to Marcovitz in the 1940s, James J. Kilroy signed documents that went global even though he never meant for them to. Kilroy worked for a shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts, as a rivet inspector. At the time, the US Navy was using American shipyards to build battleships, destroyers, submarines, and other types of vessels for use in World War II. Kilroy's responsibility was to make sure the rivets were positioned correctly and would maintain the ship's integrity throughout the strain of battle to let the sailors know that he examined every rivet by hand, Kilroy wrote the words "Kilroy Was Here" over the metallic walls and bulkheads of the ships he examined (Marcovitz 12). Kilroy's writing was soon recognized by US sailors and troops who were leaving for foreign lands. Many of them adopted the inscription as a humorous yet sarcastic scrawling on walls in foreign cities and towns they passed through as they waged war.

The years following the war, the words "Kilroy Was Here" have been found on walls in France, Germany and on islands in the Pacific, after that the inscription became more than a Signature; a cartoon of a long-nosed man peering over a wall was added to the inscription (Marcovitz 13) Paul Dickson, a historian, explains, "Many graffiti writers made a drawing to accompany the phrase "Kilroy Was Here," showing a wide-eyed baldheaded face peering over a fence which hid everything below his nose, except for his fingers, which were shown gripping the top of the fence Kilroy was the mischievous outsider, staring at, and probably laughing at, the world (13). Finally, Kilroy's graffiti with names became international icons, with popularity increasing in Philadelphia and New York, marking a critical turning point

in American graffiti history.

However, young Darryl McCray, often known as Cornbread, made a discovery that ignited the movement and put modern art on the map in Philadelphia, the term “Cornbread” was widely used toward the end of the 1960s, particularly for roadways and public transportation models. The appearance the name did not stand out much from other graffiti in the public eye at the time, but the fact that it was so widely dispersed around the city implied that it had nothing to do with “gang culture”. In the latter half of the 1960s, it became clear that graffiti was infectious (Kramer 10). In short Cornbread introduced graffiti movement in Philadelphia by spreading his unique "Cornbread" tag around the city, thus divorcing it from gang culture and ushering in the age of contemporary graffiti art.

In the early 1970s, Philadelphia’s train lines were decorated with numerous names, promoting a minimalist writing culture where participation was open to everyone. The core components of writing culture remain constant, with many participants spreading and sustaining themselves with others. In 1971, graffiti had made its way to New York City, with authors like “Junior 161, Julio 204, and Taki 183” well-known this growth contributed to the growth of literary cultures in the Bronx and other areas of New York City (Kramer 11). In short, Graffiti in Philadelphia had grown from modest local markings in a matter of years to a grassroots movement that swept through the varied neighborhoods of New York City.

### **1.1.1.3 Hip-Hop and the Rise of Street Art**

Graffiti emerged as the primary visual art form of Hip Hop, where both mediums shared fundamental principles such as creativity, defiance of norms, reimagining public spaces, and amplifying marginalized voices. Pioneers like Cornbread played a crucial role in transforming graffiti from mere tags to intricate, stylized artworks that reflected the evolution of Hip Hop itself. The emergence of Hip-Hop within the United States has primarily manifested as a localized occurrence, giving rise to unique identities within urban centers

throughout the country (Hess). Originating from cultural traditions rooted in West Africa and Jamaica, this musical genre has evolved into a platform for addressing issues of political and economic marginalization, promoting ethnic pride, and showcasing cultural norms (Keyes). Furthermore, its influence has extended globally, as its fundamental components such as rapping, deejaying, breaking, and graffiti art have been integrated into diverse cultural customs around the world (Morgan). The Black Arts Movement significantly influenced the development of Hip-Hop, as evidenced by its emphasis on societal significance, creativity, and the subversion of conventional artistic forms (Gladney). Hip-Hop, has gained popularity in the US, promoting ethnic pride, showcasing cultural norms, and incorporating elements like rapping, deejaying, breaking, and graffiti.

Hip-Hop music has played a significant role in the emergence of street art and graffiti, as demonstrated by its impact on the historical evolution of these artistic mediums (Degand). The defiant and innovative essence of graffiti, which challenges established norms and draws inspiration from mainstream culture, resonates with the fundamental values of Hip Hop (DeNotto). This correlation is further emphasized by the incorporation of graffiti art into the essence of Hip Hop as a cultural phenomenon (Morgan and Bennett). Christen claimed that graffiti writing, commonly linked to urban gangs, has been redefined as a form of creative expression and an avenue for artistic exploration among urban youth, largely due to the influence of Hip Hop.

Hip-Hop pioneers said that urban youth culture was vibrant, transformational, and radical when the genre collided with the urban art scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s (J. Chang 116). Contemporary graffiti Hip-Hop, a bold, revolutionary, and Renaissance art form, has taken the audience by storm both kinds of art were also attacked. Young city dwellers attempted to sculpt themselves following in their footsteps, more recent graffiti artists at Cornbread defied the law and transformed plain text into works of art by utilizing

vivid colors, varied writing, and creative placement. Walls, buildings, and bridges continued to be the preferred canvases, but additional components were added to show how the urban environment was evolving (118).

Jazz, blues, funk, and rock 'n' roll were all blended into some components that mirrored the Hip-Hop music movement; one such element was the imagery of movement (Trapp). Despite this, the usage of arrows in graffiti art has grown to be a prominent aspect of visual culture production, especially in public spaces (Austin). The arrow became a representation of movement in graffiti art a strong visual tool, an arrow is frequently used to provide motion and energy to lettering they convey motion and vitality. Arrows direct the viewer's attention they could weave in and out and stick out from either side of the letter in a certain way depth and rhythm are created on a two-dimensional surface by moving in circles and back and forth. Furthermore, it illustrated the turmoil that exists in inner cities, frequently conveying a message that becomes clear only upon taking a step back and analyzing the image as a whole ("Tribute to Graffiti Art...").

Graffiti art was a part of Hip-Hop's mainstreaming during the 1990s, popular videos often included urban backdrops covered in graffiti. There was Hip-Hop journalism, the editors desired for their magazine's cover to feature graffiti, the visual language of hip-hop. Young graffiti criminals were employed by networks, sports teams, and musicians to design their merchandise Commentators were drawn to the mainstream legitimization of graffiti art (White). Graffiti has spurred debates about what constitutes art, whether or not graffiti is permissible, and the attempts of established artists to provide more legitimacy to this quickly gaining art form. The acceptance of graffiti art gave rise to continuous discussions concerning whether it qualifies as art and where the lines are drawn between it and vandalism. Prominent American artists such as Roger Gastman, Banksy, and Caleb Neelon have made the shift from creating art on subway walls to showcasing their works in galleries and being collected by

private art enthusiasts (Gastman and Neelon). Graffiti has developed into a recognized art form, despite its initial associations with unlawful tagging and its use of spray paint. Graffiti murals are now frequently commissioned and funded by governments, galleries, and local governments as a way to improve urban areas and encourage artistic expression. Artists like Gastman, Banksy and Neelon made the move from subway (Gastman and Neelon).. The innovative use of visuals, color schemes, typography, and various surfaces within the graffiti realm strongly resonated with the musical experimentation and vibrant spirit of Hip Hop. Consequently, the cityscapes of urban areas were transformed into shared canvases for the creative expressions of both art forms.

## **1.2 Definitions and Key Concepts in the United States**

Graffiti is a complex, multifaceted art form and it has been a subject of debate and study in various academic disciplines by which it was defined by different scholars and authors throughout history since it is considered by some a form of artistic expression and by others vandalism. For this purpose, the examination of the diverse perspectives is going to be set on Graffiti and how these definitions shape individuals understanding of its cultural significance.

### **1.2.1 Graffiti Terminology**

Oxford dictionary defines it as “writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place.” Within the graffiti community, there is a specific vocabulary and terms that are only used by graffiti artists and cultural practitioners. Knowing the terms associated with graffiti not only makes it easier for people to enjoy and interact with the art, but it also sheds light on the subculture and its lengthy history (“Graffiti Terminology”).

#### **1.2.1.1 Tagging and Throw-ups**

The process of writing or spray-painting a signature, nickname, or alias on walls,

buildings, trains, or other public locations is known as “tagging.” It is a unique kind of graffiti where the person’s name or a brief remark is usually written in script or stylized letters. As pointed out by Cooper and Chalfant the stylized personal signature is used to tag the tag. Before making their tags public, kids put a lot of effort into them, and when they tag for the first time, they feel the urge to style tagging is applied with a spray or a marker. For the duration of their writing careers, the majority of writers stick to the same tag style, which serves as their distinctive emblem and is easily identifiable to other writers (68). “Throw-ups” is hastily written with a single coat of spray paint and outline. When quantity and speed are more important than quality, as in the case of two rivals fighting for control of a line, writers employ throws-ups (69).

From the point of view of Radosevic the basic practice of spray can graffiti writing, known as “tagging,” originated toward the close of the 1960s in Philadelphia. It was not very successful until it relocated to New York. The practice of writing one’s nickname and street number inside of subway trains quickly gained popularity. The tags grew bigger and more ornate over the course of a few years, then they were placed outside of the trains until their light graphic shape could no longer adequately cover broad areas. Large surfaces needed to be covered with throw-ups and fragments, and spray paints became essential for accomplishing this. The creators of this style of graffiti called themselves writers and described what they were doing as writing. Their idea had nothing to do with conventional graffiti. Academics and community referred to each other as “graffiti” and “graffitists” in the 1960s and 1970s, discussing latrinalia, racial, political, homosexual, and gender differences in public restroom graffiti (Phillips). In simpler terms in New York, graffiti progressed from subway car decals to elaborate artistic renderings, emphasizing “throw-ups” and “pieces” created with spray paints, and branding themselves as “writers” engaged in “writing.”

Early in the 1980s, a new type of street art known as Wildstyle rivaled Vancouver’s



progressive social and political graffiti. This distinctive style developed from the hip-hop movement, which had its start in New York in the early 1970s, as reported by Rafferty the youth of New York, who use the city as a backdrop for its various forms of breakdancing, rapping, scratching, and graffiti, are the movement's real sources of inspiration. It became popular as a substitute for gang warfare due to the high degree of juvenile violence that engulfed that metropolitan neighborhood between 1968 and 1973. The signature of an alias on city walls was the origin of wild style, or tag graffiti. Wildstyle originated with the tagging technique. The term "label tag" describes a set of highly stylized letters arranged in a way that, although it is marketing the product, it looks a lot like a commercial logo (21).

Wildstyle first appeared as tags with increasingly intricate designs. The untrained eye was driven insane by the vibrant orchestrations of color and form that resulted from enlarging the letters and filling in the spaces between them with dots, diagonal, and zigzag lines. The early exaggerations in the shape of balloons were known as "bubble letters," and they promoted a style that became so complex that it is impossible for an outsider to understand. Young people's ability to build a site-specific aesthetic standard is demonstrated by the creation of a secret code that only knowledgeable youth could decipher, thanks to improvements in both content and method. The social relationships that surround the creation of such a standard give it life (Rafferty 22). In short Hip-Hop inspired the New York Street art style known as "Wildstyle" which rose to prominence as an alternative to gang violence. With its elaborate "bubble Letters" and place-specific style, it demonstrated the distinctive visual attraction of young painters.

#### **1.2.1.2 Stencils and Wheat pasting**

Marcovitz indicated that a new generation of graffiti artists many with artistic backgrounds became attracted to the streets by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their goal was to use graffiti as a medium for creative expression. Along with introducing new methods to

the streets, they also invented stencil art. When creating an image, stencil painters employ cardboard or paper. They first sketch the picture onto the material, which they then cut out using scissors or a knife. After that, the stencil is folded or rolled up, carried outside, and held up against the wall while the artist spray paints. Before stencils were invented, street painters had to guide the spray paint can with a steady hand (16). However, the image's form and lines may now be worked out in advance. Art logger James Farina says, "Yes, it makes sense . . . and the value can definitely be quite astonishing in the end." John Fekner, who produced some three hundred stencil art pieces in New York City and many European capitals in the late 1970s, is credited as being the first stencil artist to use the method in public (Marcovitz 16).

