

Curating through the lens of critical race studies

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The act of curating is not neutral. It's a deliberate process of storytelling, selection, and framing. Curation through the lens of critical race studies becomes a radical act of reimagining. This lens demands we ask: whose stories are being told, who is telling them, and who has historically been excluded? This approach is not only about placing diverse objects in museum galleries; it enables curators to confront the ideological scaffolds that have shaped museums since their inception.

Traditionally, museums have positioned themselves as arbiters of cultural value, presenting history as stable and universal. But these institutions are not merely repositories of art—they are pedagogical spaces where assumptions about race, power, and identity are constantly reinforced or, potentially, challenged.

For me, curating is pedagogy. I approach this work with a sense of responsibility and opportunity. The gallery is a classroom where students range from kindergarteners from Harlem to retired scholars from Paris. These spaces offer the first encounter many people have with the art and histories of the ancient and medieval worlds. When framed with care, these encounters can be transformative.

Exhibitions have long shaped public understanding of history. But they have also often erased or flattened the racial and cultural complexities of the past. By

foregrounding other narratives in curatorial practice, we open the door to a more honest portrayal of history—one that recognizes the presence, contributions, and representations of diverse peoples across time and space.

One object housed in the Met that stays with me is a late antique textile from Egypt. On it, Black mounted riders hunt alongside fair-skinned, winged figures. This textile is not simply decorative, it is narrative. The riders' Phrygian caps and hunting poses might be symbols of prestige or otherness, or perhaps both. In this moment of visual ambiguity lies possibility. Who were these figures to their original audience? And who are they to us now?

The stories we tell in exhibitions have long lives. They are folded into classroom syllabi, cited in dissertations, and passed down in family visits to museums. This is why the work of diversifying curatorial narratives must be intentional and sustained. Exhibitions like *Africa and Byzantium*, which traced the connections between Northern Africa and the Byzantine world, modeled a critical race studies approach to curation. This and many other exhibits show us that Africa was not peripheral but central to global history. That Blackness is not an exception in art history, but part of its foundation.

To curate through a lens of critical race studies is not about inserting "diversity" into the margins of exhibitions. It is about using the tools of curatorial practice—object selection, wall text, programming, partnerships—to teach, disrupt, and imagine.