

Antwon Key, MFA

ARTIST STATEMENT

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Can design be beneficial to society? Could it impact society for the good? Often when we think about graphic design it is in the context of commercial applications. Although, students are taught principles of design only to sell products or services to consumers; design has the potential to be much more. If designers, through process, can create interactive advertising materials to solve a marketer's problem with low sales; could a designer produce creative work that attempts to highlight current issues in our society?

As a graphic artist I feel that in my personal work I can tackle subjects that are important to me and use it as a way to reach people, not to sell them on a product, but to push them into thinking critically about societal issues. I try to help the viewer to think critically about social, political and cultural issues in our country. Often in America we have a difficult time discussing topics of race, gender, and class. In our current climate these issues have become more relevant as more extreme archaic views from our troubled past have returned. In my work I seek to educate my audience by giving them a different perspective than what they may have gotten from the media.

My most recent project, *"Red, White, and Black: A Visual Introspective of Alternative American Perspectives,"* explored questions of African-American citizenship. This project was chosen as one of 265 Regional Winners in the PRINT 2018 Regional Design Awards. In this project, using photography and creative typography, I attempted to give voice to African-Americans concerning issues of patriotism and privilege in America by allowing them to express themselves both verbally and visually. This project compels the viewer to consider about not only alternative perspectives but allows African-Americans of diverse educational and economic circumstances a channel to contribute to the enduring discussion of expanding American liberties.

Through questionnaires, participants answered various questions about how they felt, concerning topics surrounding citizenship and patriotism before taking a portrait with the flag. Participants posed with the flag in any manner they desired. In these series of photographs each person is visually expressing their relationship with citizenship simply by, how they chose to exhibit the flag. Some enveloped themselves in the flag while others held it away in defiance. The commentaries from the surveys were often in direct contrast to how that individual elected to embrace the flag. That distinction of being highly critical but draped in the "symbol of freedom" is both visually thought-provoking and culturally significant.

I believe that it is my responsibility to use my talents, and my unique perspective to speak to important societal problems. Issues of race, gender, and class are areas where I feel that are important avenues to explore. Design should be used for the good of humankind to change our world for the positive and uplift all people regardless of ethnicity or sexual preference.