In 1981, French artist Xavier Prou, known as Blek le Rat, began painting rat pictures on Paris's urban landscape using stencils. Over the years, he created around 100,000 rat-related artworks, challenging conventional art audiences and promoting accessibility and diversity of artistic expression, dismantling barriers between street art and traditional genres (Marcovitz 17). Stated differently the emergence of stencil artists boasting backgrounds in fine art indicated the ongoing development of graffiti from rudimentary territorial symbols to a recognized, pioneering form of art that challenges the distinction between vandalism and cutting-edge creativity in impactful manners.

### **1.2.2 Legal Definitions of Graffiti**

Graffiti is defined differently in different legal contexts, but in general, it is the act of painting or marking property public or private without authorization and utilizing tools like markers, spray paint, or other materials of a similar nature. This act's distinctive lettering styles, vibrant colors, and eye-catching designs which can range from intricate murals to simple written words are what usually define it (Decker and Curry). Street gangs are frequently linked to graffiti, which they utilize for a variety of objectives such as demarcating

their area, honoring the memory of fallen comrades, bragging about their criminal activity, and confronting other gangs.

Not all graffiti is associated with gangs. Some is done as a kind of expressive art or to attract attention (“Graffiti and Vandalism”). Most countries classify graffiti as a type of vandalism since it entails destroying property without authorization. This is regarded as a crime that carries consequences that vary depending on the jurisdiction. Vandalism, criminal mischief, and trespassing are typical charges. The worth of the destroyed property, the exact actions performed by the offender, and any prior criminal history of the offender can all influence how harsh the sentence is. In more serious situations, penalties may include criminal charges in addition to probation, jail time, and fines and community work. Certain authorities have put in place measures to stop graffiti, like mandating that retailers keep spray paint and other instruments out of the reach of minors or locked away (“Graffiti and Vandalism”).

Depending on the kind of graffiti and where it is found, different legal consequences may apply. The two main differences between authorized and unauthorized graffiti must be understood. Abogado claimed that Authorized graffiti in certain situations, towns or property owners may give artists permission to paint murals or other works of street art on certain locations. This type of graffiti is permitted by law and is frequently viewed as a constructive addition to the community. Whereas graffiti that has been created without the property owner’s permission is referred to as unauthorized graffiti. Graffiti that is done without permission is usually unlawful and can lead to jail time, fines, community service, criminal charges, and/or compensation to the property owner (Abogado). The legal framing of graffiti reveals a complex conflict between traditional property rights, community development, creative expression, and dissent, highlighting subtleties on the legal level.

### **1.3 Contemporary Graffiti Techniques**

Contemporary graffiti artists use a multidisciplinary approach, blending street art,

fine art, and other artistic disciplines to create visually striking and thought-provoking artworks. They experiment with materials like spray paint, stencils, and digital interventions, pushing boundaries and expanding artistic expression in public spaces. Drawing inspiration from traditional lettering, abstract expressionism, pop culture, surrealism, and graphic design, they create visually striking compositions (Okon et al.). The beauty of graffiti stems from its ongoing growth and experimentation, as artists push the boundaries and invent new techniques to produce visually spectacular and original artworks.

### **1.3.1 Traditional Techniques**

Traditional graffiti techniques, originating from streets and subways, are fundamental to the art form's development and evolution. These techniques include spray paint, tagging, throw-ups, and pieces. Spray paint is used for quick application and vibrant colors, while tagging involves stylized signatures or nicknames. Throw-ups use bubble letters or block-style lettering, while pieces are intricate, visually complex works showcasing technical skills and individual style (Prabhath). Understanding these techniques helps gain insight into the historical roots and artistic expressions that have shaped graffiti culture.

#### **1.3.1.1 Spray Paint**

Spray paint graffiti is the practice of utilizing aerosol paint cans to produce artistic representations or communication on surfaces, whether public or private. This particular style of graffiti is distinguished by its unique method of application, requiring the individual to agitate the can in order to generate a delicate spray that is then administered onto various surfaces using diverse techniques. Spray paint graffiti is known for its bold, vibrant colors and the ability to cover large areas quickly. Spray paint graffiti emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a form of expression among marginalized communities, particularly in urban areas. The movement was influenced by a range of factors, including social and political unrest, the rise of hip-hop culture, and the desire for self-expression and community identity this movement

was significant in the development of graffiti as a recognized art form, with many artists gaining fame and recognition for their work (Chalfant and Prigoff).

### **1.3.1.2 Marker Pens**

The technique of graffiti marker pen emerged in the context of modern graffiti art, which has its origins in the 1960s and 70s in New York City and Philadelphia. This form of graffiti, often referred to as “Hip-Hop” graffiti, involves the use of spray paint or paint markers, characterized by bold color choices, highly stylized and abstract lettering known as “Wildstyle,” and/or the inclusion of cartoon-like characters. The development of the aerosol spray can take place in the late 1960s played a significant role in the development of contemporary graffiti, as it allowed for the creation of large, colorful, and elaborate pieces on subway cars and other urban surfaces (“Street and Graffiti Art Movement Overview”). Graffiti was revolutionized by spray painting and marker pen techniques, while individual flair and creative experimentation were made possible by marker pen techniques, which established the unique aesthetics of hip-hop graffiti that are still relevant today.

In the 1980s and 1990s it emerged as a form of expression among urban communities, particularly in the United States. The movement was influenced by several factors, including the revival of hip-hop culture, the desire for self-expression and community identity, and the accessibility of marker pens. Marker pens graffiti is often associated with the subway graffiti movement, which began in the 1970s and 1980s. Artists would use marker pens to create artwork on subway trains and stations, making it a form of public art that was accessible to anyone with a marker pen (*History of Graffiti and Street Art...*). This movement was significant in the development of graffiti as a recognized art form, with many artists gaining fame and recognition for their work.

### **1.3.2 Innovative Techniques**

Graffiti art has undergone a remarkable transformation due to its inventive techniques,

pushing the boundaries of creativity and challenging traditional notions of what art can be. The evolution of graffiti art has brought forth a diverse range of innovative methods that continue to captivate audiences worldwide. From stencil art and sticker art to mosaic creations and striking street installations, artists have embraced these techniques to redefine the art form and engage with their surroundings in new and exciting ways (Guilbaud). Through these innovative techniques, graffiti art has transcended its origins as an underground art form, gaining recognition and appreciation as a legitimate and powerful means of self-expression. Due to the drive to push the boundaries of creativity and question established beliefs, graffiti artists consistently redefine the parameters of art, leaving an indelible mark on the urban landscape and the art world as a whole.

#### **1.3.2.1 3D Graffiti**

In recent years, graffiti artists have embraced innovative methods for enhancing their pieces, incorporating intricate details and design elements within the letterforms themselves. This includes meticulously drawn drips, bubbles, dots, stars, and geometric shapes, all integrated into the interiors of their letters. A further refinement of graffiti is what authors refer to as 3D or the illusion of depth. This method became widely used in the mid-70s here the 3D graffiti is separated from the writer's inventive use of the color and graphic elements which they refer to designs such as stars, flags, checkerboards, and signs to letters faces (Cooper and Chalfant).

Among the advancements in letter design, as explained by Kramer that three distinct depth effects have emerged the first is the "flat 3D" effect, which gives the impression that the piece is a colored, illustrative representation of a tangible object (15). Contrarily, "Pistol" and "Flint 707" introduced a different approach, rendering their letters to resemble physical objects, creating an uncanny sense of encountering real-life items rather than mere representations. The third depth effect involves conceptualizing letters as if they were cut

from a solid sheet, slightly raised from the surface, and casting a shadow as a result of these depth effects, the “flat 3D” and the cast shadow techniques have become the most prevalent among graffiti writers (Kramer 16).

### **1.3.2.2 UV Graffiti**

UV Graffiti is the term for art that is temporarily created on surfaces using ultraviolet (UV) light. This cutting-edge type of graffiti projects pictures or designs onto surfaces using UV-based technology; the images or designs disappear when the UV light is eliminated or decreases. The principle underlying UV Graffiti is akin to that of temporary tattoos or artwork that is removable without leaving a lasting impression (Pozo-Antonio et al.). An example of UV-based graffiti technology is found in Random International's Glow Graffiti. It involves spray cans that have had their cap-tip ultraviolet LEDs changed. These cans ‘paint’ real-time rendered graphics when they are used on light-sensitive surfaces. The images generated are transient, and as soon as the UV light is removed, they almost disappear. This technology necessitates the usage of specialized canvas that, when exposed to UV light, can change its graphic qualities, such as contrast (Fermoso).

### **1.3.3 Collaborative Techniques**

Graffiti has a rich history of collaborative practices among artists, while being commonly associated with individualized tagging and stylized lettering. Collaborating with others encourages a sense of community and artistic interchange while enabling writers to produce larger, more ambitious works. Collaborative techniques in graffiti art involve artists working together to create collective works of art, often in events (Bublitz et al.). These collaborative efforts not only foster a sense of community and shared creativity but also provide opportunities for artists to learn from each other, network, and showcase their work.

#### **1.3.3.1 Group Murals**

These groups and others always obtain the owners' consent before using outdoor

spaces to host graffiti. Actually, it is common to see artwork painted lawfully on external walls in many cities. Often referred to as murals, the artists are probably compensated for their artistic abilities because they were hired to construct the piece. There are more noteworthy distinctions between graffiti and murals. For instance, the amount of time that artists use to produce murals versus graffiti is typically very different. Basic types of graffiti the painters' signatures or other personal symbols, known as tags can be applied in a matter of minutes at most. While stencil art takes longer, basic designs can still be done quickly (Marcovitz 19). Nonetheless, a lot of specialists think that murals and graffiti are becoming less distinct from one another. Asheville, North Carolina-based graphic designer Gino Tucillo claims that graffiti and urban murals frequently have the same creative attributes (20). Group mural graffiti is an artistic collaboration in which participants create a large-scale artwork collectively, sometimes led by a primary topic or concept, blending various techniques and ideas to make a coherent piece that reflects the collective creativity of the group.

#### **1.4 Graffiti's Urban Canvas: Cultural Impact**

In addition to being creative expressions, graffiti and street art have a significant cultural influence on urban areas by acting as venues for social and political commentary. These artistic mediums question conventional ideas of competence and beauty, frequently tackling subjects like politics, racism, inequality, and environmental concerns (Ross). Street artists have become part of high-end fashion, advertising campaigns, and mainstream media.

##### **1.4.1 Graffiti in Pop Culture**

One might easily argue that popular culture formats have been more receptive to, and perhaps better positioned to commodify, contemporary graffiti and street art. Graffiti and street arts are showing up everywhere in popular culture. This can be seen in all sorts of movies, books, and clothes that use these styles in some way. Numerous movies use graffiti and street art as a setting or feature characters that do it, while others try to tell the story of



real-life artists from different places. These movies, both fictional (also referred to as commercial, feature-length, Hollywood and popular) and documentary, may contain images of graffiti and street art, as well as conversations conducted with the people that participate in or react to this activity (Ross et al.).

Many of these films have been shown at local theaters and film festivals, in addition to being accessible through about twenty-two full-length English-language US films featuring street artists, writers, and/or graffiti were produced between 1979 and 2014, according to Ross fifteen of these were documentaries, and seven of the films were fictitious stories. Although fictional narratives narrate stories, documentaries are made using nonfictional content with the intention of teaching viewers or documenting a portion of history.

Graffiti and street art have been widely documented through television programming, online content providers, and books. These books feature numerous photographs and little text written by the artists themselves, making them too positive and lacking in analysis. The internet has played a significant role in spreading street art and graffiti worldwide, with websites like Art Crimes, Pure Graffiti, Bombing Science, Spray Daily, and Fatcap being major factors in its dissemination (Ross et al.). Social media networks and websites have promoted certain practitioners and elevated specific styles, affecting street art and graffiti (Ross et al.). Fashion labels that use graffiti and street art iconography may face lawsuits, as seen in the 2014 case of the Mad Society Kings graffiti group, which accused fashion companies of copyright infringement, unfair competition, and false designation of origin under the Lanham Act. Fashion companies attempt to dismiss these motions, but some judges are siding with the graffiti writers, illustrating the ambiguous role of 'ownership' over street art and graffiti branding (Ross et al.).

#### **1.4.2 Graffiti as a Form of Expression**

Graffiti art serves as a powerful medium for self-expression, allowing artists to

communicate their thoughts, ideas, and emotions to a wide audience. Initially perceived as a rebellious act, graffiti has evolved into a respected form of art, promoting dialogue and challenging societal norms. Through various techniques, including political statements, social commentary, and personal expression, graffiti artists use public spaces as their canvas to convey their perspectives and spark conversations among viewers (RayCee the Artist). Graffiti has evolved from an urban rebellion to a globally recognized art form, blending technical skill with social commentary.

#### **1.4.2.1 Artistic and Political Expression**

Graffiti functions as a potent tool for the conveyance of both artistic and political sentiments, particularly during periods characterized by social and political turmoil (Ruiter). It enables the dissemination of political ideologies and the questioning of prevailing socio-spatial norms, playing a crucial role in shaping public discourse and promoting social change (Moreau). Through its ability to blend artistic innovation with political activism, graffiti continues to evolve as a powerful medium for expression and a catalyst for social transformation.

Graffiti has been used by street painters for decades to express political views, as seen in the anonymous graffiti message on Richmond Castle's wall, which was written by a conscientious objector who opposed World War I. The use of graffiti for artistic and political expression reached its peak in the 1960s during the Cold War, with the Berlin Wall serving as a central point and popular graffiti spot (Marcovitz 57). After WWII, Berlin was divided between a repressive German dictatorship and a freely elected government. The Berlin Wall, built in 1961, symbolized authoritarian barriers (Green). Street art and graffiti can be both divisive and legitimizing patriarchy.

Graffiti, fundamentally, surpasses its initial purpose as territorial symbols or artistic trials, evolving into a democratized mode of conveying messages a means for those on the

fringes of society to express their stories and advocate for transformation using bold, inescapable imagery in city environments. This change in perspective is clearly illustrated in the context of the Sudanese uprising, where graffiti emerged as a vehicle for conveying political messages (Mohammad). Likewise, graffiti in the United States and various other nations serves as a mode of international communication, articulating political and social dissatisfaction (Žuvela). Graffiti has transformed from a territorial indicator to a democratized expression for voiceless communities.

#### **1.4.2.2 Graffiti and Free Speech**

Graffiti effectively conveys popular sentiment, resistance mentalities, and street protests into bold creative defiance, showcasing its dual nature as an aesthetic innovator and socio-political provocateur. In the US, graffiti expresses public opinion and acts as a form of resistance (Ferrell). Recent years have seen a rise in its use as a vehicle for political protest; one noteworthy instance is the George Floyd Protest Graffiti (Cappelli). Graffiti's importance as a valid academic source has also been acknowledged, with emphasis placed on how it addresses sociopolitical issues and reclaims public places (DeNotto). In short graffiti transforms common emotions, opposition attitudes, and public rallies into artistic rebellion, serving as an aesthetic innovator and sociopolitical agitator.

Graffiti in the US is often seen as art or vandalism, but some argue it should be considered free speech under the First Amendment. However, courts and experts agree that the First Amendment does not protect unlawful street art. Property owners have rights, and if graffiti is created in violation of these rights, the owner can have it erased. Graffiti with consent is an alternative interpretation (Marcovitz 63). In 2016, a graffiti artist created a picture of Maine Governor Paul Le Page donning the robes and hood of the Ku Klux Klan, a group involved in racist operations since the Civil War (66). The image was created after Le Page was criticized for criticizing illegal immigration from Latin American nations (68). The

anonymous graffiti artist interpreted the governor's remarks as having racist implications.

Graffiti is viewed as an acceptable form of free speech, especially when it speaks out against established hierarchies or gives voice to underrepresented groups (Carroll). Graffiti, however, is usually considered a property or nuisance infraction in the legal system, with judges frequently giving property rights precedence over free expression rights (Staff). The legal, cultural, and community viewpoints are intricately intertwined in the discussion around graffiti and free expression. Carroll considers graffiti as a property or nuisance infraction that can shape a culture of lawlessness by some, while others regard it as a form of free expression and a way for disadvantaged voices to be heard. This interplay between legal, cultural, and community perspectives shapes the ongoing debate surrounding graffiti's role in shaping societal attitudes and providing a platform for underrepresented individuals to be heard.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Graffiti as a Form of Artistic Expression: Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Norms**

Graffiti is an extremely controversial phenomenon that has always been a matter of the struggle between artistic action and social condemn. The history of American graffiti, which has for a century been seen as nothing more than vandalism or the activity of adolescents, is a complex and multi-component tapestry of creativity, culture, and critical socio-politics that clashes with society's usual norms and stereotypes. At the heart of this genre are outstanding artists and pioneers in the world of artistic painting, significantly expanding the boundaries of this type of art and transforming it from the subcultural marginalization of the masses into a powerful tool for self-expression, the formation of identity, and artistic protest. Their daring and audacious claims to the streets and public spaces have not only transformed urban spaces into an incredible form but have also become the basis for an incredibly "heated" discussion of the nature of art, its boundaries, and possibilities.

This section explores the diverse and extensive role of graffiti as an art form, attempting to shed light on how it transcends its origins as an unconventional outsider art form to become a structural force for social change, moving beyond the v prevalent stereotypes. It examines prominent graffiti from the early pioneers and innovative workings of the art form, and its use as a means to explore and comment on social conditions, identity, and the capacity of expression. The activities in New York City during the nascent years of graffiti are the focusing point of this paper. Here, the groundbreaking graffiti artist chooses the surface of subway trains as their creative medium, sparking a revolution that advances the boundaries of artistic expression and questions the learned aspects of identity. Additionally, the report discusses how graffiti's producers resolved and confounded the cultural layers of all these identities, utilizing their art as a tool for confirmation and self-discovery. Finally, the

paper explores the substantial effect of graffiti on many social changes, demonstrating how graffiti has developed from an artistic tool into an instrument of justice, a channel for silenced voices, and a tool for changing the world. Investigating many key works and their effect, the article explains how graffiti has progressed past its visual roots into a worldwide symbol of artistic discussion and discourse.

Drawing upon the afore presented narratives, this section also investigates the mainly unrivaled potential of graffiti as a vehicle for transformation, triggering societal involvement and sparking broader dialogues on public art. Through either collaborative murals or secretive interventions in public space, we demonstrate how the very creation of graffiti challenges the foundation of artistic autonomy and generality and encourages collectives to take an active part in reimagining and reclaiming their urban environment. In the end, this section entails a testament to graffiti's continued relevance as an art form that has prevailed against critical reception over the span of decades to reinvent itself effectively as an instrument of societal change, identity formation, and cultural dialogue. Through the examination of revolutionary pieces, conceptual precedent, and transformative graffiti experiences, we strive to shed light on a highly inaccurately represented art form and honor the transgressive creators who transcended stereotypes and reimaged the boundaries of the possible.

## **2.1 Graffiti Pioneers and Artists**

Pioneering graffiti writers and artists who have pushed the boundaries of this art form have paved the way for the transition of graffiti from a marginalized subculture to a recognized creative trend. These innovative people have not only had a significant impact on urban environments but have also questioned cultural conventions and assumptions about the meaning of art (“Graffiti Art: A Dynamic Expression of Urban Culture and Creativity”). Hailing from the underground domains of major cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, these pioneers of graffiti embraced a bold and uncompromising attitude to creative

innovation. The artists transformed public areas into their artistic platforms, adorning subway vehicles, building facades, and alleyways with their vibrant and intricate artworks (“Street and Graffiti Art Movement Overview?”). By engaging in graffiti, these artists not only took back and transformed their environment, but also proclaimed their existence and uniqueness in a society that often disregarded them. It is crucial to acknowledge that these artists were not just troublemakers; they were cultural pioneers who aimed to alter the limits of creative representation.

Their audacious and even illicit actions defied the belief that art was limited to galleries and museums, instead taking it to the public spaces and democratizing its accessibility (Kerwin Art). The works of these graffiti masters transcended their visual allure; they functioned as potent mediums for societal analysis, cultural evaluation, and individual self-expression. Every tag, painting, or mural included several levels of meaning, deriving inspiration from the artists’ personal experiences, political viewpoints, and cultural heritages.

The notable contributions of renowned graffiti pioneers, such as Taki 183, Cornbread, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Keith Haring, deserve special recognition. Their tales, inspirations, and continuing effect on the art world explore the courage, innovation, and cultural importance of these trailblazers. Their tales emphasize their influence on the convergence of art, identity, and society change.

### **2.1.1 Graffiti Pioneers**

The roots of graffiti may be traced back to ancient civilizations, when the act of writing on walls functioned as a potent means of political expression, storytelling, and communication (Pereira). The inscriptions found on ancient Roman walls and the cave paintings discovered in Lascaux, France, provide concrete proof of this fact. These masterpieces exemplify the enduring human need for artistic expression and interpersonal connection.

However, it was specifically on the busy streets of New York City and Philadelphia during the late 1960s that the contemporary graffiti movement fully developed (Patterson). The pioneers of graffiti art arose in these urban environments, achieving recognition and infamy for their distinctive and vivid visual manifestations.

Graffiti's profound expressive nature and its ability to connect with disenfranchised communities bridge the gap between its ancient roots and its modern rebirth (Pereira, Patterson). Two of the language seen from the visual language of graffiti and its social expression, the field of graffiti will continue to provide a space for voice and resonant pictures of those who do not receive disproportionate benefits. With many social justice statements and political narratives, graffiti will continue to help determined practitioners' re-image their space and give them new identities. For this reason, graffiti will continue to influence self-expression and community voice, allowing artists such as Lady Pink to push creative boundaries and create difficult conversations.

Through its visual language and social impact, graffiti continues to serve as a platform for marginalized voices, addressing social and political issues while empowering individuals to reclaim their spaces and share their stories. This dynamic art form remains a powerful means of self-expression and community engagement, inspiring artists like Lady Pink to push boundaries and create meaningful dialogue.

### **2.1.2 Cornbread**

Known as one of the pioneers of contemporary graffiti, Darryl McCray acknowledged that he was Cornbread. His moniker originated from a moniker he was given while he was a juvenile detainee for asking the chef to prepare his favorite dish, corn bread. McCray started penning "Cornbread" in his neighborhood in 1967, when he was fourteen, in an attempt to attract the interest of a girl he liked. He wrote, "Cornbread continues to love Cynthia and dated her for a while until she moved out". In a newspaper interview, decades later, McCray



admitted that he continued writing graffiti after that because he had new graffiti to write. – Enjoyed the notoriety it gave him (becoming famous for something negative - in this case illegal activity). “I was the only graffiti artist in the city of Philadelphia,” he said. “In that sense, I was the only graffiti artist in the world.” The more people talked about Cornbread, the more I wrote about it. I had my name written all over South Philly [and eventually people got really tired of seeing my name] (Collins 27).

After tagging an elephant at the zoo and the Jackson 5’s private plane when the well-known singing group arrived to Philadelphia to play, Cornbread rose to prominence as Philadelphia's most daring graffiti artist. Despite the fact that such actions are classified as vandalism, McCray never thought he was causing any harm. “People [in gangs] got reputations for murdering people, stabbing people,” said McCray: “I wanted a reputation as well, but I didn’t want to hurt anybody for it.” Similar graffiti started to surface in New York City a few years after Cornbread gained notoriety in Philadelphia, and graffiti there took off like it never had before. “Cornbread” was once interviewed by Jack Stewart in which he said, “I just started with a magic marker and worked up.” An essential concept within the culture of graffiti writing revolves around the notion that graffiti constitutes a project, where in individuals strive for acknowledgment within a subcultural context by engaging in the act of “getting up” (Kramer). Cornbread’s groundbreaking graffiti initiatives showcased its artistic advancement, transcending haphazard scrawls and promoting widespread branding and subcultural recognition through the act of “getting up.”

### **2.1.3 Taki 183**

According to Pereira, the exact birthdate of modern graffiti art remains a subject of debate among historians. While its emergence in 1970s New York and Philadelphia is undisputed, pinpointing the precise moment is challenging. One significant marker often cited is the rise of “Taki 183,” a tag consistently appearing on New York subway cars around 1969-

1971. This recurring signature, belonging to a young Greek American named Demitrius, sparked a shift. Recognizing “Taki 183” as a nickname, others embraced tagging, aiming to leave their own unique mark across the city's vast subway network and, later, buildings. The subway’s extensive reach, crisscrossing the urban landscape and carrying millions daily, made it an ideal canvas for these aspiring artists (26).

“Taki” was the most prolific and therefore recognizable name. He was a messenger who relied on public transit, so he had the chance to write all over the city and on trains. The fact that his name spread via trains aided in the formation of writing cultures that were already beginning to emerge in a number of New York City neighborhoods, including Bronx (Kramer11). However, the culture of writing was also expanding east and south of Manhattan. Public writing soon grew to such an extent that a reporter was asked by the *New York Times* to locate “Taki 183” and write a piece about the emerging phenomenon. The piece, labeled "TAKI 183" spawns pen pals," has been passed down through graffiti history and is sometimes credited with fundamentally altering writing culture (11). “Taki 183” emerges as a prominent catalyst known for elevating graffiti from arbitrary markings to a recognizable art form that champions distinctive personal branding and creative utilization of public domains such as the subway network.

#### **2.1.4 Dondi (1961–1998)**

Dondi was a significant figure in graffiti scene, especially in New York City, during the late 1970s and early 1980s. As stated by Austin, He began in the mid-1970s as a bomber in top crew, one of the first groups to use the throw-up to supplant other writers in train lines. In 1977, he established the organization known as CIA (Crazy Inside Artists), which led to the development of his recognition as a prominent authority in the realm of style innovation on the peripheries. Dondi’s impact on graffiti and contemporary art is of significant depth. His artistic creations were showcased in various galleries globally, notably at the esteemed Fun

Gallery in Australia. Furthermore, he holds the distinction of being the pioneer graffiti artist to hold a solo exhibition in both the Netherlands and Germany, with his pieces being curated in European museum collections (170).

As mentioned by the authors of “Dondi White, Style Master General,” several European museums have exhibited Dondi’s paintings and placed them in permanent collections, which is almost unheard of for an artist whose self-expression is still considered a crime to this day. The authors state that this has never happened before (Witten and White). While some people viewed Dondi’s graffiti as deviant behavior, in his own New York, he was considered an artist. Even today, writers are influenced by his style. Dondi significantly influenced the evolution of graffiti from unauthorized urban markings to a recognized multimedia art movement through his exceptional skills and international presentations.

## **2.2 Graffiti Artists and Their Artistic Styles**

Bilgi argued that people commonly regard street art as a sub-cultural domain. The graffiti and illustrations found in the side streets, wrecks, and derelict buildings in our country and around the world have a significant influence on hip-hop culture. They often convey political statements or funny messages. The process of legitimizing the creation of illicit street art was a time-consuming one. Despite the fact that many street artists conceal their name or face for legal reasons, a few artists have managed to achieve global acclaim and notoriety by using their own identity or a pseudonym (1).

### **2.2.1 Keith Haring: A Pioneer of Street Art and Social Activism**

Haring was born in 1958 in America, as documented by Neves, his passion for sketching began in his early years, and he was deeply influenced by the cartoons and comic strips he came across throughout his infancy. His unique artistic style, distinguished by strong lines and brilliant colors, was greatly influenced by his early exposure to visual narrative and graphic art (6). According to Rivera’s analysis, he studied commercial arts before becoming a

painter. The artist started drawing on subway walls and then exhibited in famous New York galleries, including those of Tony Shafrazi and Leo Castelli, Keith began creating a colorful set based on 1984's media-related icons, Black-outlined synthetic forms made his art stand out. In addition to his recognizable graphic design, his success stems from his use of unconventional and accessible materials, such as subways, city walls, and streetlamps, as well as his own shop's multiples (4).

Rivera also suggested that Haring's creative approach was deeply influenced by the graffiti he seen on the streets and subways of New York City. This encounter inspired him to develop his own unique visual lexicon that included elements of graffiti, pop art, and social advocacy. The artist's utilization of uninterrupted lines, whimsical graphic technique, and symbolic visuals mirrors his deep involvement in the alternative cultural subculture of New York, namely the graffiti and hip-hop movements. Haring's initial artworks in the subway, employing white chalk on black billboards, epitomize his aspiration to create art that is easily approachable to a broad audience and to interact with the public in nontraditional locations (7).

The *Street Art and Urban Creativity Scientific Journal* stated that Haring's unique artistic style and socially significant subjects rapidly attracted notice among the art community. His subway sketches and public installations became closely associated with the dynamic street art culture of New York City throughout the 1980s. As his work garnered a reputation for its profoundness and cultural critique, the art world began to take more notice of him (6).

For Neves that Haring expressed his views on drug addiction and apartheid with great clarity and emphasis. His artwork often depicted his preoccupations with these societal inequities, using his unique visual vocabulary to convey themes of unity and opposition. Haring aimed to include people in discussions about these crucial matters via his daring and

easily understandable visuals. Haring was a fervent proponent of nuclear disarmament. He produced artworks that emphasized the dangers of nuclear proliferation and the pressing need for peace and worldwide collaboration. His artwork functioned as a potent instrument for activism, effectively communicating complex political ideas in a visually captivating and easily understandable way (8).

Haring thrived in the 1980s he began showing his work in American and international places he made over 50 street and graffiti art pieces in various places. He mostly raised awareness of health, charities, hospitals, and children's needs. Haring has shown in notable group exhibits, including document in Kassel, the Whitney Biennial, the São Paulo Biennial, and the Venice Biennale, Haring founded his Pop Shop in Soho in 1986 to sell T-shirts, toys, posters, and buttons with his own graphics, but many condemned him for commercializing his work. Importantly, the artist's outfit appeared on street customers, boosting his popularity. He spent much of his career creating public works with social and political agendas. In the 1980s, (Stace).

### **2.2.2 Jean-Michel Basquiat: A Revolutionary Artist and Cultural Icon**

James Ballas highlighted that, Jean-Michel Basquiat was a New York City guy who was born in Brooklyn to a father from Haiti and a mother from Puerto Rico. After the age of fifteen, he left his house and fully absorbed into the 1970s Manhattan downtown counterculture. Basquiat was highly praised by the populace for his SAMO graffiti tag at an early stage, well before he gained renown as an artist. He initiated his efforts in 1981, using rugged found items and materials, and moved until utilizing EDEN canvas and paper. By the early 1980s, he had accumulated substantial prominence and resources in the art and mass media spectrum. Basquiat's works can be found in well-respected museum collections across the globe, and he has had significant solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Brooklyn Museum, Foundation Beyeler, and others. (1).

James Ballas also indicated the combining of Basquiat's artistic approach with the Neo-Expressionist style of the 1980s. This style is characterized by bold colors and dynamic brushstrokes, as well as a strong emotional impact on the audience. Similarly, Basquiat was influenced by the history, culture, and art of African-Americans that involved the topics of identity and heritage. Basquiat's various inspirations led to his diverse and dynamic artistic approach. He took elements from multiple sources and combined them to create a visual language of his own (4).

In addition to his SAMO work, Basquiat created his own artwork by drawing and painting on other surfaces, such as refrigerator doors. He also produced postcards and t-shirts, which he sold on the street. He combined oil and acrylic paints, oil paint sticks, and collage materials to merge hastily sketched graphic components and text. Occasionally, he incorporated allusions to his own idols, such as the musician Charlie Parker and the boxer Joe Louis, as well as references to art history, such as Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbooks. Words were employed as essential components in the composition and meaning of his work, and he would occasionally repeat them or cross them out in order to bring attention to them while he was working. Furthermore, Basquiat's paintings were characterized by thick accumulations of words and images, as well as compositions that were strikingly forceful. His work frequently featured a combination of text and pictures, as well as reflections on personal experiences and social themes (Schlatter 1).

The use of crowns and black characters in Jean-Michel Basquiat's artwork is highly symbolic, serving as a manifestation of his intricate connection to identity, authority, and the cultural and historical circumstances of his day. The black people shown in Basquiat's artwork, such as in "Irony of the Negro Policeman," symbolize the lived experiences of black individuals and the challenges and resilience of black men and women (Mo). In addition, Sothebys observed that Basquiat's iconic symbol, the crown, both recognized and questioned

the historical context of Western art. Basquiat elevated historically marginalized artists, such as black male athletes, musicians, and authors, to a regal and even divine status by depicting them with a crown. “Jean-Michel’s crown is adorned with three peaks, symbolizing his three noble lineages: the poet, the musician, and the esteemed boxing champion,” said his companion, the renowned artist Francesco Clemente.

Jean Michel Basquiat, passed away at the age of twenty-seven, in New York due to a drug overdose. Schlatter reflected on how the art world mourned his death noting that it occurred during a time when the pursuit of fame and fortune overshadowed integrity fueled by excessive wealth and inflated art prices rather, than creative values. Despite facing these challenges Basquiat, who openly expressed his career goals was celebrated as a trailblazing art icon (6).

### **2.2.3 Lady Pink: A Female Force in Graffiti**

From the beginning, the world of graffiti has been a subculture of individuals who operate outside the law - artists compelled to create their work in the shadows, constantly facing the possibility of being apprehended by authorities. Scant numbers of adolescent females and young adults possess although not everyone has been prepared to take that risk, a few individuals have emerged and established themselves as some of the most renowned artists in the world of graffiti. Sandra Fabara, as noted by Marcovitz has achieved unparalleled recognition as a graffiti artist, particularly among women (27).

According to Kramer, Lady Pink, or Sandra Fabara, is a graffiti writer and mural painter born in 1964; he comes from the United States and Ecuador. At the age of 15, graffiti produced her very first piece. When she was a teenager, she painted trains, which were employed in the subway for a six-year duration beginning in 1979. She had her first solo show when she was 21, and her paintings are represented in prominent museum and institution collections like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, the Museum of

the City of New York, and others. In the fight for equality, justice, and the rights of women, this strong woman went to numerous consorts in order to achieve her objectives (*The Rise of Legal Graffiti...*).

Fabara's artistic style is characterized by vibrant colors and a psychedelic aesthetic. She frequently portrays women as the primary subjects in her artwork. After her time spent producing graffiti on walls and subway vehicles, as highlighted by Marcovitz, Fabara has transitioned to making artwork on canvas and also painting murals. She does several commissioned projects, embellishing the inside and exterior walls of numerous cafés, restaurants, and theaters in New York City (28).

More importantly, Lady Pink is the mainstream art world's central figure that has made the radical transition from the subway walls to the canvases, thus broadening her audience and inscribing explicit political messages. Portrait of the artist is typically merged with a symbol, idol, or God, and therefore her art has been a conglomeration of fantasy and spirituality strongly linked with the South American and indigenous icono-philosophical genre. At the same time, woman has used the art as a medium for deli- virtually hundred thousand of struggle, men's repression, and violence, while the artist's depictive style has underneath the surface of this mess metaphorized the actual-life portrayal of the streets and the jungles of New York. Fabara's work, which continues to evolve, remains deeply rooted in graffiti-based art on canvas. Beyond her personal artistry, she is dedicated to fostering the next generation of artists, conducting mural workshops for young people and delivering lectures throughout the Northeast US ("Lady Pink").

### **2.2.3.1 Graffiti and Gender**

The origins of graffiti were primarily associated with masculinity, as young men aspired to achieve recognition, respect, independence, and a sense of male identity. Nevertheless, women authors have recently been acknowledged for their significant



contributions to the subculture, effectively questioning and defying gender norms and preconceptions “It’s One Big Boys Club”.

The lack of female presence in graffiti and street art is a noteworthy problem, since women have obstacles while trying to participate in this art form owing to its rugged and edgy character, as well as the increased risk of being out on the streets at late hours. The art world, including graffiti and street art, has traditionally been mostly male, resulting in women encountering obstacles in terms of visibility and prospects. Some female artists have chosen to utilize pseudonyms or include their gender into their work as a response to the absence of women in the scene. For example, ELLE aimed to represent and advocate for women (Demo).

Street art has a multifaceted impact on empowering women. It deconstructs simplistic depictions in media by highlighting the multifaceted nature of women, including their roles as leaders, activists, and caretakers. This endeavor defies preconceived notions and expands the general understanding. In addition, street art offers a medium for female artists to thrive in a profession that is mostly controlled by males, therefore cultivating new viewpoints within the art industry. Besides empowering individuals, street art addresses societal challenges. It directly addresses gender-based violence, by increasing awareness and encouraging action. Moreover, it explores the experiences of women from various origins, emphasizing the convergence of feminism with race, ethnicity, and culture (“The Role of Street Art...”).

The analysis of street art showcases its approach in addressing topics. It delves into matters concerning rights. Challenges societal beauty standards sparking conversations about personal autonomy, self-acceptance and breaking unrealistic expectations. Overall street art fosters solidarity among women by promoting efforts that foster a sense of sisterhood offering a space, for assistance and empowerment (Lwamba et al.).

#### **2.2.4 Futura 2000: Merging Abstraction with Street Art**

Gordon reveals that FUTURA2000, also known as FUTURA, claims to be a

practicing graffiti artist who rose to prominence in the New York art world in the 1980s due to his creative thinking, combining graffiti with abstract expressionism. Leonard Hilton McGurr was born in New York in 1955. He began to paint graffiti to fill subway cars and city walls. At the beginning of the 1970s, with Marc Edmonds, work in Ali, he founded the Soul Artists group. FUTURA2000 is derived from Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A Space Odyssey and futurist Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock*.

“FUTURA 2000” documented Futura's creative style, identified by his abstract technique in street art. In the 1980s, graffiti art mostly emphasized writing, while Futura's work was more abstract and less literal. The abstract artistic style introduced by Futura 2000 in street art has had a significant impact and has gained popularity over time. In 1981, Futura embarked on a tour with the band ‘The Clash’, during which he started the creation of graffiti artworks in a legal manner, serving as an on-stage painter for the group. He has collaborated with renowned companies such as Nike, North Face, Medicom Toy, and Levi's to create limited-edition toys, footwear, and a wide array of innovative media. Futura also collaborates and creates designs for his Japan-based apparel brand, ‘Futura Laboratories’. He has shown his work at several international locations, such as ICA in London, Solaria in Fukuoka, TBM Experiment in Rome, and Gallery du Jour in Paris, among others.

### **2.3 Exploring Social Commentary and Identity: Beyond Aesthetics**

One item that makes the relationship among social commentary, identity, and aesthetics in the United States intricate is its multifaceted nature as demonstrated in various academic publications. Sunday and Kaplan have both looked at how aesthetics now converge with current social issues like politics and political matters especially those related to ethnicity, race, class and gender (Sunday and Kaplan 12).

Traditional aesthetic analyzes are insufficient, as aesthetics, like graffiti, are intertwined with socio-political environments influencing identity politics. It advocates for

analytical frameworks that recognize the intricate relationships between artistic expressions, aesthetics, communal experiences, and narratives of identity affirmation or resistance. This intersectional perspective is crucial for understanding the dynamics of identity and social commentary in America through creative outlets like graffiti art. In exploring these connections, graffiti art serves as a powerful medium that reflects and challenges societal norms, creating dialogue and empowerment within communities (Vogel et al.1)

### **2.3.1 The Graffiti Scene in New York: Exploring the Borders of Trains and Identity**

With the distinctive melody of graffiti as a vocal of opposition and a red alarm of a state of emergency, it fights off America's ideal nationalism for money and chance ("The Story of New York City' Graffiti Scene"). Graffiti, sung through the lived experiences of the impacted poor, is also a form of domestic anger desired to provoke existential, human performances by reconstructing the ugly aspects of subsistence and misuse. Although it was in the city of Philadelphia that the first steps for the revival of graffiti were taken in the 60s, in the fairly recent urban environment in New York City, it was rapidly gaining momentum ("The Story of New York City's Graffiti Scene").

"What Does Graffiti have ....?" sheds light on how Train graffiti emerged as a popular medium for artists to exhibit their works to a broader audience. By drawing or spray-painting train carriages, artists found a means to express their perspectives and emotions on contemporary social problems and movements, expanding the reach of their "tags" and styles to a wider audience. This practice attracted aspiring rappers in New York City who sought to express their opinions but were uncertain about the means to do so. Graffiti, therefore, served as a means for artists to establish a connection through their shared passion for audacious self-expression.

### **2.3.2 Concurrent Identities and Affirmations of Being**

According to Valdez, in his work "Graffiti art and self-identity: Leaving their mark,"

graffiti artists utilize their graffiti art and pseudonyms to create a parallel persona, which serves as a means of distinguishing themselves from the masses. Their artwork asserts an independent existence and allows them to communicate their emotions and thoughts, conveying the message “I was present and I am real.” For graffiti artists, graffiti represents more than just inscribing words or images on a surface; it is a declaration of their existence and self-assertion. Despite the risks involved, such as the possibility of apprehension, injuries, or even loss of life, graffiti writers willingly expose themselves in order to establish a reputation for themselves, both within their social circles and in society as a whole. The identity of a graffiti writer, often concealed, remains unknown to many individuals in terms of their age, ethnicity, or gender (74).

The literature also noted that graffiti is not only a form of art but also a culture that conveys a message. It serves as a coping skill and a means to develop identity (Valdez 14). Drakopoulou and Avramidis emphasized that graffiti encompasses various aspects of identification, including individual, communal, ethnic, and racial identities. In the 1960s, the marginalized and impoverished population in New York gave rise to the emergence of the “ghetto youth” who sought to disrupt their state of being unseen and bring attention to their experiences of violence. They introduced the concept of the “tag” as a way to express their personal presence and avoid political exclusion. Graffiti artists formed inclusive groups called crews, where they learned the significance of both individuality and community, fostering a collective identity. Furthermore, graffiti, as a subcultural and vernacular form of art, was predominantly created by racial and ethnic minorities, highlighting the convergence of excluded and mainstream cultures (65).

In summary, graffiti writers employ their artistic skills and pseudonyms to establish a parallel identity that is separate from their public persona. This process of identity formation through graffiti art allows individuals to express their unique perspectives, affirm

their presence, and differentiate themselves from others (Valdez 44).

### **2.3.3 The Influence of Graffiti on Social Movements: Advocating for Justice**

Cappelli reported that the graffiti seen during the George Floyd protests serves as a forceful rhetorical intervention, allowing disheartened and disadvantaged people to express their narratives and feelings across urban environments. The visual aesthetics of the graffiti include a variety of elements such as pictures, symbols, aphorisms, and phrases. These elements serve the purpose of communication and mobilization (329).

Cappelli also pointed out that the Floyd Graffiti signifies a combination of racial and political sorrow, resulting in a trio of emotive aesthetic frames. In the absence of emotional impetus, the artistic expression of graffiti and the subsequent social activism it inspires would not exist. According to J. Anthony Blair, the narratives we create based on visual pictures have the potential to strongly influence our opinions (43). Here, the frames symbolize the progression of time, ideas, and feelings throughout the demonstrations and rioting (330).

“The George Floyd Murals of Minneapolis” reported that one of the first and now highly esteemed paintings created as an homage and plea for justice in honor of George Floyd was executed immediately after his death by the artists Niko Alexander, Cadex Herrera, Greta McLain, Xena Goldman, and Pablo Helm Hernandez of Good Space paintings. The painters commenced the creation of the mural three days subsequent to Floyd's demise, on the outside of Cup Foods, and accomplished it inside a time frame of less than 12 hours. For the artists, it served as a means to both find solace and advocate for justice in the case of George Floyd.

### **2.4 Graffiti as a Potent Form of Resistance and a Vehicle for Artistic Expression**

Graffiti serves as a mode of controversial political engagement, allowing marginalized individuals and groups to voice their resistance to oppression, tyranny, and injustice during times of crisis. It provides a platform for expressing alternative ideas that challenge prevailing ideologies and established systems of authority (Campos et al. 11). Campos et al. also

contended that Political graffiti often involves the collaborative efforts of artists, activists, and communities, fostering a sense of shared creative community and togetherness. It strengthens social ties, enhances a feeling of belonging among a group of people, and serves as a method of defiant expression against prominent individuals or organizations (10).

In “Political Graffiti as a Form of Art” it is argued that political graffiti also acts as a means of expressing dissent against inequitable aspects of urban life. In the 1960s, the post-industrial economy in the USA disproportionately favored the middle and upper classes, leading to discrimination and impoverishment among working-class citizens. This “urban crisis” was exacerbated by social, economic, and cultural transformations, prompting graffiti artists to use their art as a form of social protest against the unjust system. In New York during the 1960s, political messages were inscribed on subway trains, while in the 1980s, Hip Hop musicians utilized graffiti as a means of protesting against law enforcement. This artwork symbolizes the process of urban decay and injustice, carrying significant contextual meaning. Political graffiti not only expresses contemporary social ideas but also provides a platform for marginalized voices, particularly the working class, to be heard in society. Therefore, graffiti should be recognized as an art form that allows individuals to articulate their aspirations for a more compassionate society (“Political Graffiti as a Form of Art”).

#### **2.4.1 Graffiti Promote Communal Engagement**

Carver posited that street art have the ability to bring about a profound change. It has the ability to alter the appearance of the thing it is applied on, without a doubt. However, it also has the potential to profoundly alter the community in which it is located. The favelas were transformed into something that resonated with the locals via the skillful application of vibrant brushstrokes. The previously disregarded vitality of communities became apparent to the public and could not be disregarded any longer, people have used street art to convert mundane areas of a city into vibrant depictions of the local culture and heritage. Occasionally,

graffiti artists assume the role of representing those who lack a voice, creating artworks that have significant political and social implications. In certain communities, individuals collaborate to create enormous murals that immediately enhance the whole city. Regardless of the situation, street art serves as a method to reveal communal attributes that might otherwise stay concealed.

One of the well-known Graffiti projects to revitalize communities is the art project in the Brownsville section of New York which seeks to accomplish more than just aesthetic enhancement. With its nonprofit organization Groundswell that collaborates with teams of artists and young apprentices to create meaningful murals throughout New York City. Its objective is to enhance the aesthetics of the neighborhood through art that resonates with the community. Groundswell aims to provide employment and a productive outlet for self-expression to young New Yorkers. Groundswell was established in 1996 with the objective of using cooperative public art initiatives to enhance communities and the well-being of the city's youth. Since then, it has produced over 450 murals in 75 different communities around the city. Approximately 800 young people, mostly aged 14 to 21, are now engaged in Groundswell initiatives annually (“Can Murals Change a Neighborhood?”).

#### **2.4.2 Graffiti’s Positive Effect on Society**

Graffiti generates contrasting opinions regarding its value and effects. Advocates argue that graffiti serves as a valid form of urban art, offering a platform for marginalized communities to express sociopolitical messages and assert their identities in public spaces (Taylor). This perspective suggests that graffiti democratizes art by transforming the urban landscape into a canvas accessible to those who lack traditional creative opportunities.

Graffiti holds historical significance as a powerful means for countercultural movements and protests against injustice in recent decades. Its unauthorized nature has enabled it to amplify voices that may be suppressed or overlooked by mainstream institutions

and media (Verrall and Clay). Iconic graffiti artwork has played crucial roles in inspiring social activism, articulating grievances, and challenging established authority structures. Expanding on this viewpoint, graffiti has been examined as a tool for influencing operations and instigating behavioral change (Verrall and Clay). Its raw and pervasive presence in the urban environment positions it as an unconventional medium for reshaping narratives, influencing public opinion, and mobilizing collective action on significant social issues in ways that traditional media may not achieve.

“Icon Collective” discussed how various lifestyles, languages, and societal perspectives shape diverse manifestations of graffiti. These influences manifest in other genres of music, such as Hip-Hop and Punk, which are characterized by a rebellious atmosphere. This is a primary factor that contributes to the popularity of Graffiti among the contemporary “rebellious” youth. Graffiti is often regarded as a fundamental component of Hip-Hop culture, alongside DJing, Rapping, and Break Dancing. The connection between the Hip-hop culture and Graffiti arises from the more intricate manifestations of the culture in locations where other components of Hip-Hop were intermingling and developing, the Hip-Hop and Punk cultures have been credited with pioneering a fresh wave of Graffiti styles and techniques since its inception in the early 1970s (“Icon Collective”).

Adolescents who might otherwise engage in delinquent activities such as gang involvement and street life now have an outlet for self-expression that did not include violence, Hip-Hop Mc Kid Lucky states that individuals would engage in break dancing as a means of conflict resolution rather than resorting to physical altercations. Contrary to popular belief, music genres like Punk and particularly Hip-Hop were not primarily focused on drugs and violence. They continue to be used in beneficial ways, enabling today's young generation to be motivated to articulate their own perspectives and thoughts on global, societal, and individual matters. They are seen as a means of expression and a strategy for coping with the



challenges of distressed neighborhoods, as well as a mechanism for addressing the aggression associated with gang culture. An example of this may be shown by a guy named Afrika Bambaataa, who once held the position of a gang boss (Diec).

He established the street group known as Universal Zulu Nation, drawing inspiration from Hip-Hop and the culture it embodied. The primary objective of this organization was to extricate young individuals from the gang culture and facilitate their transition into a more improved and secure way of life (“The Positive Effects of Graffiti and Street Art”). This demonstrates that graffiti, despite its negative repercussions, does provide advantages to a diverse array of individuals from various backgrounds. Nevertheless, similar to the musical genres of Hip-Hop and Punk, it faces opposition from conservatives and those who uphold the existing order due to their belief that it encourages and glorifies illegal activities and violence.

## Chapter Three

### **The Legal and Social Implications of Graffiti: Is it Vandalism or Art?**

Graffiti, whether in the form of expansive murals adorning urban landscapes or the mysterious tags found on backstreet walls, has undeniably emerged as a significant element of contemporary society. Nevertheless, the repercussions of graffiti remain a topic of fervent discussion. Is it an act of vandalism, defiling public areas, or is it a dynamic manifestation of artistic creativity? This chapter looks into the often-conflicting world of graffiti, analyzing its legal and societal consequences. This exploration is initiated by scrutinizing the legal context in which graffiti operates.

Laws against vandalism criminalize such actions, placing substantial burdens on property proprietors and exposing artists to fines or incarceration. In contrast, public sentiment towards graffiti is far from uniform. While some view it as a visual nuisance, others recognize its capacity as a compelling art form. This chapter probes this dichotomy, examining the societal principles that underpin these divergent viewpoints. Progressing beyond the simplistic dichotomy of “vandalism” versus “art,” the transformative capacity of graffiti is investigated. How initiatives involving community participation can channel the artistic vigor of street artists to instigate positive transformations will be investigated. Reviving neglected zones, enriching the aesthetics of communal spaces, and instilling a sense of communal pride can be achieved by leveraging graffiti through partnerships with residents and local administrations.

This segment will present successful endeavors that have effectively used graffiti as a mechanism for urban revitalization. Establishing a common understanding between artists and governing bodies is crucial in dealing with the complexities of graffiti, as it requires open communication and dialogue to find a balance between artistic expression and legal/community considerations. The concept of legal walls, designated regions where artists

can express themselves freely while adhering to legal boundaries, will be analyzed. The examination will also encompass collaborative endeavors between municipal authorities and street artists, highlighting the importance of dialogue and collaboration in creating a more constructive rapport with this often-misunderstood art form. The concluding section digs deeply into the artistic value of graffiti within the United States.

### **3.1 Vandalism Laws, Property Damage, Public Opinion on Graffiti**

Colombini argued that graffiti is characterized by its contentious intersections among social, stylistic, and aesthetic dimensions, alongside considerations of vandalism. This particular viewpoint is shaped by the specific location and circumstances surrounding the graffiti, with certain regions welcoming it as an integral part of their urban landscape (Dovey et al.). This particular viewpoint is shaped by the specific location and circumstances surrounding the graffiti, with certain regions welcoming it as an integral part of their urban landscape (Dovey et al.).

Nevertheless, graffiti continues to be classified as a criminal offense, often disregarding its potential for meaningful communication (Carroll). The conflict arising from these contrasting viewpoints accentuates the necessity for a sophisticated approach to the regulation of graffiti, one that takes into account both its artistic and unlawful dimensions (Lerman). In general, the subtleties and complexities surrounding how the general population views graffiti needs a full grasp. This standpoint offers a well-rounded viewpoint that considers the perspectives of different parties, the specific circumstances, and the various aspects involved, without oversimplifying the issue at hand.

#### **3.1.1 Vandalism Laws**

Graffiti represents a form of vandalism that is common in urban places across the world. Since graffiti is seen as vandalism, concerns about neighborhood decay and social instability arise (Gibbons). It is present on buildings, monuments, public transit, and

civil infrastructure, and it deteriorates structural materials and cultural assets (Pozo-Antonio et al.). Conservation efforts are hampered by the use of spray paints in graffiti vandalism, particularly when historical or artistic objects are the target (Germinario et al.). The question of whether graffiti qualifies as art or vandalism is one that is often discussed in relation to it. Research on vandalism and scrawl-graffiti has examined personality traits, gender, and social behavior problems, emphasizing how difficult it is to classify graffiti (Nordmarker et al.). Graffiti may be considered a form of street art, according to some, blurring the distinction between artistic expression and vandalism (Cortea et al.). However, other people only see graffiti as vandalism. Even though graffiti is time and again policed as disamenity; it is viewed as a form of protest and territoriality that offers insights into identity and contestation (Evered). The debate regarding graffiti clarifies the conflict between personal expressions, ownership rights, and societal welfare. This is a multifaceted matter that necessitates a detailed examination of different viewpoints and the possibility of achieving a harmony between creative liberty and reverence for the communal environment.

The knotty and versatile legal stage surrounding graffiti vandalism in the United States gives rise to various perspectives and approaches from different scholars and jurisdictions. Lerman posits an intriguing argument suggesting that copyright law could potentially safeguard certain graffiti artworks, challenging the prevailing notion of graffiti as mere vandalism and proposing its eligibility for intellectual property protection under specific conditions, despite its illegal origin. Yet, Lerman also acknowledges the inherent challenges involved in extending such protections to unauthorized street art. Conversely, researchers such as Senjaya advocate for a more assertive legal position, emphasizing the importance of precise regulations and stringent penalties designed to combat graffiti vandalism on public infrastructure, road signs, and other communal assets.

Their research emphatically features the imperative to protect public amenities and maintain order by implementing focused anti-graffiti legislation. The concept of graffiti as a destructive form of vandalism highlights the need for rigorous legal scrutiny and robust management frameworks. These frameworks should effectively address instances of artistic vandalism that can potentially cause extensive property damage and significant financial repercussions (Williams). This perspective coalesces the traditional view of graffiti as a public nuisance necessitating stringent enforcement and deterrence measures.

California legislation prohibits intentional acts of vandalism and graffiti, along with the distribution of materials linked to creating graffiti. Minors are not allowed to buy etching cream or spray paint without proper authorization, and the possession of these materials by the public without proper authorization is prohibited regardless of age. The possession of specific tools for graffiti production is also against the law. Acts of graffiti are considered misdemeanors, and individuals who commit such acts may be required to perform community service and pay fines. Those who fall victim to vandalism could potentially be sentenced to up to one year of imprisonment, with fines ranging from \$50,000 to one year. Seeking legal representation can assist in mitigating the consequences of vandalism charges and obtaining a more lenient penalty for the defendants (Smith).

In short, California has essentially established an exhaustive array of regulations with the objective of discouraging and penalizing instances of graffiti defacement, focusing on not only the deed in question but also on the ownership of implements and instruments employed in the production of graffiti. The sanctions involved can carry substantial weight, notably for those affected by acts of defacement, albeit the involvement of legal counsel could potentially mitigate the gravity of the repercussions for accused individuals facing such charges.

Graffiti and tagging, frequently perceived as a form of artistic expression, can be categorized as vandalism in the absence of authorization. These actions have the potential to

result in property destruction, depreciation of property values, and the creation of an aesthetically displeasing environment. Penalties within the legal framework may encompass monetary fines or allegations of criminal behavior. Property proprietors and local governing bodies regard such behaviors as acts of vandalism, prompting the enactment of anti-graffiti regulations and campaigns aimed at thwarting them. Nevertheless, individuals must be cognizant of the repercussions and obtain consent prior to inflicting harm on the property of others (“Graffiti and Tagging Laws”). Graffiti art, like those by “Haring and Banksy”, can be considered protected expression or transgressions, as they often provide societal commentary, stimulate creativity, and evoke emotional responses.

### **3.1.2 Property Damage**

Graffiti is a common type of property damage that is frequently directed at individual residences, automobiles, and business establishments; schools and commercial buildings are particularly typical targets (Howard). The notion of criminal damage has been reevaluated in response to the work of well-known graffiti artists such as Banksy (Edwards). As seen in the aftermath of the Red River Valley disaster, graffiti can occasionally function as a forum for community discussion (Hagen et al.). On the other hand, property owners who want to preserve uncommission art on their property confront legal obstacles that highlight the conflict between graffiti as art and property harm (Mettler). While graffiti undeniably presents difficulties concerning damage to property and financial implications, it is crucial to recognize its capacity as a mode of artistic articulation and a platform for communal conversation. Tackling this matter demands a sophisticated and comprehensive strategy that takes into account legal, financial, cultural, and societal aspects, in addition to the viewpoints of various stakeholders.

Various manifestations of property damage may encompass harm to one’s dwelling, vehicle, and personal belongings. Acts of vandalism and graffiti represent common forms of

property damage, characterized by the unauthorized marking or defacement of objects. The act of graffiti includes activities such as painting, drawing, and scratching, constituting a criminal offense when executed without the consent of the rightful owner. In the event of an individual unlawfully entering a property, whether it be land, residence, or place of work, with the intention to steal or cause harm, this act is legally defined as burglary. If the trespasser is present on the premises during the time of entry, the offense may escalate to aggravated burglary, a more severe criminal offense (“Vandalism Laws”).

### **3.1.3 Public Opinion on Graffiti**

Graffiti embodies a complex phenomenon that questions conventional concepts of art, urban environments, and societal communication. Through an examination of its cultural and sociological significance, alongside the viewpoints of participants, there is potential to investigate alternative and encompassing strategies for managing this intricate matter. Graffiti serves as a multifaceted medium through which public opinion is articulated, with its sociological and cultural implications significantly influencing overall societal consciousness, there are differing opinions on whether this is art or vandalism, making it a controversial topic (Kimvall).

Despite understanding graffiti’s potential for harm, young people frequently see it as a method to interpret urban space and appreciate its cultural value and aesthetic appeal (Rowe and Hutton). Graffiti art and social issue messages can also be communicated through the risky but artistic act of creating graffiti (Ten Eyck and Fischer). The discussion surrounding graffiti in American society is complex, as some individuals perceive it as vandalism that leads to property damage, chaos, and negative impacts on community appeal, property values, and public safety perceptions. On the other hand, graffiti is also recognized by some as a legitimate form of art and a medium for creative self-expression.

Zuvela's study on graffiti as a global form of communication demonstrates its effectiveness in conveying social and political messages from marginalized communities. In this context, graffiti serves as a platform for marginalized voices and brings attention to issues often overlooked in mainstream discourse. Vanderveen emphasizes that public opinions on graffiti are shaped by subjective assessments of whether it is art or vandalism, as well as the context and environment in which it appears. While graffiti may be viewed as unattractive in affluent neighborhoods, it is celebrated as urban art in lively street cultures.

The public perception of graffiti varies greatly, influenced by personal beliefs, environment, motives, and perceptions of activism or disturbance. Factors like artistic, sociopolitical, law enforcement, and contextual elements shape opinions across different communities and demographic segments, causing ongoing debate on addressing or condemning graffiti as a cultural phenomenon.

### **3.1 Graffiti and Urban Revitalization: Transforming Communities through Street Art**

The significance of graffiti and street art in the rejuvenation of urban areas is intricate and diverse. Dyomin underscores the transformative potential of these forms of artistic representation as they evolve into a respected and impactful artistic movement, while Lovaglio and Scortichini stress their capacity to empower communities and spur urban revitalization. Christensen delves into the role of graffiti and street art in reclaiming voice and physical space within the urban landscape, particularly in opposition to institutionalization and dominant ideological influences. He warns against the risk of art in urban renewal merely reproducing prevailing cultural norms, instead advocating for its function in reclaiming public spaces (Miles).

#### **3.2.1 Community Engagement**

Graffiti, especially when converted into street art, holds a notable position in fostering community involvement and rejuvenation. It functions as a platform for communal artistic



expression, civic esteem, and open-air interaction, thereby aiding in the enhancement of localities and the financial prosperity of enterprises. This evolution has been noted in various urban areas in the United States, as murals and graffiti now serve as symbols of local pride and a profitable venture for trade.

Graffiti plays a crucial role in community engagement, shaping identity and unity through risk, recognition, and respect (Taylor). Artists' experiences, including evading authorities, foster camaraderie and inclusivity. Their intricate artworks are admired, influencing local identities and boundaries. Within the realm of graffiti, mural art has emerged as an effective tool for fostering community unity and resilience, thereby promoting sustainable development within communities (Petronienė and Juzelėnienė). Mural art promotes community cohesion, resilience, and progress by fostering creative expression, cultural depiction, and narrative sharing. It transforms public spaces into platforms for community-led transformation, fostering social unity, empowerment, and sustainable development initiatives. Yet, the advent of social media has not only broadened the scope of graffiti culture but has also posed challenges to the tangible communal ties that are essential for its perpetuation (Baird). Consequently, this dynamic landscape has significant implications for various stakeholders such as law enforcement, local governance, and the community, as they grapple with the repercussions of graffiti within urban settings (Graycar).

### **3.2.2 Beautification Projects**

Beautification projects involving graffiti represent efforts directed towards the alteration of urban environments by means of street art, murals, and various types of public artistic expressions. Such endeavors serve to not only improve the visual allure of localities but also play a role in fostering community involvement, cultural representation, and economic progress. These undertakings function as a medium for artists to exhibit their ingenuity and for societies to communicate their sense of self and beliefs.

Studies carried out regarding graffiti and beautification projects in the United States reveal the intricate relationship between urban art, graffiti, and their respective functions. According to Taylor, specific studies indicate that urban art can potentially deter the proliferation of graffiti through providing sanctioned channels for artistic expression. Conversely, alternative perspectives underscore the cultural and political significance of graffiti as a form of resistance and self-representation, as noted by DeNotto. This disparity underscores the need for a nuanced approach that acknowledges the dual capacity of graffiti in urban environments.

Balancing the competing aspects requires a thorough understanding of graffiti's varied attributes, recognizing its artistic merits while addressing concerns of vandalism and public welfare. Collaborative efforts among artists, communities, and authorities may aid in navigating this delicate balance, fostering responsible artistic expression while preserving the authenticity and cultural importance of graffiti (Christen). Understanding the intricacies and intricacies of public perception towards graffiti offers a comprehensive perspective that considers various viewpoints.

Graffiti and beautification projects in the United States have significantly altered urban landscapes, enriched the visual attractiveness of neighborhoods and contributed to community involvement and economic advancement. These endeavors have transitioned from counterculture movements to a legitimate form of public art that plays a role in the prosperity of communities and enterprises within a constantly changing urban setting. One noteworthy instance is the mural "Life Is Full of Wonderment" created by Marcel Blanco and Noah Neighbor, which initially fell victim to vandalism but was restored utilizing graffiti art methods, resulting in a reduction in such acts (Altschuler). This particular undertaking showcases the transformative capacity of street art, converting a negative viewpoint on graffiti into a favorable means of artistic expression and community participation. Beautify, a

platform collaborating with local associations, revitalizes Los Angeles' Santa Monica and Venice areas into artistic centers, contributing to their rebranding as "Silicon Beach."

It creates enhanced spaces, supports artists, and empowers communities through local art (Altschuler).

Altschuler claimed that street art has demonstrated a positive influence on businesses, as evidenced by murals in Los Angeles leading to a 5-10% rise in revenue. This artistic expression has proven to be impactful in city planning, converting areas into dynamic settings. Urban centers such as Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Philadelphia, and Detroit exemplify the capacity of street art to rejuvenate cityscapes and bolster the economic sustainability of neighborhoods. To explain further Graffiti and beautification initiatives within the United States are fundamental in the process of urban rejuvenation and fostering community involvement. These endeavors serve to convert urban areas into lively, artistic settings that mirror the innovative essence and vitality of the local population. By means of these initiatives, municipalities have the opportunity to elevate their visual charm, promote cultural creativity, and establish a feeling of communal satisfaction and character.

### **3.2.3 Positive Impact of Street Art**

Street art serves both aesthetic appeal and a specific purpose, often conveying shared values or celebratory desires. It can transform the visual appearance of a city, diminishing unexciting and unclean surroundings and motivating individuals to interact with their environment. Collaborative efforts between artists and community leaders can result in large-scale artworks that redefine spaces, introducing distinctiveness and intricacy. Research shows that street art contributes to a community's sense of belonging, transforming urban and rural areas into unique entities. It also enhances aesthetic appeal, promotes pride and responsibility, and boosts economic activities. Street art also serves as a platform for social commentary and awareness-raising, shedding light on societal issues (Book an Artist Team).

Street art has been found to have a positive impact on urban spaces, particularly in terms of economic and cultural development (Cercleux). The diverse impact of street art on urban spaces, encompassing economic and cultural dimensions, is a subject of considerable scholarly interest. The concept of the “art infusion effect” reflects the ability of street art to enhance product evaluations and potentially stimulate economic activity in the surrounding area (Baumgarth and Wiekler). This notion suggests that the presence of street art can positively influence how products are perceived and evaluated by consumers, leading to effective economic benefits for businesses and the local community. Street art plays a pivotal role in the revitalization of urban public spaces (He and Gyergyak), contributing to their enhancement and meeting the demands of local communities. Transforming mundane and overlooked areas into vibrant platforms for artistic expression, street art instills a sense of pride, ownership, and community engagement, ultimately promoting the well-being and unity of urban neighborhoods.

The economic significance of street art is further acknowledged within the context of urban renewal strategies, as discussed (Forte and De Paola). Thoughtfully curated and executed street art projects can act as catalysts for regeneration, drawing in tourists, increasing foot traffic, and stimulating local commerce. Particularly in areas undergoing revitalization endeavors, the economic influence of street art can be substantial, playing a major role in reshaping the identity of the area and creating a feeling of liveliness and cultural diversity, rights and the safeguarding of cultural heritage (Forte and De Paola).

### **3.3 Bridging the Gap: Finding Common Ground between Artists and Authorities**

Graffiti is a contentious issue, as it is perceived by artists as a form of artistic expression but by authorities as an act of vandalism (Lerman). This dichotomy has resulted in a persistent conflict, where artists are confronted with legal consequences and authorities are striving to control the proliferation of street art (Colombini). In parallel, numerous urban areas

and societies are acknowledging the necessity of bridging this gap; various efforts are being made to explore collaborative strategies that recognize the artistic value of graffiti while addressing concerns related to property rights and public safety (Bublitz et al.). The creation of a clear line of communication between artists and governing bodies demonstrates the potential for the promotion of new methodologies that support artistic creativity, promote accountability and encourage community engagement.

### **3.3.1 Legal Walls for Graffiti Artists**

The introduction of legal graffiti walls has had a profound impact on the graffiti community, promoting mobility and social inclusion for artists (McAuliffe). Notably, in certain cases, even unauthorized graffiti murals have been accepted and welcomed by the authorities because of their positive impact on the community and their ability to improve the visual attractiveness of urban environments (Bloch). This shift in attitudes reflects a growing recognition of the artistic value and potential benefits of graffiti when applied with care and in appropriate settings.

The legitimization of graffiti in urban centers like Singapore has led to a significant shift in perspectives, challenging conventional ideas of creativity and lawfulness (T. Chang). This expanding acceptance and integration of graffiti art emphasizes the importance of discovering common ground between artists and authorities. This can be achieved by recognizing the artistic qualities and cultural significance of graffiti while also addressing concerns regarding property rights and public welfare.

The legal position of graffiti in the United States exhibits variability based on geographical location. Instances exist where unauthorized graffiti is accepted if no grievances are raised (Bloch). Nevertheless, this act is frequently criminalized, resulting in a disparity between the judiciary and graffiti practitioners (Assaf-Zakharov and Schnetgoke). Certain municipalities, like New York, have established authorized zones for graffiti creators to

operate, acknowledging the cultural and artistic significance of their creations (Kramer). These efforts are meant to create a more diverse and dynamic urban environment, while also recognizing the artistic significance of graffiti and dealing with issues related to property ownership and public welfare. The conflict between graffiti as a mode of self-expression and its acknowledgment as an artistic medium under the confines of intellectual property law further adds complexity to the matter (Grant). While graffiti artists might perceive their creations as a mode of artistic expression, the unauthorized application of graffiti on private or public surfaces could be deemed a breach of intellectual property rights and consequently lead to legal repercussions.

A cooperative strategy combining artists, property owners, police enforcement, and legislators is needed to address the graffiti problem in the United States. Creating well-defined criteria, establishing community-driven mural projects, and increasing the number of approved graffiti spaces are some strategies. The public interest, property rights, and artistic freedom should all be balanced in this strategy. Notably, cities such as Los Angeles and New York have successfully implemented collaborative approaches, resulting in the transformation of once-vandalized areas into vibrant, culturally rich spaces that celebrate graffiti art as a form of creative expression (Pereira; Patterson).

### **3.3.2 Collaborative Projects with Local Governments**

Establishing designated spaces for legal graffiti and street art, putting in place community-based programs for graffiti education and mentorship, reviewing and updating laws to balance public spaces and cultural value, encouraging public-private partnerships for commissioning legal graffiti, and promoting educational campaigns to raise awareness about the cultural significance of graffiti and the perspectives of artists and communities are some strategies that could be used to bridge the gap between legal and artistic perspectives on graffiti.

Local authorities are increasingly engaged in collaborative endeavors with a diverse array of stakeholders, which include individuals partaking in street art, in order to address urban challenges and advocate for eco-friendly practices (Vernon et al.). These partnerships assume a pivotal role, as they facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and bolster public support. One noteworthy illustration of such partnerships can be observed in New York City, where the “Groundswell Community Mural Project” has been partnering with local artists, youth, and community groups since the 1990s, metamorphosing public spaces into dynamic canvases that mirror the variety and stories of their localities (Abogado). Another exemplar is the “City Leaks” project in Malmö, Sweden, which engaged graffiti artists to craft murals on derelict buildings, thereby converting them into open-air art galleries and offering a legitimate platform for artists to showcase their creativity.

This endeavor garnered public approval and admiration, breathing new life into urban regions. Similarly, in São Paulo, Brazil, municipal authorities allocated specific walls and structures as sanctioned graffiti zones, diminishing illicit graffiti while nurturing a sense of community pride among artists (Paulo). Nonetheless, they face challenges, such as the need for effective partnerships spanning various sectors and the governance of segments linked to the creative economy (Cairns and Harris). Despite barriers, collaborative initiatives between local governments and street artists possess the power to enhance urban landscapes and promote community engagement.

### **3.4 The Complexity and Diversity of Graffiti as an Artistic Medium in the USA**

Graffiti in the United States is a multidimensional and ever-changing form of artistic expression that mirrors the intricacies of the political, economic, and social environments. It functions as a potent cultural form of communication that is frequently misunderstood by the general populace (Phillips). The transition from traditional graffiti to the modern street art movement has further broadened its significance as a mechanism for negotiating identity and

challenging established norms (Waclawek). The creation of graffiti has historically served as a mode of opposition to urban segregation and authority, establishing alternative social, cultural, and economic structures (Ferrell).

Within marginalized societies, graffiti has emerged as a means for individuals to assert their existence, articulate their grievances, and reclaim public spaces that have traditionally been restricted or regulated by dominant factions. For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s, graffiti in metropolitan areas such as New York and Philadelphia functioned as a tool for disenfranchised young people to stake their claim in the cityscape (Austin). Graffiti artists, originating from low-income areas and communities of color, employed their artwork to challenge the idea of who possessed the authority to shape and characterize public spaces.

Their daring and vivid tags, throw-ups, and pieces evolved into a visual form of opposition against the influences of gentrification, urban redevelopment, and displacement. Graffiti has been elevated above its traditional forms in the modern street art movement by artists like Shepard Fairey, Lady Pink, and Banksy, who have used it as a vehicle for social and political commentary (The Art Story). Their immersive installations and large-scale artworks address issues such as corporate power, materialism, and egalitarianism; they often use satirical and rebellious imagery to provoke thought and challenge accepted standards.

While graffiti and street art have been perceived as acts of vandalism or urban decay, it is crucial not to dismiss their capacity to stimulate community involvement, safeguard cultural heritage, and encourage social advocacy. Through embracing these artistic mediums and establishing legitimate channels for their manifestation, urban centers and societies can leverage the influence of graffiti and street art to honor variety, advocate inclusiveness, and enhance the visibility of individuals who have traditionally been excluded.

### **3.4.1 The Intersection of Graffiti and Urban Subcultures**

Graffiti in the United States intersects with diverse urban subcultures, economic



inequalities, and identities. Despite being linked to illicit behavior, graffiti functions as a medium for self-expression, interaction, rivalry, resistance, and unconventional principles. It presents a challenge to established societal conventions and acts as a symbolic arena for marginalized groups. Profound comprehension of the socioeconomic, cultural, and subcultural roots of graffiti is essential for its comprehension and utilization in urban environments.

The occurrence of graffiti in urban areas in the United States is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that defies categorization within a specific urban subculture or economic demographic (Lasley). Challenges the common belief that graffiti is limited to lower-income neighborhoods by noting that individuals from both working-class and middle-class backgrounds partake in this unauthorized form of artistic expression, driven by a shared aspiration for acknowledgment and involvement in prohibited activities, Tierney emphasizes the disruptive impact of graffiti on the urban environment, particularly when contrasted with the apparent disconnection between diverse cultural groups and social classes within cities. This disruption arises from graffiti's capacity to surpass boundaries and materialize in areas frequented by varied communities. A closer examination by Lannert uncovers several key themes that characterize the graffiti art subculture, such as the formation of personal identity, avenues for interaction, elements of rivalry and one-upmanship, hints of criminal behavior, the establishment of unique aesthetic criteria, and the progression of communication methods within the subculture itself.

These themes underscore graffiti's dual role as a form of creative expression and a countercultural practice. Ferrell explains how graffiti practitioners establish forms of opposition and alternative social frameworks in reaction to the urban class divisions, marginalization, and authority structures they confront. Thus, graffiti emerges as a tool for marginalized subcultures to reclaim spaces, voice dissent, and affirm their presence amidst

the injustices of urban settings.

### **3.4.2 The Commercialization and Mainstream Acceptance of Graffiti**

The evolution of graffiti in the United States in recent decades has been a notable one, transitioning from its origins as an underground and countercultural art form. Once viewed primarily as vandalism and a representation of urban decay, graffiti has now achieved widespread legitimacy and financial prosperity, surpassing its initial rebellious and oppositional nature. The progression of graffiti from the outskirts of society to mainstream acceptance has been a convoluted and multidimensional occurrence. This transformation has been influenced by the artistic ingenuity and perseverance of graffiti practitioners, the changing attitudes of the general public and cultural establishments, and the ongoing complexities of commercialization and commodification within the realm of art. The proliferation and widespread acknowledgment of graffiti in the United States have unequivocally altered this formerly clandestine and countercultural art form, instigating discussions regarding legitimacy, oppositional identity, and the dilution of graffiti's nonconformist beginnings.

The scholarly sources referenced underscore the intricate dynamics and compromises entailed in this development. Lombard emphasizes the cooperative element of graffiti's commercialization, wherein artists frequently make concessions to secure acknowledgment and financial advantages. This procedure entails navigating between upholding artistic authenticity and adjusting to market requirements, potentially resulting in concessions concerning artistic expression and the rebellious essence of graffiti. However, as noted by Rabiega, there are legitimate apprehensions regarding the possible erosion of legitimacy and oppositional identity in commercial graffiti. The practice of graffiti has traditionally been linked to a rebellious and anti-establishment philosophy, grounded in the infringement of public spaces and the empowerment of marginalized voices. With graffiti's increasing

mainstream appeal and commercialization, there exists a risk of forfeiting this fundamental identity and the countercultural statement it previously represented.

The influence of social media has profoundly shaped the trajectory of graffiti culture, leading to its migration from its unconventional roots. Through the widespread dissemination and endorsement of graffiti art on online platforms, its visibility and economic viability have been greatly enhanced. However, this digital transformation has also resulted in a detachment from its tangible and localized origins. The democratization of graffiti through social media has simultaneously broadened its reach and raised questions about its traditional subterranean essence. Social media platforms have become crucial catalysts in the evolution of graffiti culture. Artists now have the ability to share their work with a global audience instantly, transcending geographical boundaries and reaching individuals who may have never experienced graffiti art before.

The accessibility and ease of sharing on social media have propelled graffiti into the mainstream consciousness, garnering increased attention and recognition. In conclusion, social media has undeniably influenced the relocation of graffiti culture, transforming it from its unconventional origins to a digital landscape. While it has brought increased visibility and economic opportunities, it has also raised questions about the preservation of its tangible and localized essence.

### **3.4.3 The Future of Graffiti as an Artistic Medium in the USA**

Graffiti is closely linked to discussions on legislation and its impact on urban environments. It shows the need for graffiti to expose conflicting narratives surrounding its nature – ranging from creativity versus destruction, subculture versus mainstream and individual expression versus communal ownership. This subtle approach enriches the exploration of graffiti as a socio-cultural entity that transcends conventional boundaries, shapes discourse, and holds important symbolic meaning in analyzing authority, selfhood, and

city landscapes. Such a contextualized viewpoint offers valuable insights for in-depth analyses of graffiti's historical, current, and future presence in American culture.

The origins and development of graffiti in the United States are intricately linked to issues of social exclusion, artistic representation, and the dynamics of urban environments. According to Ferrell, graffiti has functioned as a significant means of expressing dissent and resistance within communities that have long been marginalized and disadvantaged. By creating unauthorized public markings, graffiti has allowed these groups to voice their presence, question authority, and convey narratives that are often ignored in mainstream discourse. Yet, this form of countercultural expression has frequently been misunderstood and labeled negatively. Phillips' research illustrates how graffiti is commonly associated with urban decline, blight, and the degradation of the urban landscape in a simplistic manner. This viewpoint fails to recognize the complex motivations, socio-political foundations, and artistic value that underpin much of graffiti culture.

Despite criticisms and misconceptions, the potential for graffiti to be acknowledged as a legitimate art form and its ability to challenge established social norms and power dynamics are of great importance (Ferrell). Graffiti challenges conventional ideas of art, questions who holds the authority to create it, and debates its place in society. Graffiti art prompts essential discussions about urban landscape through the occupation of public spaces and crossing boundaries, ownership, representation of marginalized voices, and democratization of creative expression. As graffiti continues to develop and influence various aspects of American society, its path as an artistic medium is closely associated with the ongoing discussions on its legal status and its role within urban culture (Ferrell). The debate between graffiti's legitimacy and its classification as vandalism remains contentious, with local governments and communities struggling to balance property rights, public safety, and artistic freedom preservation.

Cities have embraced graffiti through authorized public art endeavors, allocated graffiti walls, and cooperative projects aiming to harness the creative potential of street art while addressing public order and community aesthetics. These initiatives signify an acknowledgment of graffiti's cultural importance and an effort to find common ground among artists, authorities, and various stakeholders. However, in some areas, a zero-tolerance stance persists, with rigorous enforcement of anti-vandalism laws and severe penalties for graffiti-related crimes (Lerman).

This approach often prioritizes the protection of property and thus ignores the artistic value of graffiti, perpetuating the historical cycle of marginalization and repression that has fueled the graffiti movement. Ultimately, the future trajectory of graffiti as an artistic medium in the United States will be shaped by the ongoing discussions and negotiations surrounding its legal status, its interaction with the urban landscape, and its capacity to challenge and enrich American culture.

## Conclusion

Graffiti, deeply embedded in American society, has consistently been a topic of contention, balancing on the thin line between being an avenue for artistic expression and a subject of societal disapproval. This unorthodox form of art has consistently challenged preconceived norms and stereotypes, raising debates on the essence of art, inclusivity, and the limits of creative expression. Graffiti stands as a daring reclamation of public spaces by trailblazing artists who strive to amplify the voices of underrepresented groups and critique societal norms. The groundbreaking works of graffiti trailblazers in urban centers like New York have not only reshaped urban landscapes but also sparked wider cultural conversations on identity, belonging, and the journey of self-discovery. Graffiti has provided a stage for artists to explore and blur the lines between intersecting identities, using their provocative art as a tool for validation and self-exploration.

A closer look at the disruptive and frequently illegal nature of graffiti exposes its resistance to legal and societal standards. Laws that prohibit vandalism criminalize graffiti, subjecting artists to penalties or imprisonment while burdening property owners with expensive cleanup efforts. This legal conflict reflects the broader societal divide, with some viewing graffiti as a visual disturbance that defaces public spaces, while others praise its artistic merit and transformative impact. In response to this divide, inventive programs have surfaced to channel the creative energy of graffiti towards positive urban renewal. The encouragement of community involvement and collaboration among street artists, residents, and local authorities resulted in using graffiti to breathe new life into neglected areas, develop aesthetics, and instill civic pride. The idea of “legal walls,” designated areas where artists can express themselves freely within legal boundaries, further exemplifies efforts to find a middle ground.

In the end, the persistent presence and influence of graffiti in American society

underline its artistic importance and cultural worth. Graffiti has become a channel for positive discussions on social justice and inspired wider dialogues on the role of public art in stimulating community participation. It has evolved beyond its roots to become a powerful catalyst for societal change. The transformative power of graffiti is not limited to the physical spaces it occupies. It extends to the minds and perceptions of those who encounter it, challenging preconceived notions and encouraging a broader understanding of art and expression.

Looking forward, the weight of graffiti as a tool for societal change is immense. As more cities embrace the concept of “legal walls” and other initiatives that steer the creative energy of graffiti artists, a shift may be seen in the public perception of this art form. The future of graffiti in American society may be one where it is not only tolerated but celebrated as a vibrant and vital part of its urban landscapes. This study works as a stepping stone towards that future, providing an extensive analysis of the current state of graffiti and granting clarity into its prospective trajectory.

The study brings out the importance of continued research and dialogue in this area. As graffiti continues to evolve and adapt to the changing societal environment, so too must Americans’ understanding and interpretation of it. The dynamic nature of graffiti, its artists, and the communities it impacts requires an equally dynamic approach to studying it. This includes not only academic research but also initiatives that ensures direct engagement with graffiti artists and the communities they impact. Such efforts can convey invaluable interpretations into the evolving role of graffiti in American society and contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive policies and programs.

The study also revealed the aptitude of graffiti as a tool for social commentary and critique. Graffiti artists often use their work to comment on societal issues, from politics and inequality to culture and identity. This aspect of graffiti is regarded as a platform for

marginalized voices and a catalyst for social change. If these issues are brought to the forefront in a public and accessible manner, graffiti will contribute to increased awareness and understanding of these issues, sparking dialogue and eventually inspiring action.

Ultimately, the phenomenon of graffiti in American society is neither a simple nor an easy issue that bridges the line between artistic expression and societal disapproval.

Nonetheless, through open dialogue, effective communication, and innovative solutions, it is probable and even feasible to acknowledge the artistic value of graffiti while handling its adverse aspects. The enduring presence and impact of graffiti in American society stands in for a testament to its artistic denotation and cultural value. American society can harness the transformative power of graffiti through building a more positive relationship and devising inventive solutions, while reducing its negative aspects. Therefore, balancing the dichotomy between artistic expression and societal impact is a necessity so that graffiti serves as a testament to the enduring human quest for identity, voice, and creative freedom—a touching reminder that art, in its myriad forms, has the power to challenge norms, ignite important discussions, and ultimately drive societies towards a more inclusive and expressive future.



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